

NADIS disease bulletins are written specifically for farmers, to increase awareness of prevalent conditions and promote disease prevention and control, in order to benefit animal health and welfare. Farmers are advised to discuss their individual farm circumstances with their veterinary surgeon.

Costs of Disease

With recent corporate scandals and the latest figures published for the costs of last years Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak running into billions of pounds, it is easy to lose sight of the costs of “normal” disease problems on a pig unit.

Over the last 30 years or more, there has been a tremendous advance in genetic potential and nutritional science such that we now have available the best pigs and the best diets we have ever had. And yet many producers struggle to get the best out of their stock, partly due to management faults, environmental inadequacy but most importantly disease.

The troubles of last year highlighted the problems of “biosecurity” – a horrible manufactured word, which refers to procedures designed to prevent spread of disease. Whilst it has been applied to the concept of prevention of disease spreading from farm to farm, it is equally relevant to preventing disease spreading within a unit.

Pig farms are well aware of the normal necessary procedures to limit introduction of disease – barriers, entry protocols, fallen stock disposal, unit design, limits on meat exposure, stock selection and health matching – but now diseases of the last 10 years have spread, at least in part as a result of uncontrollable events, such as wind borne and wild bird spread. To some extent, this is a feature of geography and demographics but we are stuck with what we have got – limited space and a magnetism of one type of farming to attract another e.g. cereal and pig farming go hand in hand on the low rainfall east side of England.

For several reasons, many farms are enzootically infected with specific disease causing organisms. What is surprising, in many cases, is how common clinical disease is reported in N.A.D.I.S. with signs indicative of expensive, and yet easily controlled disease. 3 examples illustrate the point:-

Sarcoptic Mange

In its untreated form, this disease can easily add 0.3 to feed conversion efficiency in the growing pig from weaning to slaughter, representing in the region of £3 per pig additional feed cost – in excess of £60 per sow per year. In addition, if left uncontrolled in the sow, feed usage can increase by 5% at a cost of an extra £7 per sow per year and weaning weights of pigs can suffer to the tune of 10%, adding another 6 days to age at 90kg – or another 10kg of maintenance food per pig. This adds up to £87 per sow per year or a staggering £26,000 per year for a 300 sow breeder feeder! With a little attention to pig flow, some decent cleaning and regular treatment of sows costing perhaps £10-15 per sow per year, this disease can be totally controlled. Producers are urged to get their veterinary surgeon to draw up a control programme. Furthermore, for an investment that may add up to a year’s total cost in treatment, the disease can be eradicated. Again, consult your veterinary surgeon.

Enzootic Pneumonia

This disease – caused by *Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae* – forms the basis for much of the clinical pneumonia seen on farms and exacerbates the effects of other agents such as PRRS and *Actinobacillus pleuropneumoniae*.

Inspection of lungs in the abattoir indicate that many farms have an average level of damage in pigs in excess of 20% of lung tissue. This equates to loss of growth of 80g per day between 30 and 100kg, extending days to slaughter by 10 days or more. This requires an extra 14kg of feed just for maintenance. This cost will be boosted by the additional building and labour costs of keeping pigs longer.

Vaccination for SEP in the baby pig has been shown to be highly effective, reducing the level of lung damage in half, almost immediately and over a period of time, in the continuous flow breeder feeder farms, to less than 5% of lung tissue. SEP is not a disease that pig producers now have to live with. Ask your veterinary surgeon for a vaccine programme.

PRRS

For more than 10 years, UK pig producers have struggled with this complex and highly damaging disease and yet, despite the fact that a live grower vaccine has been available for 2 years and killed breeding herd vaccines have been available for a year, N.A.D.I.S. vets continue to report common problems with the disease. In particular, there is the doubt and uncertainty over the immune status of gilts entering the herd. Non-immune gilts are susceptible to the disease themselves, potentially permanently damaging their reproductive capacity (wasting £80-100 per gilt) but also de-stabilising the whole breeding population, reducing overall fertility.

A drop of 5% in farrowing rate – increasing empty days in a 300 sow herd by 750 days per year would cost close to £3000 per year and yet vaccinating gilts prior to entry to the herd would cost less than £500 per year.

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At a time when cash is still short for pig producers, veterinary advice should be sought as how to increase income and reduce wastage by attention to health control. A failure to mitigate against the costly losses that enzootic disease brings will always leave the farm at a disadvantage.

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