

Pig Fact Sheet 11

MYCOTOXINS

Mycotoxins are the poisons that are produced by moulds. They can have a major impact on pig productivity and health, depending on the toxin involved. Contamination of feed is the most common cause of mycotoxicosis but it is important to remember that mouldy straw can also be implicated.

Symptoms of mycotoxicosis are varied, as there is a broad range of toxins that may be involved, each of which affect different body organs. The variability in clinical signs can make diagnosis very difficult and identifying the toxin in feed/straw is often problematic and costly. For this reason, focusing on preventing the problem is essential. At visits currently, a number of clients are reporting issues which could be attributable to mycotoxins.

The following clinical signs can all be associated with mycotoxins.

Breeding Herd

- Birth of gilt piglets with red, swollen vulvas, as if “born on heat” – this is due to high oestrogen levels in the sow and sow’s milk.
- Poor litter size
- Irregular returns
- Abortions
- Poor milkability
- Piglets born with splay legs
- Tail necrosis in piglets
- Nymphomaniac (cystic) sows and also sows showing no signs of heat
- False pregnancy
- Reduced immunity, so increased risks of other diseases, e.g. PRRS, Leptospirosis.

Rearing & Finishing Herds

- Scour
- Poor feed palatability
- Immuno-suppression, so increased risks of other problems, notably pneumonia
- Reduced daily liveweight gain and increased feed conversion ratio

So how do we treat the problem?

Mycotoxin binders are available commercially and can be added to the feed. These act to “tie up” any mycotoxins present, rendering them unable to cause harm to the animal. There are several different products available and discussion should be held with your vet/nutritionist before adding them to the diet.

A product that is relatively new to the UK is MTox Plus, which binds all the common toxins that are likely to cause problems for pig producers, and is starting to be widely used within the industry.

Prevention

The following steps can be taken to help reduce the risk of your herd being affected:

- Avoid use of mouldy straw
- Check feeders and remove mouldy feed
- Empty bulk bins regularly and clean down/ fumigate quarterly
- Repair leaking bulk bins
- Store grain to reduce risks of it becoming moist
- Consider cleaning of wet feed systems
- Assume an issue, do the above and include a binder anyway!



Taking representative samples of feed and storing it in the freezer will allow you to have it analysed should you suspect you have a problem with mycotoxins in your herd.