

Addressing consumer demands for socially responsible pork production

Protect Your Pigs Against Mycotoxins

The unusually wet weather experienced in many areas this fall not only put corn harvest way behind, but it provided ideal conditions for mold and mycotoxins to appear in corn—a potential headache for pork producers using the new-crop grain in swine rations.

Although mold itself found in grain does not cause problems for livestock, pigs can be very sensitive to the mycotoxins that molds sometimes produce. In these cases, pigs may refuse to eat the affected feed, but often the symptoms may go unnoticed even as pig performance declines.

According to Bob Thaler, a South Dakota Cooperative Extension swine specialist, it's the unpredictable nature of mycotoxins that make it essential to know exactly how much is in the grain for any ratio formula to work. It's also why producers should keep a very close eye on the quality of corn, whether they harvest it themselves or buy it from suppliers.

Specifically, Thaler says the mycotoxins to watch for include: aflatoxin, zearalenone, vomitoxin (also known as DON), fumonisins and T2.

“We recommend that you take samples from several different locations in the bin or load, and then send them to a certified lab for analysis. Your county Extension educator can provide more information about proper sampling and where to send it.”

To help make sense of the lab results, watch for the following mycotoxins:

- **Vomitoxin.** Gibberella ear rot fungus produces the mycotoxin called deoxynivalenol (DON), also known as vomitoxin. Vomitoxin does not cause health or reproductive problems, but when the total concentration in the diet reaches 1 ppm, pigs will eat less feed, Thaler says. “This decrease in feed intake will result in slower gains, but not death.” You can easily tell if there's a problem with vomitoxins, because pigs will vomit and suffer from diarrhea, in addition to eating less feed, adds Dr. Hans Stein, a swine nutrition specialist at the University of Illinois Extension. “If you have to feed grain with vomitoxin in it, mix it up as best you can so levels in the final diet are a maximum of 1 ppm in the final diet,” he says.
- **Zearalenone.** In contrast to vomitoxin, the mycotoxin Zearalenone has estrogen-like effects that tend to cause problems in the breeding herd. It can cause a number of health issues, from swollen vulvas to reduced birth weights, says Stein, who notes that Zearalenone seems to be less detrimental in grow-finish pigs. “If you have to feed it, try to get it into the diet of grow-finish pigs, and try to keep it out of the diet of the breeding herd and developing gilts.”
- **Ochratoxin.** This mycotoxin is a concern in swine diets. Reduced performance has been reported with levels as low as 1.4 ppm, and high levels are toxic. Feed no more than 1 ppm of ochratoxin in the final diet, Stein says.
- **T2 toxin.** Particularly in the diets of young pigs, T2 is very toxic and reduces feed intake and average daily gain. This mycotoxin also reduces the immune function of these pigs, says Stein, who recommends no more than 0.5 ppm of T2 in the final diet.
- **Fumonisin.** Quite a bit of fumonisin has appeared in corn this fall. Don't feed more than 10 ppm, Stein says. “If you are above this level, you need to blend it down.”
- **Diplodia.** While the University of Illinois has received many calls about diplodia this fall, diplodia is not toxic and can be fed to pigs with no detrimental effects. “There are some reports that feed intake may go down a little when you feed diplodia corn, however,” Stein says. “Watch this, and try to blend it up as much as you can.”
- **Aflatoxin.** This is the only mycotoxin regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. No more than 20 ppb of aflatoxin is allowed for interstate shipment of contaminated grain. At low levels (20 to 200 ppb), aflatoxin often decreases feed intake, depresses growth rate and can suppress the pig's immune function.

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Adding measurable value to U.S. Pork

“Pick Up Pork” Campaign Builds Social Media Buzz

The more you give, the more you get, according to the social media's unwritten rules of online success. Through the “Pick Up Pork, The All American Value!” promotion this fall, the Pork Checkoff found a novel way to give something extra to pork fans on Facebook and followers on Twitter.

