

Swine Project Biosecurity

Dr. Tim Page tpage@agcenter.lsu.edu

Recently, at the 2016 LSU AgCenter State Livestock Show, we experienced a disease situation with a pig. An exhibitor came to us to ask about their show pig and the symptoms the pig had. When we looked at the pig we determined rather easily that the pig had erysipelas. Erysipelas is a fairly common swine disease that usually does not cause mortality. However, the disease is highly contagious and does cause morbidity.

The classic symptoms of erysipelas are high fever, skin lesions or welts (these lesions are red to purple in color, diamond shaped, and can start anywhere on the body but usually start around the ears, head and underline), going off feed, and sometimes shivering or shaking. Usually antibiotics, or a combination of antibiotics, cure the affected pig. But, keep in mind, any pigs around the diseased pig are subject to contracting the disease.

Another important concern with erysipelas is that it is a zoonotic disease (which means that humans can contract the disease from pigs). Usually the strain that affects humans is slightly different than the swine strain, but not always. I have not heard any feedback since the show with people complaining about their pigs becoming sick. However, to illustrate my point about the disease being zoonotic, two exhibitors that came into contact with the pig were diagnosed as having erysipelas soon after the show concluded. I am happy to report that both exhibitors were treated and are doing fine now.

This example reinforces the need for biosecurity for show pigs and large market hog operations. Biosecurity for a youth swine project actually begins before the exhibitor purchases the pig. Biosecurity is a continuous process and involves preventing outside people, equipment or other animals from spreading disease to your pigs. Thus, exhibitors should purchase pigs from farms that have a quality herd health program and that adhere to strict biosecurity procedures on their farm.

You can help prevent swine disease from spreading by using clean, farm-specific clothes and boots when working with your animals. Disease also can be prevented by cleaning, disinfecting, and allowing vehicles and show equipment to dry after a show. Finally, and extremely important, disease can be prevented by isolating animals that have been purchased or those that are returning from a show. Isolation does not mean that pigs are placed in a different pen in the barn. True isolation is placing pigs on a property separate from the other pigs. Furthermore, a week of isolation is not long enough. Pigs need to be isolated for a minimum of 30 days, and I even prefer 60 days when possible.

Last but not least, your pigs have a much better chance of remaining healthy if you work closely with a veterinarian. All exhibitors need to develop a relationship with a veterinarian in their area. A veterinarian can help you adapt biosecurity guidelines to the type of production system (show pig, farrowing, market hog) you have and to the diseases that may be prevalent in your area.