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Swine Newsletter

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Low Level PRRS and Secondary Disease

Dear pork producers,

In the March newsletter I mentioned that we have not been dealing with as many PRRS outbreaks as during previous winters. This isn't to say that it isn't still out there causing trouble. In fact we have been seeing it in a more chronic form or what I might even call subclinical form in weaner and finisher barns.

What do I mean by chronic or subclinical forms? First of all this is "Reg" terminology. Not really veterinary jargon. Let me give an example: A client calls and explains that his weaner pigs aren't doing well. There are too many that are losing ground and are unthrifty. And mortality has gone from 2% up to 6%, or 8% or 10%! But there are no abortions in the sows, any noticeable problems at all in the farrowing rooms so, we make a visit, walk through the rooms, sacrifice 2 or 3 pigs for post mortems and sample collection. We prescribe some short term course of treatment while we await the lab findings. Sure enough bacteriology finds Strep suis, Pasturella, Glasser's, etc. When the virology report comes back they have found PRRS. In just about all of these cases it is PRRS that is opening the door for the other opportunistic pathogens.

Meningitis caused by Strep suis is often the most noticeable disease in a weaner barn. Second most common is post weaning enteritis, most commonly caused by K88 colibacillosis. But, if PRRS is present either of these can become worse than if PRRS wasn't present.

By now, some of you reading this may be thinking "he's writing about my herd!" No, I'm not writing about any case in particular. At some herds we employ water soluble and feed antibiotic strategies to deal with these "secondary" infections. If they are successful the farm might just put up with the PRRS. Other times we can't cure the problems well enough and elimination from the weaner barn is necessary. Usually, if the pigs have had to deal with a PRRS strain and they finally mount an immunity then they preform through the last part of the finishing barn just fine.

Occasionally, the pigs do ok in the weaner barn but come in contact with PRRS in the finishing barn. Low levels of respiratory disease, red eyes, dopey looking pigs, and fall behind pigs are the signs. In this scenario, we would probably vaccinate with the MLV PRRS vaccine in the weaner barn, about two weeks before they are to move out.

So, PRRS is still out there, whether as the reproductive abortion storm, or as a chronic respiratory, secondary-disease door opener problem in the weaner and/or grow/finish barn form. While we consider late fall and winter to be the main PRRS seasons it can hit anytime. I've often noticed that we have to deal with a few cases in August. This is after the winter wheat has been harvested and some pig liquid manure has been broad cast onto the stubble in proximity to other downwind pig barns.

In my opinion, PRRS is still the most important and impactful disease in the North American swine industry. In Canada we have our Swine Health Investigation Network (SHIN) and our ARC & E projects. In the United States, they have The Swine Health Monitoring Project (SHMP). It is a volunteer initiative aimed at monitoring the incidence and ultimately supporting swine disease control including PRRS. Data collected through the SHMP represents approx. 42% of the sow population of the United States.

What the Swine Health Monitoring Project has found with regard to Geographical Factors affecting the Incidence of PRRS outbreaks.

1. Swine density and herd size increased the risks for PRRS outbreaks.
2. Farms located in terrains with a slope of 9% or higher has lower rates of PRRS outbreaks compared to farms located in terrains with slopes lower than 2%.
3. Being located in an area of shrubs/herbaceous over and trees lowered the incidence of PRRS compared to being located in cultivated/managed areas.

Some of the above may seem obvious but I thought it is interesting so decided to share it with you. So, plant some windbreaks!

Yours truly,

Reg Reed
RR/cp