

Linda Geist

Marcia Shannon

Many fair boards suspending April weigh-ins for hogs

COLUMBIA, Mo. – Spring weigh-ins for 4-H pig projects are being waived throughout much of Missouri to slow the spread of the pig disease, porcine epidemic diarrhea virus (PEDV).

University of Missouri livestock specialists, 4-H specialists, fair board members and agriculture teachers discussed whether weigh-ins should be suspended recently on a conference call, said Marcia Shannon, MU Extension swine specialist and animal science professor in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Shannon said weigh-ins could spread the disease. Missouri lags the nation in outbreaks of the PEDV with only 48 confirmed cases of PEDV. The disease has killed 4 to 5 million pigs three weeks or younger in 25 states.

State weigh-ins are held in April of each year for those who plan to enter livestock in 4-H fairs held in each county. The weigh-ins are used to document ownership of the livestock and evaluate growth performance.

No state mandates have been issued for non-commercial operations regarding PEDV. Shannon said this presented a good opportunity to educate youth about the disease and biosecurity practices.

Shannon said exhibitors often make livestock purchases in march and April. As they shop for livestock, they may visit several farms, sale barns and auctions. Because the disease is carried through the feces of pigs, it spreads easily by someone who has visited multiple facilities.

MU Extension specialists recommend that youth visit only one place per day, with a maximum of three, to prevent the spread of the disease through vehicles, people and materials. “We want the youth to be a good example for the swine industry,” Shannon said.

Any new pigs brought home should be isolated from existing swine for 30 days. Most pigs are shedding the virus for 21 days.

Extension specialists also are working with feed mills statewide. Some producers have suggested that PEDV may be caused by feed, but Shannon said, it is more than

likely not, but it is possible that feed delivery trucks could spread the disease as they travel from farm to farm. Because of this winter's extreme cold temperatures, trucks may not have been washed as much as usual, resulting in conditions to spread the disease via vehicles.

She said some producers are taking extra preventative biosecurity measures such as keeping disinfectant spray and wipes in their vehicles to wipe down floor mats and door handles, two of the places where the disease is transferred. Some may keep an extra set of boots in their vehicles or wear disposable coveralls.

Shannon recommends frequent washing of vehicles, especially floor mats. "Biosecurity measures require extra time and effort, but it is worth it," Shannon said. "Missouri's very fortunate to have a low numbers of disease cases and we want to educate people about better biosecurity practices so that we keep it that way."

Symptoms of PEDV include projectile diarrhea, vomiting, difficult breathing and lethargy. Tests are available to diagnose the disease but there is no cure at this time.

For more information, Shannon also recommends exhibitor guidelines at National Pork Board website at www.pork.org and the American Association of Swine Veterinarian's website at www.AASV.org.