

APRIL 2017 – VICE AND eMB

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Vice

With these longer and sunnier days the temperatures are certainly warming up, which brings a nice change to the weather we experienced at the beginning of the year. However as temperatures increase this can bring about a problem for pig herds. Vice, or ‘abnormal behaviour’ can be a major challenge on some farms causing considerable economic loss and a potential welfare concern. As well as the obvious issue of tail biting in finishers, vice can manifest itself as navel/prepuce sucking in weaners and ear/flank biting in growers. Recently we have experienced an increase in reports of tail biting, in which the weather may well be a trigger factor. Here are a few questions to ask when assessing a potential tail biting problem on your farm:

Feed space – are there the correct number of feed spaces for the number of pigs in the pen? Are they all working and accessible? Having the correct number reduces competition and conflict within groups. Don’t forget that pigs like to feed together so sticking to legislative or farm assurance guides may not necessarily be the optimum.

Stocking density – are the pigs overstocked in the pen? Overstocking increases competition for resources (food, water and lying space) which can lead to fighting in the group. Are pigs now leaving the pens at 45 kg when a few years ago it was 35 kg? This could be adding pressure to the pen, which may cause conflict.

Ventilation – are the vents working properly? These are critical in providing stable room temperatures so that good air quality is maintained, and draughts onto the pigs avoided.

Water- is there water available at all times of day in every pen? It is worth checking drinker spaces and measuring water flow rates to ensure adequate flow is maintained when all drinkers are in use. Are the drinkers optimally sited- close to food, and accessible without disturbing the main pig lying area?

Enrichment – pigs need access to some form of enrichment in their pens, whether it is straw, chains, soil or plastic toys. Were the pigs initially interested but became bored? Try alternating the enrichment after a couple of days.

Treatment – How do you treat a case of tail biting in a pen? Prompt treatment is crucial so pull out the affected pig(s) into a separate hospital pen and treat with an appropriate antibiotic (e.g. injectable long acting amoxicillin or lincomycin). If possible, identify the tail biter and remove from the pen. If a very large number of animals are affected it may be a case that a course of water antibiotic is needed.

AHDB pork have launched a Web Based Husbandry Tool designed to be an interactive resource providing information about the key risks for tail biting in pigs and practical suggestions to help reduce these risks on-farm. Take a look here: <https://webhat.ahdb.org.uk/>

e-MB – How is the antibiotic use actually measured?

So you have your antibiotic usage report from e-MB and it tells you that your level of antibiotic usage is XXXXXX. What does that actually mean, and how does e-MB calculate it? The mg/kg measure of antibiotic use is calculated by dividing the total usage of antibiotic active ingredient in milligrams (mg) by a measure of the assumed weight of pigs at time of treatment (kg).

The assumed weights used in the e-MB calculations are as follows:

- Sows = 240 Kg
- Slaughter Pig = 65 Kg
- Grower Pig = 25 Kg

These are used by e-MB and based on an estimated weight at the time of treatment. The Octagon services spreadsheets, which you may well be familiar with invariably have a lower mg/kg output as their figures work on the live weight at time of slaughter, not an assumed weight at time of treatment. The assumed average weights at the time of treatment are standardised weights rather than exact measures and they have been used because they work across all countries in the EU, not just in the UK. This therefore makes us comparable. Treatments are often given towards the start of the weaning or finishing periods, which is why the weights are lower than the usual weight of a pig at the end of the weaning period or at slaughter. So if you think your mg/kg appears much higher compared to previous reports from the Octagon services spreadsheet, it is because of this estimation of assumed weight of pigs at the time of treatment, not based on the actual weight at time of slaughter, and in most instances will lift the mg/kg figure by ~2/3rds.

Thanks,

Victoria

eMB recording

The new Red Tractor requirement to enter all antibiotic use onto eMB will be introduced in October. At this stage all RT assured producers will be expected to have entered usage data for Q1 and Q2. In order to help producers enter this data GVG will be sending out summarised quarterly usage reports for all antibiotics supplied during the previous quarter. The first reports, covering Q1 2017, will be sent out with the May accounts. Henceforth we will send the reports with the first accounts of the new quarter. The first round of reports will be issued to all producers FOC and after that there will be a nominal charge of £15 per quarterly report. If you wish to opt out of this service please contact the office.

Richard.