

USDA IDENTIFIES PORK INDUSTRY'S INFORMATION GAPS

Looking Ahead to a Second Swine Study

In 1990, the USDA :Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service collected information on health and management of farrowing sows and piglets from birth to weaning through the National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS). In preparation for a second swine study, NAHMS used a variety of techniques throughout 1994 to identify the information of most value to the pork industry.

Needs Assessment

Early in 1994 with the help of the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), a questionnaire was sent to 5,000 producers to determine the industry's informational needs. Also polled were 1,000 other individuals representing the swine industry, such as state and federal animal health officials, Cooperative Extension Service veterinarians, university researchers, and representatives of pharmaceutical companies and trade journals. Several focus group meetings were held throughout the year with key individuals in the pork industry. Participants representing universities, the NPPC, the American Association of Swine Practitioners, and the USDA shared their organizations' goals and objectives and discussed possible areas of collaboration. Many issues raised through these activities related to fundamental changes occurring in the structure of the U.S. pork industry. Production increases have resulted in a pork surplus which has increased the need for producers to become more efficient. Timely information on barriers to continued expansion of productivity and exports is highly valued by the industry.

Health and management issues continue to be key areas of informational need, particularly those areas related to intensive hog production such as waste management and associated environmental concerns. Lack of universal adoption of new technologies and a high level of variability in carcass quality were also identified as impediments to continued improvement.

Key Issues Identified

The 1995 NAHMS swine study will focus on eight specific questions raised during the needs assessment activities:

- What management factors affect the prevalence of Salmonella shedding in grower-finisher pigs?
- What management factors affect seroprevalence of porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) and other swine pathogens?
- What disease prevention methods are employed on grower/finisher operations, and how do these affect performance, health, and mortality?
- What feed components are used in rations to feed grower/finisher pigs?
- What antibiotics are used in swine feeds?
- What types of waste management systems are utilized on grower/finisher operations?

- What management practices are employed to improve product quality?
- What marketing/transportation schemes are utilized for grower/finisher pigs, and how do these affect food safety and disease control programs?

Information on a national level is needed on these areas to assess how they interact and affect issues related to food safety and public health.

NAHMS Swine '95: Grower/Finisher Study

Plans are to begin data collection in June with producers from 16 of the largest swine-producing states. Swine '95 information will provide a general overview of management and animal health on all sizes and phases of swine operations, much of which can be compared to results of the NAHMS 1990 National Swine Survey and other studies. Comparisons will help identify industry trends. Data collected on the farm will target management and health in the grower/finisher phase of production. Presence of PRRS, Salmonella, and other swine pathogens will be assessed via fecal and serum samples collected while on the farm. As with past studies, NAHMS assures participants that connections between the data and participating producers will be held in confidence. These links will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Responses and results will be used to develop a national data bank describing pork production in the U.S.

The successful 1990 NAHMS National Swine Survey set a precedent for Swine '95 in participant satisfaction and response. In the final study evaluation, 89.4 percent of the participating producers said they felt the program would benefit the U.S. pork industry as a whole, and nearly 90 percent indicated they would recommend participation in the program to others. A key benefit cited was help in identifying weak points in their operations. Participant requests sparked NAHMS to improve timely return of 1995 study results. Early information requests have shown that the pork industry is hungry for information from the Swine '95: Grower/Finisher. NAHMS producers, veterinarians, and technical personnel will deliver!

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