Focusing on the health and management of the developing gilts that supply a sow farm is key to achieving the marketing of >24 pigs/sow/year that are healthy and that grow and convert well. SVC’s Dr. Mike Eisenmenger outlines the following 6 important steps to help you successfully manage your GDU...

**Step 1:** Start with young animals. This gives you time to get exposure recovery and good development of immunity prior to gilts entering the sow farm. Pigs from weaning through 50 lbs. are ideal.

**Step 2:** Expose them to any and all disease producing agents that the sow farm might harbor. Manure, tissue and live animal exposure are all valuable tools. Multiple exposure events are needed to accomplish this goal.

**Step 3:** Vaccination. Develop a programmed system matched to the specific herd. Circovirus (PCV2), Mycoplasma, PRRS, SIV(flu), Salmonella, Ileitis, and Lepto/Parvo/Erysipelas are common vaccinations.

**Step 4:** Allow time for animals to recover post pathogen exposure. Stop exposing in the late gilt developer stage. The goal is for gilts to be immune and not shedding pathogens by the time they enter the sow farm. If the baby pigs in farrowing are not exposed to pathogens because the gilts are not shedding bacteria and viruses, then grow finish health is greatly improved.

**Step 5:** Monitor the GDU process. It is important to understand exposure and immunity. Dollars spent testing the gilts to understand if what you EXPECT to happen is actually happening is money well spent. Develop a predetermined set testing protocol. This includes:

- Confirmation of pathogen/disease exposure by PCR and antibody tests.
- Confirmation of non-shedding by PCR prior to shipping to the sow farm.

**Step 6:** This is also an important time to prepare the gilts for future reproduction. Make sure a program for heat induction and heat recording is in place so that every gilt is bred on their 2nd or 3rd heat cycle.
VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY
WHAT TO WATCH FOR...

Reports of Vitamin D deficiency have been occurring throughout the Midwest over the last year. Pigs get their supply of Vitamin D through their diet but can also get some natural Vitamin D from sunlight. Vitamin D is essential for the absorption of calcium from the small intestine and has hormonal functions in most all body systems. It plays an important role in all functions of the immune system as well. Without Vitamin D, the body will not absorb the calcium that it needs and calcium deficiency will occur. Currently there are many trials underway looking at vitamin D supplementation to sows in lactation and piglets at weaning.

The following is a list of clinical signs of calcium deficiency which are dependent on age, reason for deficiency, and magnitude of dietary insult.

- Sudden death (animals found dead)
- Tetany: seizures, squealing, skin hyperemia; sometimes flaccid paralysis
- Stiff jointed (tender footed); painful gait
- Broken bones: acute fractures of weight bearing bones or calluses on ribs (Many times the packer recognizes fractures and “rosaries” on the ribs)
- Paralysis (varying from incomplete to full paralysis)

Depending on clinical signs, diagnosis can include full tissue work up, feed sampling, and blood testing for Vitamin D, calcium, and phosphorus levels. There are many labs that do Vitamin D testing and results can vary depending on the type of analysis that is run. Consult with your SVC veterinarian before sending in samples for suspected Vitamin D deficiency.

RELIEF FROM SUMMER HEAT FOR MARKET HOGS

Summer heat has arrived in full force and with the additional effect of high humidity, the situation has turned deadly. Market weight finishing pigs are at high risk during these situations.

Remember:
- Pigs cool themselves by water evaporation from the respiratory tract. This is the reason they pant.
- Pigs don’t sweat, so in order for evaporative cooling from the skin to occur, you MUST wet them and have air move across the moist skin.
- Animal losses due to heat stress tend to occur in the late afternoon and early evening after a long period of heat stress.

What to do:
- Cool pigs by sprinkling them with water. Get them wet, allow them to JUST get dry and then repeat the process.
- Keep air moving across the animals. Use stir fans or put extra fans in barns. Pay close attention to corner pens where air movement tends to be poor.
- Start cooling early in the day.
- Check animals often but pay extra close attention late afternoon and into early evening. You may need to keep people at the site until it cools down.
- Transportation is extremely stressful in hot weather. Wet bedding down prior to loading. Get pigs wet on the truck quickly after loading, don’t pack as tightly and get the truck moving as soon as possible. Avoid any stops.