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NEWS RELEASES

AGP BAN RAISES ILEITIS CONCERNS FOR UK PIG PRODUCERS

Intestinal diseases in pigs are likely to steal a march on the UK pig industry next year after the antibiotic growth promoter ban comes into force, if experience in Denmark is anything to go by. And one of the most economically significant problems to tighten its grip is likely to be porcine ileitis.

The warning stems from a Europe-wide study that highlights considerably higher rates of the disease in Danish herds, where AGPs have been outlawed since 1999.

Sixty per cent of finishing pigs at 22-24 weeks old in UK herds in the study proved positive for *Lawsonia intracellularis*, the bacteria that cause porcine ileitis, and on over half the farms tested within this age group 80-100% of the animals were positive. More than half of sows and gilts (53%) also had the disease, adding to the evidence of very high levels of infection on a significant number of UK farms.

In Denmark, where therapeutic use of antibiotics has increased significantly since the ban on AGPs, the study showed clearly that pigs are developing the disease at an earlier age, and higher numbers in the different age groups are proving positive.

While seroconversion in UK herds is starting generally from 13 to 18 weeks of age, the study showed the infection is already well established in Danish herds at 13 weeks.

Veterinary surgeon Allan Henderson, of Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, says: "The concern is that UK producers will be caught out when AGPs are withdrawn from use throughout the EU from January 1 next year.

"Not only are we likely to see an increased incidence of the disease, but also – even though we might think that antibiotics are currently controlling ileitis – our study shows that 60% of UK finishing pigs are sub-clinically infected despite the high use of antibiotics. In reality, the problem is only being masked, and with the AGPs ban the disease is likely to become much more significant."

Sixteen thousand blood samples were taken from pigs on 342 farms in 12 countries to study the incidence of the bacteria that cause porcine ileitis, work made possible by the development of a new laboratory test. The study was carried out by researchers from the University of Leon, Spain, in conjunction with Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health and bioScreen GmbH, Germany.

Allan Henderson urges UK producers to review their biosecurity measures now and consider what else they might do to minimise the effects of ileitis after the withdrawal of AGPs in a few months' time.

"Estimates suggest the disease can be devastating financially, so doing everything possible to minimise infection rate will bring its rewards," he adds.