Major outbreaks of erysipelas in finishing-age swine have occurred in the past several weeks throughout Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. There have been reports of as many as 40-50 deads in a day per 1,000-head finisher. Pigs most severely affected have been from 180 lbs. to market, but there have also been confirmed outbreaks in younger finishing-age pigs. We believe that the industry may be on the verge of repeating the erysipelas outbreaks experienced in 1991-1993.

Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae is actually a common bacterial inhabitant of swine. It’s estimated that 30-50% of healthy animals harbor the organism in their tonsilar and lymphoid tissues. Stress factors such as temperature variations/extremes, viral diseases, etc. can initiate an outbreak of this disease.

The acute form of erysipelas is manifested by sudden death of one or more animals. This is typically the first sign seen on many farms. Other pigs may be obviously sick with extremely high body temperatures (104-107 degrees F). They may be depressed, off feed, inactive and in pain when walking. Affected animals are usually stiff or lame; their peculiar looking gait is often described as “walking on eggshells”. Pigs may also drag their hindquarters and exhibit difficulty getting up. Generalized reddening of the skin and/or diamond-shaped skin lesions 1-2” in diameter are seen on a sporadic basis over the next few days in about 10% of the acutely infected pigs. (Packers have been condemning affected carcasses).

The majority of the recent erysipelas outbreaks have been in unvaccinated pigs. SVC recommends vaccination of summer grow-finish production which means vaccinating late nursery/early finishing-age pigs in March through July. Oral and injectable vaccines are commercially available, although they are in short supply right now due to the huge increase in demand. SVC is working with vaccine manufacturers and distribution centers to secure product as soon as possible for our clients.

Contact your SVC veterinarian for specific advice on erysipelas prevention and treatment measures for your farm.

Pfizer Animal Health’s new Farrowsure® Plus and Farrowsure® Plus B are porcine parvovirus-erysipelas-leptospirosis vaccines that contain an erysipelas bacterin with a 26-week duration of immunity. These vaccines also contain the adjuvant (Amphigen®) which enhances the immune response to parvovirus and leptospirosis as well. The old Farrowsure® and Farrowsure® B vaccines will soon no longer be manufactured.

While vaccination against these common diseases of swine is considered to be routine in most systems, many vaccines stimulate only a short-lived duration of immunity for erysipelas. Farrowsure® Plus and Farrowsure® Plus B promise to be significant improvements in the line of prebreeding vaccines currently available!
What’s The Proper Way To Sort Finishing Pigs?

Dr. Mike Brumm was one of the invited speakers for the IMAGE Seminar held late last month in Mankato, MN. and co-sponsored by Pharmacia Animal Health and SVC. Dr. Brumm, professor of animal science, is currently stationed at the University of Nebraska’s Haskell Agriculture Lab in Concord, Nebraska. He was given the task of covering a variety of topics at the seminar related to nursery and finishing barns including sorting pigs, space requirements, feeder and waterer design, and wean-to-finish technologies.

The topic of sorting addressed the issue of filling barns and whether to sort pigs by incoming weight or just to gate-cut them into the barn.

Dr. Brumm presented research summaries which indicated that sorting pigs into pens by weight did not improve the performance of the barn and actually decreased performance in some cases. The theory behind this is that pigs of varying sizes within a pen do not need to fight as much to establish a social order like pigs of uniform size do. Fighting causes some of the pigs in a pen sorted by size to move to the bottom of the social order. Performance of these pigs suffer and this creates variation in the pen. In this research, pigs were sorted strictly by weight (i.e., the appearance or health of the pigs was not considered).

Implications are to gate-cut the pigs into the barn if the small pigs are not going to be treated any differently than the large ones. This would not be the case in many nurseries where sorting allows smaller pigs to be fed a more complex diet, kept at a warmer temperature, or provided with a different treatment program. Of course, pigs will still need to be sorted by sex where split-sex feeding is utilized...and remember, this work refers to initial barn filling. Non-competing and sick pigs still need to be sorted into hospital and recovery pens.

People: Your Business’s Most Valuable Input

Sarah Fogelman, Human Resource Specialist from Kansas State University’s Extension Program was another featured speaker at the IMAGE Seminar. Multiple topics were discussed focusing on ways for pork producers to strengthen employer-employee relationships. This is part one in a series of topics covered at the meeting.

- **How do we know if an employee is failing at your workplace?** Try to identify if an employee is not meeting professional expectations. Establish performance goals that can be reviewed on a regular basis. Establishing workplace expectations will provide a basis for determining if employees are seeking position advancement and job satisfaction. Look for changes in behavior and job performance.

- **How does employee failure impact the business?** First, unmet performance objectives result in mistakes that can add production cost. This reduces farm profitability. Second, employee turnover creates a vicious cycle of low worker morale when then results in poor job performance.

- **What can managers do to improve employee and business performance?** It all starts by establishing business culture. The 3 aspects to define include:
  * What is your business mission statement?
  * What is your business’s vision?
  * What does your business value?

Until the business culture is clearly defined and understood by everybody on the team, the employee and the business will suffer. Mission statements, business vision and values send a strong message to employees about job expectations and they define what the company stands for.

Foot & Mouth Disease Update

The U.K. is experiencing another new outbreak of FMD in its biggest pig production area. An update on July 7th revealed that 100 farms in North Yorkshire are infected. This is very close to the pig-breeding areas of North and East Yorkshire which could be devastated if the outbreak spreads...which seems likely since pigs spread the virus more