



Factsheet

Protecting Swine Health through Validated-Qualified Herds

The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS) is responsible for protecting American agriculture and natural resources. As part of this goal, APHIS protects the health of the nation's livestock herds and poultry flocks. We work to keep foreign diseases out of the country and to keep diseases that are present in the United States under control.

Two domestic diseases of concern in swine are swine brucellosis and pseudorabies. Swine brucellosis causes abortion, infertility and small litter sizes. Pseudorabies causes death in newborn piglets. These diseases can have a significant impact on herd productivity. Through a cooperative effort, animal health officials and the swine industry eliminated them from confinement production swine herds – swine brucellosis in 2011 and pseudorabies in 2004.

However, both diseases can still be found in feral (wild) pigs. If animals from indoor/outdoor swine herds have contact with feral pigs during outdoor periods, the herd can become infected. And if one infected pig joins a new herd, that herd can also become infected. To address this concern, APHIS established the Validated Brucellosis-free and Qualified Pseudorabies negative herd programs. Producers can choose to participate in one or both programs.

Validated-Qualified Herds

Validated-Qualified (VQ) swine herds provide assurance that their animals are free of brucellosis and pseudorabies. To gain VQ status, producers must test a certain amount of their herd for these diseases every year within a specific timeframe. All animals must test negative. They must also follow guidelines to prevent diseases from entering the herd when purchasing new additions. The specific guidelines for which pigs, how many, and when to test are found in USDA's Uniform Methods and Rules for each disease. This status must be renewed annually.

Buying from a VQ Herd

When adding to your herd, consider buying animals from VQ herds. This simple step greatly reduces the risk of introducing swine brucellosis or pseudorabies into your herd. Because of the strict testing regiment and biosecurity practices required to gain and keep VQ herd status, you can feel confident in your new additions. Also, they will not threaten the health of your family and other animals.

Testing an individual animal from a non-VQ herd before buying it is not as effective as purchasing from a VQ herd. There are several reasons why. First, the accuracy of the test depends on the length of infection, the immune response, reactions to other disease

agents and the type of test used. Second, the tests are much better at identifying an infected herd (many tests being run on the herd) than detecting just one infected animal. It is possible that an animal could test negative even though the herd, and even the animal itself, is infected.

Herds which test negative over time are more likely to be truly disease free. Owners of VQ herds also use consistent biosecurity practices to keep the disease from being introduced.

To verify VQ status, look for a document from the state department of agriculture showing the herd is VQ and the last test date. This date should be within the past 12 months. If you have any questions, contact state animal health officials or APHIS.

Benefits of Having a VQ Herd

Earning VQ status is helpful for herds that sell, trade or share feeder pigs, show pigs or breeding pigs. Buyers look to VQ herds to help ensure their new animals are free of brucellosis and pseudorabies.

Any herd with breeding animals can gain VQ status and help protect herd health. Because these diseases can affect more than just swine, the programs also help protect the health of other livestock, pets (dogs/cats) and even people. Pseudorabies can infect cattle, sheep and other animals, and is usually fatal in animals other than swine. Pseudorabies does not affect people. On the other hand, brucellosis can affect both people and other animals. People are most likely to get brucellosis by assisting an infected sow with farrowing, slaughtering infected pigs and field dressing infected feral hogs. When properly treated, brucellosis is not usually fatal to humans but can cause serious chronic health problems.

Becoming a VQ Herd

To acquire VQ status for your herd, start by contacting your veterinarian or the State Veterinarian. Depending on the state, you may need to complete an application form or your veterinarian may simply indicate VQ status on laboratory submission forms as the reason for testing your herd. Your veterinarian will collect blood samples from your animals for testing.

For both Validated Brucellosis-free and Qualified Pseudorabies negative herd program statuses, all breeding swine over 6 months of age will need to be tested. In addition, you will need to test some 4-6 month old pigs that were born on the farm to gain qualified pseudorabies negative status. You must test an amount equal to 20% of the breeding swine (for example, 10 pigs born on the farm for a herd with 50 breeding pigs). All tests must be negative to gain VQ status.

There are three ways to reach the required testing numbers. You may:

- Test annually - all animals once a year;
- Test quarterly - 25% of breeding swine over 6 months of age and the number of 4-6 month offspring equal to 6% of the breeding herd each every 85-105 days; or

- Test monthly 10% of breeding swine over 6 months of age and the number of 4-6 month offspring equal to 3% of the breeding herd every 25-35 days.

No individual animal can be tested twice in 10 months to meet the testing numbers. The herd cannot gain VQ status until all its breeding swine, and the required number of offspring test negative.

Keeping VQ Status

VQ status is good for one year – that’s the anniversary date. If all pigs were tested on the same date, the anniversary date is the day the blood was drawn. To maintain VQ status, a whole herd test can be done once a year, prior to the anniversary date. There is no grace period – the VQ status expires one year after the anniversary date.

Once VQ status is achieved, you can maintain it by testing monthly or quarterly (at the same rate as to obtain VQ status over time). Testing every quarter or month helps ensure the herd’s status won’t expire.

To keep VQ status when adding outside animals to the herd, you must purchase animals from other current VQ herds. Swine moved from one VQ herd to another VQ herd do not require additional testing. Only use semen from boars in VQ herds for artificial insemination.

Breeding swine moved from a non-VQ herd into a VQ herd must:

- Be tested for Brucellosis and PRV in the herd of origin 30 days prior to movement;
- Be retested for Brucellosis and PRV 30-60 days after arrival; and
- Be kept isolated from another animals until you get negative results for the second test.

For More Information

For more information on the requirements for a Validated Swine Brucellosis free herd, go to: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/swine-disease-information/swine-brucellosis> Click on additional resources down arrow, then select Uniform Methods and Rule. There is a section in the UM&R on validated herd requirements.

For more information on the requirements for a pseudorabies validated herd go to: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/swine-disease-information/swine-pseudorabies/swine-pseudorabies> Click on Supporting Documents and then Select PRV Program Standards. There is a section in the Standards on Qualified Pseudorabies Negative herd requirements.

For information on becoming a VQ herd, contact your [local APHIS Veterinary Services office](#) or your [State Veterinarian](#).