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Receiving Show Pigs

By Dr. Kevin Burgoon
HONOR®/SHOW CHOW® Nutritionist

Getting young show pigs over the stress caused during the buying/receiving process can be a challenge. There is not one universal protocol or method that works for every pig, or every farm. This article will attempt to address some of the common problems and methods of minimizing potential problems.

Source of problems

Young show pigs are acquired in a variety of ways.

Some pigs are purchased from breeders right off the farm and never co-mingled with other pigs.

However, some purchasers acquire several pigs from several different pig sales or breeders and place them all in the same pen upon arriving home. These scenarios pose very different problems and possible solutions.

Recently purchased pigs may become sick, or show symptoms of diseases such as coughing, scouring, and/or anorexia (off feed), when they consume a feed that contains a medication that is different than the medication used at the facilities from where they were purchased. The new medicated feed may not protect the pigs from the pathogens that were controlled by the medications in the original feed. Always consider the type of medication the pigs were fed prior to purchase and contact your local veterinarian for the appropriate recommendations.

Basic Receiving Suggestions

Again, not all pigs are going to encounter and then exhibit symptoms of stress and disease. So the following suggestions are guidelines only, and not hard and fast methods that work every time.

1. Vaccination by breeders: The first line of defense is vaccination to prevent some of the diseases discussed in this article. Young pigs originating from herds with an average health status or that will be eventually exposed to pigs of an average or unknown health status should be vaccinated for a minimum of mycoplasmal pneumonia, erysipelas, and atrophic rhinitis. Another disease causing problems at an alarming rate is Circo virus. These immunizations usually require an initial vaccination with a second "booster" injection approximately two weeks later.

At the time of purchase the buyer should ask the breeder if the pigs have been vaccinated, how many times, and against what diseases. If the breeder has not vaccinated the pigs, then the purchaser should do so. The purchaser should also medicate the pigs during this process because it could take a few weeks for full protection from vaccination to be effective. This medication should be delivered in the form of drinking water and medicated feed for pigs that are consuming feed and water normally. The use of electrolytes during this time is also advisable.

2. Water medication: Actually, this is not as easy as it may seem. There are different methods to water medicate from proportioners to barrel waterers. If the owner has sufficient facilities and equipment to proportion the water soluble medication that is the preferred method. However, a plastic 55-gallon barrel with a nipple attached is also a viable method. Medications of choice will be determined by the pathogen encountered. We recommend that the owner or feeder consult with their veterinarian the appropriate course of treatment and the medication administered.

Water medication is the preferred method of medication delivery as a sick pig may not consume enough feed to attain therapeutic levels of medication, but the same pig is more likely to drink a sufficient amount of water. In some cases, pigs will be sick enough that they will not eat or drink and will need to be treated with injectable medication as recommended by a veterinarian.

3. Medicated feed: There are many choices of medication in feed. Again, the medication used will depend upon the pathogens that are encountered, so first gain the recommendation of a veterinarian. Feeds that contain tylosin, carbadox, lincomycin, or double medicated such as CTC and tiamulin (Denagard®), or a triple combination such as CTC, penicillin and sulfathiazole, or sulfamethazine, are effective in some common situations. A feed containing one of these regimens of antibiotics should be fed for the initial 14 days or as recommended by a veterinarian.

Tylosin phosphate (Tylan®) is common in show pig feeds. However tylosin, while effective against Ileitis, is not absorbed from the small intestine and is not effective against respiratory diseases. It is suggested, where feeders have a history of battling respiratory pathogens or intestinal diseases that are not sensitive to feed grade tylosin, that a feed medication is administered that is effective against the particular disease in question.

4. Isolation: One effective method of reducing exposure and spread of disease is isolation of incoming pigs. If an owner has the facilities, he might consider keeping incoming pigs separated from the rest of the pigs for 14 to 21 days after arrival. Usually, in commercial practice, a longer period is required, but from a practical standpoint, 14 to 21 days will incubate most pathogens and allow symptoms to appear. If symptoms appear, the pigs should be isolated for an additional 30 days until the disease has been treated and the pigs have recovered. This will reduce the number of pigs affected and the need for additional pigs treated in most cases.

The isolation facilities should ideally be located downwind from the current pen where "old" or current pigs are being housed. This will limit the spread of disease from the new pigs to the current pen through aerosol transmission. The facilities should also be located at least 100 yards from the current pen. Furthermore boots, shoes and clothes should be changed when going between the isolation and current pens. The feeders should work with the current pens first before beginning work in the isolation pens. The feeder should make every effort to limit the transmission of disease from the isolation pen to the current pen.

After the isolation period is over, the pigs can be co-mingled. The feeder should keep a vigil eye on the pigs for the next 14 to 21 days. The differences in immune status of pig sources will be gradually homogenized as the pigs become exposed to the diseases that each source carries. During this time the water and feed should be medicated as described above. The intention is to limit the sick days and possible loss of pigs due to disease and stress. The exhibitor will encounter fewer problems during the feeding period by starting with healthy pigs.