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## PRRS Lawsuit could Affect Practices

April 19, 2011 —

A lawsuit in Indiana alleges that employees at one farm intentionally infected pigs with porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus and accidentally infected a neighbor's swine.

The operator of the first farm and the owner of its pigs deny the procedure was connected with the neighbor's outbreak and sought dismissal of the suit.

Dr. Derald Holtkamp, a professor at Iowa State University and director of the American Association of Swine Veterinarians Production Animal Disease Risk Assessment Program, said intentional infection is a widespread practice, although he didn't have figures to indicate how much of the industry uses the practice. He thinks a successful lawsuit over the practice could affect regional PRRS virus elimination projects emerging nationwide.

The regional projects cover areas of varied size, from portions of a single county to multiple-county areas, and all rely on shared information and collaborative work among pork producers, Dr. Holtkamp said.

"All of those rely on trust, working together, and sharing information that could potentially be used against them in a case like this," Dr. Holtkamp said.

Wilhoite Family Farm, which operates farms in Boone and Tippecanoe counties in west-central Indiana, is suing Dale Johnson, who operates a farm near Wilhoite's Tippecanoe County operation, and TDM Farms, which owns the pigs at Johnson's farm. The Wilhoite farm's pigs allegedly became infected with PRRS virus through airborne transmission or other means following infection of TDM pigs. Attorneys for TDM and Johnson have denied that the pigs were the source of the strain that infected the Wilhoite pigs.

Gary Price, an attorney for Wilhoite, said his client was not close to any PRRS eradication program areas but has talked with a veterinarian about involvement in such a program. However, the Wilhoite family is currently hesitant to repopulate its barns with PRRS-naive sows because of the difficulty in eliminating the virus if another outbreak occurs.

Price disagreed with concerns about the potential impact of his client's lawsuit, and he expects that, if the lawsuit were successful, it would encourage pork producers to share information when a PRRS outbreak occurs. That information could allow neighbors to take steps to avoid outbreaks on their own farms, he said.

Adam Arceneaux, an attorney for TDM, said the company is concerned that the threat of lawsuits could make companies less likely to communicate and share information, harming the pork industry. The company thinks courts are the wrong place to form policies or dictate practices regarding PRRS, he said.

Dr. Holtkamp said that figures from a study pending publication are preliminary, but they clearly show that PRRS is causing more economic harm to pork producers than the \$560 million annually estimated in a previous study published in the Aug. 1, 2005, issue of JAVMA.

Increased prevalence of the disease and increased pathogenicity of some of the strains currently circulating in swine were connected with the increase in economic costs, despite improved ability to manage outbreaks, Dr. Holtkamp said. The PRRS virus is widespread, easily transmitted over long distances, and able to rapidly develop new strains, and the absence of widely effective control strategies has hurt eradication efforts, he said.

Source:

AVMA, JAVMA News

By Greg Cima

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