

## Veterinarians Urge Hog Producers to Rethink Antibiotic Rotation

*Editor's note: The following is reprinted courtesy of Feeks Communications  
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Now that antibiotic rotation has become a popular way for hog producers to cut drug costs in half without compromising on herd health or efficiency, a few noted swine specialists are challenging their producers to take this program one step further.

Instead of feeding grower-finishers a low-cost production antibiotic for three-weeks and a therapeutic additive for one week, they suggest keeping the production antibiotic in the feed from 50 pounds to market weight and rotating to therapeutic additives only as needed.

"The three week/one week rotation was a step in the right direction, especially for producers who were feeding a tetracycline (CTC or OTC) continuously," says Dr. Bernie Curran, a veterinarian in Eldridge, Iowa.

"But if you're doing a good job with your health program during the starter period, there's no reason to keep feeding a therapeutic drug in the grower-finisher phase," he continues. "At that point, growth promotion and feed efficiency should be your primary concerns, so it makes more sense to use a low-cost production antibiotic like BMD."

If a respiratory problem develops, the veterinarian explains, the hogs can be switched to therapeutic additive to bring it under control. Then hogs can be put back on a production antibiotic.

Dr. Roy Schultz, a swine veterinarian from Avoca, Iowa, who pioneered the three-week/one-week rotation, agrees with Curran's strategy.

"The rotation program was introduced a few years ago as a model cost-effective alternative to feeding tetracyclines continuously," he says. "It's been a successful program for many producers. But if hogs are doing well and there are no respiratory problems, you may as well stay

with the production antibiotic."

During the flu season or when cool, wet weather prevails, some producers are still inclined to keep 100-200 grams tetracycline (per ton of feed) in their grower-finisher rations to prevent respiratory problems. The veterinarians caution against this practice, however, because the continuous use of tetracyclines may cause a build up of resistant bacteria and make the drug less effective in treatment situations.

"Prudent drug use should not come and go with the seasons," insists Dr. Dennis Mefford, a swine veterinarian in Oneida, Ill.

"If anything, exercising prudent drug use is even more important during changeable weather because, if respiratory problems are indeed more prevalent, you want to keep tetracycline in reserve for treatment purposes."

Mefford notes that when treating seasonal pneumonia outbreaks, he frequently sees better response to tetracyclines when these drugs are not fed continuously as growth promotants.

"And the hog producers who do insist on feeding tetracyclines continuously are probably obtaining very little respiratory benefit," he observes.

Concern over sulfamethazine residues and concern over tetracycline usage has also made it more important to reserve tetracyclines for therapeutic uses.

"Tetracycline is a good, broad spectrum antibiotic that can be used with little or no withdrawal time—it's one of the best we have," Mefford says. "For this reason, I think producers should be extra careful to use tetracycline only when it's essential and put more emphasis on production antibiotics like BMD. If we burn out tetracycline, our only backup might be a sulfa."