

An Overview of North American PRRS Eradication Efforts

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In a recent publication in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the cost of PRRS was estimated to be 560 million US dollars each year (Neumann and others, 2005:227;385-392). In this article, several interesting points were made. First of all, it was noted that these were only the direct costs of the disease, i.e., costs secondary to production losses. In other words, this estimate did not include the extra costs incurred due to vaccination, diagnostic testing, treatment protocols for opportunistic pathogens secondary to PRRS virus infection, etc. Therefore, the estimate of 560 million per year is conservative. Another interesting point raised by the authors was the majority (88% or approximately 496 million of the losses occurred in the growing pig population, in contrast to only 67 million in the breeding herd. Finally, when adjusted on the basis of the value of the US dollar in the year 2004 when the study was conducted, the cost of PRRS far exceeded the estimated costs of classical swine fever and pseudorabies (364 million and 36 million respectively,) in the US.

The fact that these two diseases have been eradicated from the US has led to a great deal of discussion regarding the feasibility of eradication of PRRS from the North American pig population. In 2005, the American Association of Swine Veterinarians (AASV) published a position statement of PRRS eradication, which read as follows:

“Porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) is a significant production-limiting disease of swine that is estimated to cost the US industry approximately 560 million dollars per year. Control of the disease via traditional methods has not been effective in all cases; therefore, it is the position of the AASV that eradication of the disease from the North American swine industry is the long term goal. The AASV will take a leadership role by partnering with the swine industry to promote collaborative PRRS eradication efforts at the local, regional, and national levels, communicating the need and identifying sources of funding to support such initiatives, and assisting in the transfer of new PRRS-related information and technology across its membership, in order to achieve this goal.”

Following the publication of the statement, PRRS eradication based working groups have been formed throughout North American in an effort to assess the feasibility of elimination the virus and eradicating the disease from a region, or a group of farms. The first group to organize such a collaborative effort was located in Ontario, Canada and is known as the Ontario Swine Health Advisory Board or OSHAB. The members of OSHAB include the Ontario Association of Swine Veterinarians, the Ontario Pork Industry Council, along with the various sectors of the Ontario swine industry. This group is working closely with the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph and has raised a significant amount of funding that will be dedicated to PRRS research.

Following the lead of OSHAB, the AASV is currently in process of organizing a North American PRRS Eradication Task Force. Individuals serving on the Task Force will represent stakeholders from across North America including practitioners, researchers and producers. The goal of this task force will be to serve as a steering committee to provide direction, knowledge, resources and coordination for national and regional PRRS virus elimination efforts. The Task Force will also facilitate the dissemination of information regarding the progress of these efforts as well as any other information pertinent to achieving the AASV's long-term goal of eradicating the disease from the North American swine herd. It is hoped that such efforts will enhance communication and collaboration across groups and stimulate the initiation of regional PRRS eradication pilot projects in order to demonstrate that sustainable eradication is possible within a group of farms.

At this time, a Minnesota PRRS Eradication Task Force is taking shape. It is comprised of representatives from the Minnesota Pork Producers Association, the Minnesota Pork Board, the AASV, local pork producers, swine practitioners and scientists from the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine. Proposed objectives include to:

1. Raise the awareness that eradication of PRRS from North America is the long-term goal.
2. Facilitate communication of ongoing PRRS eradication efforts in Minnesota.
3. Identify and organize PRRS eradication working groups throughout the state.
4. Develop PRRS eradication educational programs and materials.
5. Write collaborative proposals for the funding of PRRS regional eradication projects.
6. Develop the long-range plan for PRRS eradication from Minnesota and assist in its implementation and oversight.

The initial feedback regarding the organization of a group of this type has been positive and initial meetings will be held this month. It is hoped that similar groups can be organized in other states, resulting in a producer-practitioner driven initiative, not a program that is regulated by the government.

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