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Swine Newsletter

April 1, 2015

Oxytocin: Use with Care

It is easy to overlook reviewing the use of some routinely used pharmaceutical products, like oxytocin, even at the CQA visit which serves as a yearly appointment to go over how a producer is using drugs in the pig herd.

Oxytocin is a prescription drug. This means that it is only available through veterinary clinics and that we need to have a proper veterinary-client-patient relationship with you, your farm and your animals to be able to sell it to you.

It is a cheap but powerful drug! We all need to be careful when handling it; especially females as this is a reproductive hormone.

General Information: Oxytocin is a pituitary hormone. It acts directly on the smooth muscle of the uterus to produce rhythmic contractions. It is also closely related to the let-down of milk.

Indications - for Sows and Gilts:

1. To accelerate the process of normal parturition.
2. Postpartum evacuation of uterine debris.
3. To help let down milk.
4. As an aid in the induction of labour (following initiation with a prostaglandin drug like Planate or Lutalyse).

Recommended dose: ½ to 1 ml (10 to 20 iu); by intra muscular injection. Use a 1 or 1.5 inch needle, 18, 20 or 21 gauge, in the sows neck. Giving it in the vulva works as well.

Storage: This is a hormone and should be stored in the fridge. 2°C to 8°C. Keep from freezing.

Use Oxytocin with care.

- Every farm should establish standard operating procedures for baby pig delivery assistance, and avoid excessive or too early administration of oxytocin, which can be hard on the sow and the unborn piglet.
- If a piglet is stuck, then it should be extracted before oxytocin is given. Washing up the sow, gloving your hand and arm, using lubricant (not soap) and reaching in with your hand and arm, grasping the piglet and using gentle traction is recommended. Using forceps, snares, etc. should only be used by trained farrowing managers. If you have reached in to assist during farrowing then I recommend 0.5 ml oxytocin at the end of farrowing and an antibiotic treatment.
- I recommend 0.5 ml oxytocin rather than 1.0 ml or more. This is enough to cause gentle contraction of the uterus. You don't want a massive clamping, which might cause the placenta to disassociate from the piglets and cause more stillbirths at the end of farrowing. Also, high doses of oxytocin (over 20 iu) may create a refractory period in the sow lasting up to three hours, during which her natural oxytocin, or even more injectable oxytocin, fails to stimulate uterine contractions!
- Especially recommend oxytocin use in older sows. Older sows take longer to deliver their stillborn pigs than younger sows. In a herd with a stillbirth rate of 8% or higher giving 0.5 ml of oxytocin every 45 minutes during the delivery for older sows (5th parity and up) often reduces the number of stillbirths.
- Should you give all sows 0.5 ml oxytocin at the end of farrowing to be sure that all the piglets are out, and to aid in the evacuation of uterine debris and to be sure that they are letting their milk down? No, I don't think so although this a good question. Experienced farrowing room people will be able to tell if it is needed or not.

Warning: the withdrawal period is three days. So this is not a problem.

R.G. Reed
RR/cp