“When people became a fan of The Other White Meat Fan Page on Facebook or started following us on Twitter, they had the chance to win a \$100 gift card to a nearby grocery store to pick up pork,” says Cathy Lee

Fredrickson, online content manager for the Pork Checkoff. "This was a great example of permission-based marketing that gives people the power to be associated with pork, and it was an amazing success."

In just two weeks, the contest generated 500 new Twitter followers for pork's Twitter handle @AllAboutPork, says Fredrickson. The Pork Checkoff actively "tweeted" throughout the whole promotion, posting short messages like "loin = lean" about pork's role in a healthy diet, pork's value and more.

"In the social media, we've found that messages about pork's benefits, such as the fact that ounce for ounce, pork tenderloin is as lean as a skinless chicken breast, resonate with our fans and followers even more than recipes," Fredrickson says. "Since these people can pass along our messages to their friends and followers, it's important for us to keep posting information while being flexible and responsive to social media users' interests."

As part of the "Pick Up Pork" promotion, the Pork Checkoff partnered with The Write Spot's Ann Marie Nichols, an influential blogger and friend of pork, to share great ideas for a perfect "Pork Party Pack" to guarantee a hog-wild celebration. Nichols and the Checkoff encouraged people to visit the new TheOtherWhiteMeat.com to find inexpensive meal ideas, pork recipes that are easy on the wallet, and simple tips from America's pork producers, who are proud to provide families across the country with good food at a great value.

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PORK CHECKOFF IN THE SPOTLIGHT

October Pork Exports Show Growing Momentum

Editor's Note: Statistics refer to pork plus pork variety meat, unless otherwise indicated.

Pork exports continued their upward momentum with a strong performance in October. Exports of 164,092 metric tons or 361.8 million pounds represented the second-largest monthly volume this year, while pork muscle cut exports achieved their highest volume of 2009 at 128,392 metric tons or 283.1 million pounds.

Year-to-date exports are down 11 percent in volume to 1.53 million metric tons or 3.37 billion pounds and 13 percent in value to \$3.57 billion compared to 2008, the highest ever year for pork exports, but they remain nearly 50 percent higher than the second-best year on record, 2007. This year, exports account for 22.3 percent of total production compared to 24 percent last year, while the value of exports equates to \$38.17 per hog slaughtered compared to last year's \$42.31.

Mexico continues to be a stalwart for U.S. pork exports. For the first 10 months of 2009, exports to Mexico are up 33 percent in volume at 409,628 metric tons or 903.1 million pounds and 10 percent in value at \$606.1 million compared year-ago totals. It is the No. 1 volume market for U.S. pork exports.

Japan remains the No. 1 value market for U.S. pork. While export volume, 355,323 metric tons or 783.4 million pounds, is down slightly through October, the value of nearly \$1.3 billion still exceeds last year's pace by about 1 percent. October exports to Japan increased by nearly 20 percent in both volume and value over September and exceeded the 2009 monthly average in terms of both volume and value.

October exports to the Greater China/Hong Kong region reached their highest level of the year despite a continued ban on direct exports to mainland China. U.S. Pork also overcame a variety of market access issues by recording a strong month in Russia. For January through October, however, these markets are still down more than 40 percent compared to 2008.

Pork exports to the ASEAN region achieved their second-highest monthly total of the year in October, with the Philippines accounting for most of the region's growth. Results were similar in Korea, where pork exports still trail 2008 by about 19 percent, but October exports were the highest since May.

Though down slightly from an all-time record in September, pork exports to Taiwan recorded another solid month and have increased by 38 percent in volume and 27 percent in value for the year versus 2008. Exports to the Oceania region of Australia and New Zealand have increased 18 percent in volume and 11 percent in value.

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Editor's Note: To more efficiently utilize Checkoff funds, Pork Leader will no longer be offered in a printed version after the Dec. 17, 2009 version. Pork Leader will be emailed to those producers with a valid email address on file. If you wish to receive Pork Leader electronically please email the Pork Checkoff Service Center at info@pork.org or call 800-456-PORK. Pork Leader also is available on pork.org under the news and information section.