

THE PIG ISSUE



Garth
Partnership

February 2010

A belated Happy New Year to you all. With 2009 a year of decent returns and above all significantly improved health on the majority of units we look forward to 2010 hoping this will be sustained, many of the pointers and opinions been aired suggest it may well do. This version of the newsletter contains a couple of articles on health improvement schemes in which we can all participate with the drive to improved pig health being a fully supported desire of BPEX. Also you will notice an additional member to the team, Riki, which should give us the manpower to work in greater detail with you in order to see those improvements through.

Henrike Jaeger

Riki joined Garth Partnership as a full time Assistant in January 2010. The previous three years she undertook a specialist training in pig medicine at the University of Cambridge. During this time Garth Partnership contributed significantly to her clinical training and specialist knowledge in pig medicine. Riki is very interested in reproduction health and farrowing management. Apart from this, she gets excited about pathology.



Piglets Teeth

It is common practice in the UK to try and prevent udder and facial damage (to the sow and other piglets respectively) by cutting, or clipping, piglets canine teeth in the first few days of life. Because it is so ingrained in pig management, it is easy to forget what we are doing to the piglet's mouth.

Animals in general do not have the same reactions to pain as humans, and we must not assume that a piglet is free from pain just because it is not holding its trotter to its mouth saying "ouch!" As well as the pain aspect, there is a disease issue. The exposed pulp is at risk of infection by bacteria, which may either form a tooth-root abscess or gain access to the bloodstream leading to secondary infections such as meningitis or joint-ill.

BUT THIS CAN BE AVOIDED. Tooth grinding is a viable alternative. Just the tip of the tooth is worn down with an electric grinder. This avoids most of the trauma to the tooth while leaving the bulk of it intact to help the piglet grip the teat, retaining the function of the tooth but without the sharp point to cause damage.

While clipping is still currently legal in the UK, the assurance schemes only allow it "if necessary". The practice is all but non-existent in some European countries, and the DEFRA welfare codes state that tooth grinding is preferred to clipping.

Although some people report trouble with the technique of grinding, clients of ours who are doing it routinely (instead of clipping) find it as easy, and possibly even quicker, than clipping. They also find it more satisfying to do and have stated that they won't go back to clipping.

Having decent equipment and a good technique are probably the key factors to making tooth-grinding a successful and routine practice on your farm. Speak to us at the practice about the former.

Health monitoring and improvement

We hope this title grabs everyone's attention, because surely there cannot be a producer who does not want to improve herd health and, therefore, improve their production efficiency. Healthier pigs are more profitable pigs, as well as enjoying a higher level of welfare.

We would like to draw your attention to 2 schemes currently available to help you achieve health improvements, and strongly encourage you to become involved:

1. British Pig Health Scheme (BPHS)

For the bargain price of just £150 for three years, you can be a member of BPHS. For this you get a vet assessing the carcasses of your pigs for a range of diseases at the abattoir four times a year. You just need to organise for your pigs to go to slaughter on an allocated assessment day at your abattoir. These are frequent, and spread around different days of the week, so there should always be a convenient day approaching. Assessment days can be found at www.bpex.org.uk by clicking on the BPHS link. With good planning you may even be able to get an assessment every month at no extra cost.

The information you will receive can be incredibly useful for revealing the presence and severity of disease on your farm. This can help you make informed decisions on the most efficient use of vaccination, medication etc. And by having regular assessments you can monitor the effectiveness of any management changes you initiate. For example, does an overhaul of your ventilation system or a new vaccination programme lead to lower levels of pneumonia?

In terms of cost-benefit, this scheme is exceptional value for money (it is heavily subsidised, so you are getting a lot of it for nothing!). When you join you also get all the historical data previously collected through BPHS for your slap mark. If you are not currently a member, just give us a call at Garth and we can set it all up for you. It couldn't be easier!

2. Yorkshire and Humberside Health (YHH)

To join this initiative costs you.... NOTHING! It is funded through the Regional Development Agency and the aim, in very simple terms, is to establish co-operation and communication between pig farmers in a given area so that they may make a co-ordinated attempt to improve the health of the pigs in their region. The scheme has only been up and running for a few months, and is in the development phase, but ultimately the aim is to improve the health (and thus profitability) of pigs in the whole of Yorkshire and Humberside.

The only cost to you is your time to meet fellow producers, to keep track of developments via the YHH website www.yhh.org.uk and to sign a declaration about your health status. You can get more information from the website, or give us a call at Garth if you would like to discuss it further or register.