

# HOG-UPDATE

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VOLUME 22  
Issue 2  
June 2010

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## HEALTH – Top 10 Tips

By Peter Vingerhoeds

Health ... it's important for you, your family, your employees and your pigs. When looking at your biggest threat to profitability on farm, health should always come to the forefront.

How do you ensure health on the farm?

**1. Early recognition is key. Early intervention is paramount.** In past updates, we have discussed the economics of intervention (Pulmotil) and prevention (biosecurity – Danish entry). Make sure you not only understand their limitations, but also their contributions to healthy, profitable pork production.

**2. Invest in the right feeds for each stage of production.** Sows receiving the right minerals and vitamins will pass these onto their piglets, which in turn will help their immune system function as well.

**3. Vaccinate according to your needs.** We all have seen response to Circo vaccines, but fine tuning may still be appropriate.

**4. Budget for feeds to fit your barn schedule and pig's health.** As your weaning age and weight changes, adjust and budget feeds accordingly for smooth weaning transition. Once you have helped transition piglets from milk to solid feed, use the appropriate feed to maximize

returns and health. Remember to invest in healthy pigs.

**5. Monitor Feed Curves.** If you are liquid feeding, make sure your feed curves start at 15kg or before the lightest weights you are entering pigs. If pigs are lighter, enter them at appropriate weights on the feed curve so they receive targeted nutrition - not feed they should have in two weeks. If you have a health challenge, adjust feeding to the needs of the pigs.

**6. Reduce stress on pigs whenever possible.** Stress has a great affect on the pigs' ability to generate an immune response if being challenged. This is where your husbandry skills are needed the most. Take the time to observe your pigs, and if something should show up, an early intervention is possible. Reduce any stressors so that normal active immune function can help mitigate any exposure and potential flare up.

**7. Culling is very important to maintain health.** Early intervention is a must and pigs which do not respond to treatment need to be removed. Many years of hard data indicate that higher cull rates usually translate into lower mortality rates, improved feed conversion, feed costs and profitability.

The same is true for overcrowding. Over many years of observations, those that sell excess piglets as weaners have been able to ship more pigs through their barns at better feed conversions and feed costs and still have revenue from sold weaner pigs.

Dr. Joseph Connor from Carthage Vets had an excellent article on Health as a factor for variation. Health or lack there of, will affect carcass quality and profitability; other measures for health include mortality and cull rates.

**8. Water.** Quality and quantity is important, as well as palatability. Water intake will drive feed intake. Pigs consuming optimum amounts of feed and water will be better able to mount an immune system defense. Ensure enough waterers for pigs in the pen with appropriate flow rates and water pressure – not too high or too low. Assure no bacterial contamination with a water test, and treat as required.

**9. Air Quality and quantity is important.** Make sure you meet minimum ventilation rates and air exchanges – measure relative humidity and temperature to ensure adequate ventilation. Remember virus and bacteria load will be greater

with less exchange of air in winter. In summer, more air exchanges will lessen disease pressure.

**10. Use your resources.** If you have a concern, let someone know. Work with your feed representative, veterinarian, truckers and packer. Again, early diagnosis and intervention helps keep health high and costs low.

Regular benchmarking pays regardless of your system – consider it a must! Benchmarking helps you track costs and trends and ensure your money is spent wisely for returns. Annual feed costs, growth and feed intake curves help you to maximize your resources. Sound investments usually always pay, and it helps to have data to back up those decisions.

In summary, invest in good lactation diets, weaning diets and starter diets to get piglets off to a healthy start. Monitor for early intervention, and recognize pigs that are not comfortable. Utilize your excellent husbandry skills.

NOTE: Don't forget to ask your vet about Draxxin® use for light weight pigs at weaning, especially if you are having a challenge in the nursery. Recent farm trial results show remarked improvement in mortality and average daily gain. Again, it is imperative to know that you are seeing a response to any intervention, so keep records of all lightweights, mortalities and culls in your nursery, before and after treatment. Remember early intervention is important and with Draxxin® the best time to treat is before signs of the disease appear.

Table 1: 50% of All Pigs Treated at Weaning

	No Draxxin®	Draxxin®
<b>No. Pigs Placed</b>	1217	1217
<b>Deaths</b>	23	3
<b>Mortality</b>	1.9%	0.2%
<b># Culls</b>	0	0
<b>Weight In</b>	5.9	5.9
<b>Weight Out</b>	24.5	28.3
<b>ADG (gms)</b>	396	476

Source: South West Ontario Veterinary Services  
Draxxin® is a registered trademark of Pfizer Products Inc.

### Reminder

If you are concerned about bio-security:

- keep feed room floors clean
- clean up spoiled feedstuffs
- remove mortalities as quickly as possible

**Come visit us at the  
Ontario Pork Congress**

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10 a.m. - 5 p.m.**

**Booth # A19-20**

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Sat. June 26, 2010

2 pm - 12 am

William Memorial Allman Arena

15 Morenz Dr., Stratford

Contact 1-877-700-3130 for tickets

\*\* Pork ribs supplied by local  
Pork Producers \*\*

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**HOG UPDATE** is published in the interest of helping hog producers become more profitable. We welcome your comments.

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