

Pighealth BYTES

Number: 154
Biosecurity

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Introduction

Globally, there has never been such a need for effective biosecurity in the pig sector as there is today. This is based on three facts:

- African swine fever
- Zoonotic pathogens
- Antibiotic-free production

Antibiotic-free production is almost the norm in some countries, whereas in many others the proportion of the national swine herd being produced under antibiotic-free conditions is rising significantly year on year. Interestingly, we now appreciate that in the past the routine or semi-routine use of antibiotics was often the unintentional last line of defence in our biosecurity.

Now, in antibiotic-free production no antibiotics are used so other aspects of production, such as improving the quality, robustness and livability of piglets, minimising stress at weaning, correct vaccination and use of prebiotics and other novel products now assumes a greater importance in today's pig production.

In the broadest sense of its meaning, biosecurity operates at several levels, namely, national, regional, corporate, farm and house or section. From now on we will be focusing on farm biosecurity.

Farm biosecurity

Before considering farm biosecurity in practice, we need to consider what diseases we require our biosecurity to keep out of our pig herd. Basically diseases can be evaluated in terms of their impact and this can be measured based on time, frequency and morbidity/mortality. Thus, diseases can range from high mortality, short duration, rarely seen diseases to negligible mortality, ever present, regularly seen entities. Interestingly, this latter category often costs the farmer more than the acute episode that occurs once every 10 years or so. It also has a less disruptive effect on cash flow. Historically, biosecurity tended to focus more on the former entities, whereas today it tends to focus on all diseases.

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