

Biosecurity remains most reliable PEDV defence

Is anyone not a tad confused by conflicting media reports on porcine epidemic diarrhea?

According to a recent media report, "Although no vaccine has so far proved effective, Ottawa has authorized emergency access to an American vaccine to stop the virus from porcine epidemic diarrhea (PED)."?

The American vaccines, according to Reuters last Friday, have been under development by Harrisvaccines, an Ames, Iowa based animal pharmaceutical company and separately by Merck Animal Health under agreement with Netherlands-based Utrecht University. Vaccine iPed+Harrisvaccines may be imported by Canadian veterinarians.

Meantime, as reported last week, a 1999 study by CH Kweon, BJ Kwon, JG Lee, GO Kwon, and YB Kang in 1999 revealed that, when pregnant sows had been inoculated (with a Korean vaccine), the suckling piglets were protected "from challenge of wild type PEDV."

Otherwise, the piglets under 10 days of age are the most at risk. Mortality estimates vary from 90 to 100 per cent.

Reuters reported that "Vaccines have been used to fight PEDv in Asia and Europe but those vaccines are not approved for use in the United States due to concerns over their effectiveness, animal health officials said."

But neither have the American vaccines been fully tested.

La Terre de Chez Nous, a French-language magazine owned by the Union of Agricultural Producers of Quebec (UPA), formerly known as the Catholic Union of Farmers, recently quoted agricultural Secretary of State Maxime Bernier (MP Beauce) in an exclusive interview as admitting "that the manufacturer's serum (has only) done preliminary testing, biosecurity measures remain the best means of prevention," according to a translation.

If biosecurity is a key, why is the federal government refusing to oblige drivers to wash, disinfect and dry their tractor trailer on their return to Canada after delivery in the United States, as required by veterinary Swine Health in Quebec?

"We're in a free country and there are producers who have asked us to have access to a vaccine.

We can not compel an individual to take a shower, change clothes. There is a charter, that is, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we respect it. We strongly encourage those people to follow biosecurity measures," MP Bernier is quoted in what might seem an evasive response.

And, "because a registration in Canada requires a period of 18 months, he adds, the vaccine is made available to the hog (industry) as an emergency measure through their veterinarians.

"The vaccine is a preventive measure among others," he claims, "but the best preventive measure is biosecurity."

La Terre reported that Chief Veterinary Committee of the Quebec Swine Health Team, Francis Cardinal, argues instead that it is unrealistic to rely on this vaccine as a means of prevention.

"It is a means of control for farms that are already struggling with the disease."

How many cases of PEDv have been identified in Canada thus far?

Published mainstream Canadian reports as of the weekend had varied between five and 11, but Bloomberg News last Friday placed it at eight in Ontario and one at a loading dock in Quebec.

The disease spreads so quickly that current numbers might be without importance. But there might be sunshine amid the shadows ? with or without vaccines.

Iowa is the major hog producing area in North America. There, says Bloomberg, "every piglet born on Craig Rowles' hog farms near Carroll, Iowa, died from the virus that swept through his herds in November, causing \$462,000 of lost revenue in the first month of the outbreak. By the end of February, he expects to lose 15,000 animals, or 10 percent of annual sales.

"When the outbreak struck the first of his three breeding units, Rowles said he lost 93 percent of newborn piglets over the first three weeks. During that period, only 250 animals survived at the unit, which usually produces 1,100 a week. The mortality rate slid to 50 percent over the next two weeks, and 10 percent to 20 percent after that. All three units were affected. While still 90 percent of normal, two breeding units are back to producing close to 1,000 piglets a week, he said."

Bloomberg identified Mr. Rowles, 56, as a veterinarian who began raising pigs on his father's farm at the age of 14 to pay his college tuition.

By Wes Keller