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Vermin

Typically, vermin are rats and mice but this term can also include other animals like lizards, snakes and monkeys/baboons. The latter can become a real nuisance if they develop a liking for accessing pig farms, for example to steal feed. Rats, mice and lizards are notorious salmonella carriers. 'Typhimurium' actually means fever of mice. Mice have been implicated in carrying Salmonella enteritidis into newly placed poultry flocks and there is no reason why they should not bring salmonella into the pig farm.

The route into pig herds

Rats and mice will happily eat pig feed and they nest in stacks of straw bales, both of which they readily contaminate with their faeces. In cold countries they are also attracted by the warmth of pig houses.

If a rat or mouse falls into a header tank it can not usually get out so it drowns and decomposes, ultimately releasing all the germs in its body into the water. Lizards are very capable climbers and small lizards are virtually impossible to keep out of pig houses. Sows have been known to catch and eat lizards!

Any clutter or debris, such as stacks of old equipment, piles of old sacks and old disused drains or overgrown open ditch drains, provide ideal habitats, especially for rats.

Control

The first aspect of vermin control is to make the pig farm unattractive for rats and mice. This includes removing all possible havens, such as old equipment and overgrown ditches. In addition, mice do not like going over open ground because they are susceptible to attacks from hawks and other birds of prey during the day and by owls at night. Six inches of grass can hide mouse runs. So, another aspect of vermin control is to surround each pig house by a zone of clear ground. This is easy to do in desert regions but not so easy in the tropics where plants grow quickly and their roots are often needed to minimise erosion by heavy rains.

Do not leave food, such as feed spillages or dead pigs, around the pig houses. In arid regions water can also be strongly attractive to vermin.

Remember rats can travel hundreds of metres in search of a new home, so beware of potential populations of rats in the neighbourhood and consider if it is worth trying to remove them.

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