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Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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Baby Pig Anemia

Cooperative Extension Service: South Dakota State University and U. S. Department of Agriculture
Baby Pig Anemia

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Anemia in baby pigs may affect a high percentage of those farrowed and raised in confinement. The incidence of the disease may be as high as 90 per cent where pigs are raised on concrete without supplemental iron. The losses include pigs that die of anemia as well as failure of affected pigs to gain normally. Anemic pigs may be more susceptible to infectious diseases.

CAUSE
The common baby pig anemia is caused by lack of iron. Pigs are born with a limited amount of iron stored in their bodies. Iron is a necessary part of hemoglobin which transports oxygen in the blood. A shortage of hemoglobin is manifested as anemia. Iron must be available for formation of hemoglobin, as new blood is constantly being produced in a young growing pig. Anemia occurs generally in pigs having no contact with soil, which usually provides sufficient iron. Sow’s milk, although able to provide most of the nutrients needed for newborn pigs, is too low in iron to prevent anemia. There is enough iron in the pig’s body to prevent anemia for one to two weeks, so symptoms of iron deficiency are not ordinarily apparent until after that age. Treatment and control are much more difficult after the pigs are visibly sick.

SYMPTOMS
The symptoms of anemia usually become apparent in pigs two weeks old or older. The affected pig may appear normal and in good condition. In advanced cases there is labored and difficult breathing. The skin and the membranes of the mouth and eyes are pale. There may be sudden death of fat, well nourished pigs or there may be a period of poor growth with rough haircoat, wrinkled skin and drooping ears and tails. Lowered resistance, caused by anemia, may make the pigs more susceptible to scours, pneumonia and other infections. When pigs have scours, they absorb less iron from their food supply so the anemia becomes more severe.

CONTROL
Treatment of the sow before farrowing will not prevent anemia in baby pigs. Even if the sow is given supplemental iron, she will pass very little of the excess iron through the milk. Control involves administration of iron to the baby pigs. There are both oral and injectable compounds available for prevention or treatment. In most cases, orally administered iron must be given frequently. This requires repeated handling of the pigs. However, making clean sod available to pigs a few days old seems to be adequate for prevention of anemia. Provide fresh sod several times weekly in an area away from the sow. Obtain sod from a place that has not been contaminated by swine.

Iron injections require less handling of the pigs and assure that an adequate dose is given each pig. Improper administration of iron can result in muscle damage and abscesses which may persist until pigs go to market. Too much iron can be toxic. One injection at 5 days and another 10 days later is recommended. Follow the instructions on the label. Consult your veterinarian for diagnosis and his recommendations concerning prevention and treatment.