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Introduction

Globally, sarcoptic mange or scabies is one of the most important ectoparasitic infestations of swine and its significance is often underestimated. This condition depresses performance in fatteners and decreases fertility in breeding sows.

Two forms are known – a chronic form, which is mainly seen in sows, and a pruritic (itchy) hypersensitive form, which is normally seen in growing pigs. Historically, sarcoptic mange was seen in up to 90% of herds but modern production systems and commercial breeders who have eliminated the condition from their herds have reduced this figure dramatically.

Aetiology

Sarcoptic mange is caused by the mite, *Sarcoptes scabiei*, which is a mite that burrows into the skin of the animal. *Sarcoptes scabiei* is a permanent skin parasite and its eggs, larvae, nymphs and adults grow and develop there. Adult mites mate on the skin's surface and then the females burrow through the skin laying a string of eggs behind them. After about a month these females die in the burrows.

After a few days the larvae hatch, moult into nymphs and then adults within the burrows in the skin. The adults then go to the surface and the next life cycle commences, each one of which lasts for 10-25 days.

In pigs up to 60kg bodyweight growth rate can be depressed by 4.5-12.0% and in breeding sows feed intake can be adversely affected.

Epidemiology

Sows usually hold the main reservoir of mites on the farm and mites are passed from animal to animal when these come into contact. Prior to the advent of AI boars played a key role in the transmission of mites between animals. Transmission from animal to animal is quite slow. Practices such as group housing of sows, continuous flow systems for growers and large groups of growing pigs favour the spread of mange.

Typically, infestation of adult pigs is characterised by hyperkeratotic ear lesions although lesions across the whole body can occur. Pigs can become infested with the mite if they are put into a pen immediately after infested pigs are removed from it.

Once mites leave the host they can survive for some time but their infestability declines quickly. Infestability for mites in straw is lost within 2-3 days, whereas survivability can be up to two weeks.