Steps For Pork Producers To Protect Herds

COLUMBIA, MO.

People cannot become infected with any of the influenza viruses by consuming meat or other products derived from pigs, says a University of Missouri Extension veterinarian and swine disease expert.

"Influenza is strictly a disease of the respiratory system, and these viruses are not known to infect meat," said Beth Young.

Young and other members of the MU Extension Commercial Agriculture Program swine focus team met to discuss how to keep producers and the public up-to-date with accurate information.

The main concern for producers is to keep their pigs protected from the virus from sources outside the production site.

The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) and the National Pork Board (NPB) are urging all pork producers to use industry standards to reduce transmission of influenza viruses between pigs and people.

Joe Zulovich, structures engineer for the Commercial Agriculture Program and an expert in ventilation, said producers should immediately check their ventilation systems to be sure they are in working order. "If a producer was considering upgrading his system, now is probably the time to make that investment," Zulovich said.

Maintaining appropriate ventilation in the barns will reduce the exposure of pigs to viruses from other pigs and to human influenza viruses. It also will reduce exposure of workers to swine influenza vir-uses.

The virus identified in the current outbreak, misleadingly na-med "swine flu," belongs to the A(H1N1) influenza virus subtype. H1N1 is unusual as it can cause disease in many species. Birds are especially susceptible as both victims and carriers.

Pork producers should maximize protection of herds by sealing or screening doorways, windows and airflow vents in swine housing units to prevent birds from entering. Unlike migrating waterfowl, small birds are not thought to be important in the overall ecology of influenza viruses, but they may carry the virus from waterfowl feces into barns on their bodies.

Pig feed should be stored in closed containers to prevent contamination with feces from overflying waterfowl. Producers should not use untreated surface water as either drinking water or for cleaning in swine facilities. It would be prudent to minimize waterfowl use of farm lagoons.

Vaccination of pigs for swine influenza can reduce the levels of virus shed by infected animals and thus reduce the potential for human exposure and infection.

Swine farmworkers and their families should be vaccinated for human influenza virus on a yearly basis. Vaccination will provide some level of protection against infection with swine viruses of the same hemagglutinin subtype. Vaccination of farmworkers also will reduce the amount of virus they shed if infected during human flu outbreaks, and thereby limit the potential for infection of pigs with human influenza viruses.

To further reduce the risk of infection of pigs with human influenza viruses, farm owners should provide sick-leave policies for employees that encourage them to remain away from work when they are suffering from acute respiratory infections. People typically shed influenza viruses for three to seven days.

Producers should enforce basic hygiene and industry-standard biosecurity practices. Producers should provide workers with boots that are worn only within the pig housing units. Workers should change clothes prior to leaving swine barns for office facilities, food breaks or their homes.

Hand-to-face contact should be minimized and hand-washing stations should be available throughout animal housing areas.

Public access to barns should be restricted. Δ