

## **Consumer demands on antibiotic-free pork production challenge industry**

Chief science and technology officer of Murphy-Brown LLC discusses his company's approach to sub-therapeutic and therapeutic antibiotic use.

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The animal agribusiness industry - specifically pig producers - are currently walking a fine line between science and consumer attitudes and values when it comes to the use of antibiotics, and especially antibiotics as growth promoters.

That view was expressed by Dr. Terry Coffey, chief science and technology officer for Murphy-Brown LLC, a major U.S. pork producer, at the 2013 Alltech Symposium May 21 in Lexington, Ky., as part of a panel, "Is Antibiotic-Free Animal Production Possible?"

### **Antimicrobial growth promoters**

"What is on the line is use of antimicrobials as growth promoters," said Coffey. Referring to the FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] Guidance 209 for judicious and responsible use for antibiotics in the animal industry, he said, "Basically, if a product is important for human use, it can't be used in animals."

Murphy-Brown follows Guidance 209 and the Veterinary Feed Directive and clearly outlines the company's antibiotic usage policy on its consumer web site. Coffey said Murphy-Brown does a full accounting of antibiotics use each year, so Coffey knows exactly why and how antibiotics are used at the company. He said well over 90 percent of the antibiotics are used for prevention and control of disease, with a very small percentage used as growth promoters.

Antimicrobial growth promoters are used to manage immune system inflammatory stress. "These function more predictably than other alternatives, so they do work," said Coffey. "When we look to the future, the search is on for alternatives. What natural products can give that type of protection?"

### **Pig health factors**

Murphy-Brown also is looking at other management techniques to reduce stress. "Other related issues are sanitation, biosecurity, good management practices, and use of pig vaccines," said Coffey. "Every time we use a vaccine, we create a reaction in the immune system, so some of this is self-inflicted."

As pressure from the public mounts for reduced antibiotics in pork production, the challenge of keeping pigs healthy continue. While Coffey says alternatives may be found to manage gut microflora, there aren't many alternatives for therapeutic use of antibiotics. "More than 90 percent of the antibiotics we use are for prevention and control of disease," he said. "PRRS and swine influenza drive most of the therapeutic antibiotic use."

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