

Review: How PED virus took over the World Pork Expo

The 25th edition of the World Pork Expo in Des Moines, IA, USA, attracted nearly 20,000 visitors. The show was very timely to inform the pork industry all about the latest threat to the industry: Porcine Epidemic Diarrhoea.



There were plenty of hot issues this year, in the weeks leading up to the 2013 World Pork Expo. For several years, drought and heat in the Mid West had affected crop yields – this year, however, it had been unusually wet in spring, with tornadoes making headlines even in the week of the expo.

And if it was not the weather, another topic of conversation could have been the announced takeover of Smithfield by the Chinese Shuanghui Group. Neither of the two proved to be the hot topic at the annual show. Along with the usual pastime of hog shows, barbecues and supplier meetings, one issue jumped into view – Porcine Epidemic Diarrhoea (PED), a disease that had never touched US soil until this spring. On 29 April, it was confirmed at a growing pig site in Ohio. Ever since, the virus was diagnosed on 110 farms in 11 states by the time the World Pork Expo kicked off – and growing to 331 cases in 16 states mid-July. PED, in clinical signs similar to Transmissible Gastro-Enteritis, affects pigs of all ages, but can cause high mortality among neonatal ones. Seminars were replaced, additional press conferences were being held, the media zoomed in on the virus' potential. It made the Smithfield deal seem less important and weather conditions only a side topic.

During a special luncheon, organized by the US National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), questions were answered as to the origins of the disease. Emerging pork markets as China and Vietnam are known to be suffering from PED virus these days and Asia could well be the origin of the infection, indicated Dr Greg Stevenson, professor at Iowa State University's Diagnostic Veterinary Lab. After sequencing the virus' genome, it turned out to be 99% identical to the genome of PED virus found in China. The virus, however, is far from new, as it was first described in 1971 in the United

Kingdom. At the time, it affected various countries throughout Europe and indirectly led to more awareness of on-farm hygiene. In a review in Pig Progress last year in issue 28.08, Korean scientist Prof Dr Hyun-Jin Shin said about the European situation in the 1980s: “The economic impact of the disease was not extremely significant, mainly due to a tight biosecurity.”

In addition, vaccines for PED have been available in e.g. Korea for some time, and were marketed at last year’s IPVS Congress as well as VIV Asia in Bangkok, this March. Attempts to make a vaccine available for the US were in full swing, as Dr Hank Harris of Harrisvaccines announced at WPX that his company is working on a PED vaccine, in cooperation with North Dakota State University. The company aims to have the vaccine available for US pig producers as from mid-August. So perhaps perspectives in the long term do not look that bad for the US pork industry, however understandable the attention on PED was in this difficult economic time. The timing of the show was simply perfect for the topic to grow to big proportions. Early June proved to come too early after April to oversee all consequences – and late enough for the organisation to properly anticipate. For the US pork industry it would be great if next year, 4-6 June – even if weather conditions are good – WPX can properly look beyond the issues of the day.

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