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Specialists Offer Tips For Improving Efficiency, Profits of Heavy Hogs

Increasing packer demand for hogs weighing up to 250-260 pounds has put more pressure on producers to improve feed efficiency and rate of gain.

With that in mind, three swine specialists, a British veterinarian and two experts from the United States, stopped here recently to present their ideas for improving profitability of finisher hogs.

The seminar, sponsored by the Animal Health Division of A. L. Laboratories, was held at the University Park Holiday Inn.

Dr. John Walton, a world-renowned swine veterinarian from the University of Liverpool, England, kicked off the seminar with a profile of swine management practices in the United Kingdom, most notably the feeding of intact boars to only 180-200 lbs.

"Feeding boars may not be economically feasible for U.S. producers at this time," he noted. "But in terms of feed conversion, it's a highly efficient practice that might be considered for the future."

Dr. Jim Green, nutritionist and area technical manager for A. L. Laboratories, Inc., said U.S. producers could reduce costs and maximize feed conversion in the grower-finisher phase by using feed antibiotics more judiciously. He recommended using only low-cost, growth-promoting antibiotics to improve efficiency and reserving therapeutic antibiotics (tetracyclines) for special-need uses.

"Contrary to a common misconception, the performance of growth-promoting feed antibiotics does not diminish with hog weight," Green added.

Citing data from 74 field trials, Green noted that the best feed conversion was obtained in hogs that were fed a growth-promoting antibiotic from the time they left the nursery until they reached market weight.

However, hogs put on a growth-promoting antibiotic at 125-150 lbs still showed a 7.2% improvement in daily gain and 4.5% better feed conversion over non-medicated controls in the same weight category. "This shows that finisher hogs can still show a dramatic response to growth-promoting antibiotics," the nutritionist said.

Green also sought to dispel the myth that fast-gaining hogs do not benefit from growth-promoting antibiotics. For example, in two recent field trials, hogs fed a growth-promoting antibiotic showed an average daily gain of 2.03, compared to 1.92 for fast-gaining controls. Feed conversion was also better for the treated group, 3.00 vs. 3.18.

As an added benefit, the panelists said, feeding certain growth-promoting antibiotics in the grower-finisher phase can reduce the prevalence or transfer of antibiotic resistance.

"Over the years, we have found that feeding BMD decreases the resistance of both gram-negative and gram-positive bacteria to various antibiotics, including the tetracyclines," reported Liverpool’s Walton.

The FDA does not permit feeding of BMD and tetracycline simultaneously. However, a similar effect has been observed in field trials when growth-promoting and therapeutic antibiotics are rotated, three weeks BMD followed by one week of chlortetracycline (CTC).

According to Dr. Roy Schultz, a nationally recognized swine veterinarian from Avoca, Iowa, who helped supervise the study, hogs on the BMD/CTC antibiotic rotation had an average daily gain of 1.53, compared to 1.46 for hogs fed CTC continuously. The rotation hogs also showed bet-
The improvement in feed conversion alone amounted to nearly $8 in extra pork value from every ton of feed (assuming a $45 hog market),” Schultz said. “Tack on a $3 savings in antibiotic costs, and you have an $11 advantage per ton of feed.”

Schultz stressed that the three week/one week rotation was just a model. In situations where there is little or no concern about respiratory problems, it may be more economical to feed only a growth-promoting antibiotic, without rotating to a tetracycline the fourth week.

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