Protein Sources Swine Update

March/April 2012

Lori Feldmann, DVM

Anyone with nursery and/or finishing pigs probably ends up with some umbilical hernias (belly ruptures) in each group. As a management company these have been challenging to address. Unlike scrotal ruptures that show up at castration, umbilical hernias most often show up in late nursery and early finishing stages. There is no "quick fix" in most cases and as you all know euthanizing these pigs or marketing them on cull markets becomes costly.

Generally, umbilical hernias have been blamed on pigs being in a dirty environment at birth and getting a naval infection. So the typical reaction from producers is to say we need to do a better job at the sow farm. While we can't deny that the sow farm is the right place to start looking, some observations over the past few years have led us to believe that umbilical hernias are likely caused by a combination of factors:

- **Dirty environment**. We do the best we can to keep the farrowing environment as clean as possible to limit naval infections. We also make sure any equipment used in the farrowing rooms is cleaned frequently.
- **Genetics**. As we have worked in the industry to produce leaner, healthier pork we have also bred animals to have thinner bellies. There simply isn't as much muscle to close up around the umbilical area when it is healing after birth.
- **Season.** We definitely see an increase in umbilical hernias in late summer/early fall. Last year we checked with one of the cull markets and they confirmed our observation that there were definitely more umbilical hernias coming in during the fall.
- **Disease.** When we have a PRRS break or other major health issue, we tend to see more umbilical hernias. It is likely that the depressed immune system of the pig can't fight infection as well and leaves the pig more susceptible to an umbilical infection.

Many of you are probably wondering what we are actually doing to try to prevent umbilical hernias. It has been a standard practice in the sow farms that Protein Sources manages to give an antibiotic along with the iron shot at 4-5 days of age. We have re-evaluated that policy in the past few months and now all pigs receive an antibiotic within 24 hours of being born. At this point, it is too early to know if that change is enough to decrease the number of umbilical hernias that we see. Our expectation is that by the end of this year we will be able to evaluate the effects of the new antibiotic protocol on umbilical hernias.

If you would like more information on our new farrowing protocol or have any other questions, please contact Dr. Mark FitzSimmons or Dr. Lori Feldmann in the Protein Sources Management office at 507-524-4511.