

Ask A Vet: Lame Pig Problems

Sunday, May 18, 2014

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We have 4-H pigs that are now pushing 160-180 pounds and we have noticed that a couple in the group seems to be stiff in their legs and having trouble getting around. They tend to want to lie around more. We don't see any cuts or bruises on them. Can you please give us some insight as to what is going on? How common is it for pigs to just go lame?

-Stumped

Dear Stumped,

This is a great question and in order to determine what is going on we have to look at the main systems that come into play when evaluating lameness in pigs; musculoskeletal (muscles, tendons, bones), neurologic, and integumentary system (skin). Significant losses on a farm can be attributed to lameness in pigs and can account for as much as 5 percent in growing pigs. What happens is the pigs get too sore to move comfortably and may have to be culled from the herd prematurely especially if unable to compete for food and water. It also means the pigs are moved to a hospital pen so that special attention can be given to them without other pigs bullying them and get the proper treatment.

It is great that you observed no cuts or bruises as this is what we look for if pigs have been fighting in a pen and possibly hurting another pig. When evaluating lameness we first break it down into two main categories. The first one is no visible signs and pigs appear normal and the second is visible signs such as swelling or pigs off feed and not feeling well. From those two categories we look at whether the start of things was gradual or sudden. In category one with no visible signs and it was sudden, we often think of nutritional deficiencies like calcium and phosphorous, or muscle tears, trauma, sore muscles, fractures, or laminitis (inflammation of lamina inside the hoof). If the onset was gradual, we look for things like abscesses, diseases like Erysipelas . Mycoplasma arthritis or degenerative joint disease. In the category where we see visible signs and the onset was sudden, we have to look at things like Erysipelas (again), necrotic back muscles, fractures, hematomas (blood clots), PSS (porcine stress syndrome), Streptococcal bacterial infections or vesicular diseases (foot and mouth as in other countries). If the onset was gradual in pigs with signs, we look for things like bursitis, Erysipelas, Mycoplasma arthritis, Glasser's disease caused by Haemophilus bacteria or foot rot.

If you noticed from my list some of these ailments are in both categories. This is because they can be obvious sometimes and other times not so. This is when you need a consult with your veterinarian to sort out things and do a thorough physical exam with diagnostics. Pay close attention to environmental surfaces like flooring or sharp edges protruding from troughs or pens. Be sure to not overcrowd mix different age groups and have your vet help design a good health care and vaccination protocol.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz