

Control strategies to keep your pig units free of pests

A pig farm provides the ideal environment for pests to multiply due to the abundance of food, water, shelter and warmth. Rats, mice, and flies are all well known for their ability to spread diseases and can bring specific health risks for pigs.

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In farrowing and nursery buildings, where a large number of pigs are in close proximity, contamination can occur at incredible speed, threatening the hygiene and biosecurity of the premises. In this respect, it is always best to have a proactive pest control strategy in place so that, where possible, you are not reacting to pest infestations that could have been kept under control.

Placing preventative measures at the centre of any pest control strategy is therefore critical to its success.

Rats, mice and flies can threaten the health and security of pig farms in a number of ways. They are carriers of infections, including salmonella, bordetellosis and leptospirosis, as well as swine erysipelas and trichinosis. Food spoilage is also common on pig farms, as rodents can contaminate the animal feed with their droppings and urine.

Besides infection, rodents have the ability to cause structural damage as they gnaw through insulation and electrics, instigating fires in

extreme cases. All pig farms will implement rodent control measures, but their effectiveness can vary.

This article outlines how going back to basics in pest control is the best way to control the presence of rodents and flies.

The following provides a simple but effective guide to proofing the farm against these pests.

Rodents

● **Early detection.** Early detection can significantly reduce the impact of an infestation. Techniques are available to monitor for rodent activity that will alert farmers of a possible problem without the need to keep toxic substances in the environment. Rentokil's non-toxic monitoring block, for example, can be placed onto the farm and around pig units to detect the early stages of a rodent infestation.

Only when infestation is detected are toxic rodent baits or physical control methods such as lethal traps employed.

It is worth noting that the rules around the use of anti-coagulant rodenticides are changing and advice on the latest restriction on use should be sought from a professional pest control organisation.

● **Safeguard stores.** Properly sealing animal feed is essential in safeguarding against infestation. Food containers should be metal or industrial plastic, covered and stored away from the main pig enclosures. All stores should be cleaned regularly and feed spillage and other

waste removed quickly to deny pests a readily available food source.

● **Cleanliness is key.**

Rats and mice are attracted to areas with easily accessible food and harbourage (shelter), so clutter should be kept to a minimum.

Moving tools and bins away from walls prevents rubbish left behind them

being forgotten, and keeping drains clearly visible helps ensure they are regularly cleaned.

Keeping vegetation cut short also denies pests secure cover, discouraging them from approaching any buildings. Any trees with branches hanging over buildings should be cut back severely to prevent rats gaining access to the roof.

● **Secure the building.** Rodent access can be reduced by ensuring all doors fit properly and no gaps larger than 5mm exist below or above the doors when closed. Pests can also be prevented from gaining access to wall cavities and ceiling voids by sealing holes in walls, around eaves and around pipes and electrical cables with sand and cement or silicone sealant.

Flies

Fly populations should be monitored throughout the year and you should not wait until fly levels are unacceptably high before attempting to control their numbers.

Due to the warmth in indoor units and pig breeding sites, flies can present a pest issue throughout the year. Adult flies live between one and two weeks and can fly large distances in this time, spreading a range of pathogens as they go.

Farmers must make sure that they have a fly control strategy in place so that numbers can be regulated, limiting the health risk to the animals.

To control the population of flies, you can take the following actions:

● **Restrict larvae feeding.** As flies often lay eggs in manure, cleaning the floors of the pig houses is an obvious but essential step to take in preventing infestation. Additionally, adequate drainage will prevent standing water, which provides several different species of fly with a breeding environment.

● **Mechanical devices.** The efficiency and durability of electronic fly control devices has improved over recent years, making them incredibly useful in the defence of the pig environment. Pheromone (muscamone) attractants are also useful in making the units more

attractive to house flies. Mechanical devices should not be placed outside of buildings, however, as they can end up killing a variety of beneficial insects. They can be used effectively inside control rooms and farrowing and nursery buildings, but may not be appropriate inside the actual pig house, where electric grids could provide a fire risk.

● **Chemical control.** For buildings where fly infestation is a severe problem, chemical control may be required. Larvicide chemicals can be placed into manure heaps, via a spray, or as a bait formulation painted on walls where flies congregate. Care should be taken with all biocide applications to ensure the well being of the pigs and people working in the environment. In some circumstances, it will be safer to use professional help with chemical applications.

Final thoughts

When managing a pig farm, the importance of continuous pest monitoring cannot be underestimated. Catching the problem early is crucial, as the longer pests have to thrive; the more likely it is that a sizable infestation will occur. This in turn increases the risk of a significant breach in the health and safety of your pigs.

The results of inspections and monitoring programmes should always be recorded and any trends in pest activity noted and discussed at management level. This will help ensure the efficiency of pest control programmes is monitored and that, if necessary, they are adapted to meet the critical needs of the pig house.

Whether you are dealing with a pest problem or are simply looking to prevent one, it is important that you know who to contact.

For any external contractor, part of their role is to be fully up-to-speed on the latest legislation changes in their particular area of expertise. Pest controllers are no different, so if you are in any doubt as to what substances to use, then it is always best to check with the experts. ■

