

Porcine epidemic diarrhea won't impact US pork prices until December

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By Roy Graber, Business Editor

Lack of data on pig virus cases makes it difficult to calculate its financial impact

The presence of [porcine epidemic diarrhea](#) virus (PEDV) in the United States is not expected to affect pork prices until winter, industry experts say.

More than 300 cases have been confirmed in 16 states since its April discovery in the United States, infecting both sow and finishing operations. Because the disease can have a 100 percent mortality rate with piglets, the biggest financial impact of the disease will emerge in December when piglets lost in June would go to market. The affected pigs from [finishing operations](#) typically survive.

"It might be slowing slaughter down a little because those pigs that get sick won't grow for a few days, but I don't think there's been any immediate impact on pork prices," said Steve Meyer, president of [Paragon Economics](#). "The impact will probably come in December."

Despite the number of confirmed cases, there is no measurable way to know how many pigs in the United States have been infected. Operators who detect PEDV are not required to report it to government agencies, so the only data available is from submitted tests, comments Meyer.

Based on the inconclusive data he has so far, Meyer expects slaughter of U.S. pigs to be reduced anywhere from 60,000 to 100,000 pigs a week in December, a 2 to 4 percent cut. If that happens, he added, pork prices could go up anywhere from 4 to 12 percent.

Butch Baker, interim director of the [Iowa Pork Industry Center](#), noticed pork prices increased around the time the virus was confirmed in the United States, but prices have since returned to expected levels. He, too, said prices won't change significantly until December.

Baker also did not expect PEDV to cause a decline in demand for pork or impact prices. Because it is only transmittable to pigs and does not affect food safety -- and the media so far has accurately spread that message -- it does not cause consumer worries like diseases that can infect humans.

PEDV containment is key

The number of reported PEDV cases are on the decline. On June 30, there were 19 new cases, Meyer said, compared to 47 new cases reported in each of the two previous weeks.

Meyer, however, cautions that may not be reflective of the situation. Because producers don't have to report cases, and now they better understand how to identify the virus, the number of existing cases could be going up or down.

How well the virus is controlled in upcoming months will be vital.

"If you have multiple weeks in a row without surviving piglets, that economic impact can be large when it gets into the breeding population," says Steve Moeller, Ohio State University swine extension specialist.

Moeller and Baker stress cleaning trucks of feces, and changing boots and clothing when moving from one pig herd to another to reduce the virus' spread.

Baker also believes medicines that can reduce the severity of PEDV could emerge.

"There are no PEDV vaccines, but some emergency vaccines are in the pipeline and could be on the market within weeks," he said.