

## **North American PRRS Eradication Task Force**

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Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) continues to be a significant production-limiting disease in the North American swine industry. PRRS is estimated to cost the US industry approximately 560 million dollars per year. The cost of PRRS to the Canadian Swine Industry is estimated to be 100 million dollars per year.

The American Association of Swine Veterinarians (AASV) has presented a position statement with respect to the long-term plans for control of this devastating disease. Part of the AASV position statement says that “Control of the disease via traditional methods has not been effective in all cases; therefore, it is the position of the AASV that eradication of the disease from the North American swine industry is the long term goal.”

At least initially, the idea of achieving North American PRRS eradication will probably seem like an overwhelming challenge to most of us. Over 30 years ago a small group of US pork producers first contemplated a Pseudorabies eradication program. At that time, they actually knew less about Pseudorabies than we currently know about PRRS. The existing information “gaps” did not deter this group from pursuing the possibility of establishing a US Pseudorabies eradication plan. Recently, the goal of Pseudorabies elimination from the US domestic herd was achieved. This national elimination program was the result of a dedicated team effort. The North American swine industry is now taking some of the initial steps towards investigating the potential of North American PRRS eradication. AS the Chinese proverb states, “Even the longest journey begins with a single step”.

Dr. Scott Dee, as President of the AASV, has stated that PRRS eradication is a long-term goal requiring a careful, well-thought-out plan, and solid support from swine producers. To this end, the AASV has formed a North American PRRS Eradication Task Force (NAPETF). The members of the task force are veterinarians that are representative of regional eradication project groups and industry. An advisory panel of PRRS researchers has also been formed with the goal of supplying a direct link between the task force and the research community. The NAPETF includes veterinarians from the USA, Canada and Mexico.

There have been successes in eliminating the PRRS virus from individual herds and production systems. Several regional groups such as the Minnesota PRRS eradication task force and the OPIC Swine Health Advisory Board (OSHAB) are working on regional PRRS control and elimination. At a national level, Chile has made great progress with its national PRRS eradication program with only a few remaining sites that are PRRS virus positive.

PRRS elimination techniques are being fine-tuned to the point that the swine industry is increasingly confident that PRRS virus can be successfully eliminated at both the herd and system levels. The greatest challenge that we have is keeping the PRRS virus out of herds. Some progress has been made in the understanding the biosecurity required to control the spread of PRRS by people, aerosols, transport, insects and semen. One of the “weakest links” that has been identified in the management of PRRS is the actual assessment of PRRS risks at the farm level.

The NAPETF will be working with the AASV team lead by Dr. Derald Holtkamp at Iowa State University and Dr. Dale Polson, BI Vetmedica as they continue the development and implementation of the PRRS Risk Assessment Tool and the related PRRS Risk Benchmarking

Database. At the International Pig Veterinary Society (IPVS)<sup>1</sup>, Polson et al. demonstrated the use of the PRA tool in benchmarking PRRS-related risks in breeding herds (PRA<sub>BH</sub>). In a second study<sup>2</sup>, Yeske et al. described how the PRA score influences the survival rate of PRRS virus naïve swine breeding herd sites. Survival rate is a term that is used to describe the ability of herds to remain PRRS naïve. This research demonstrates that much work needs to be done in the area of PRRS Biosecurity. One of the questions that the NAPETF will try to answer is how consistently we can eliminate PRRS from various types of production systems. An even greater question will be how consistently can we keep it out.

Currently the focus of the NAPETF is an assessment of producer and veterinary attitudes to PRRS eradication. A survey has been developed by the NAPETF. The goal of the survey is to provide a starting point or baseline with respect to producer and veterinary attitudes to PRRS eradication. The results will help in identifying the current knowledge gaps and help to prioritize research efforts. The survey will also help to provide direction with respect to industry education programs. The plan is to complete the US survey in the first quarter of 2007 with initial results to be presented at the AASV annual meeting in March 2007.

Having just completed the Pseudorabies eradication program, the US swine industry state and federal government is very aware of the systems required for an industry led disease elimination program. While this is familiar territory for the US participants in the NAPETF it is unfamiliar territory for the participants from Canada and Mexico. In Canada, we will need to identify the potential national and provincial players and establish a line of communication. The export of live pigs and pork to the USA is very important to the Canadian swine industry. Although PRRS is not currently a barrier to cross border trade, Canada can little afford to fall behind the US with respect to PRRS elimination.

It is entirely possible that the conclusion of the NAPETF will be that PRRS elimination is not possible given the nature of the disease and our current technology. If this is the case then we will need to focus on the control of PRRS until the appropriate technology becomes available that will facilitate elimination. If it were possible then it certainly would be a shame to have future generations look back at our inaction and say to themselves “ What were they thinking?”

1. Polson, D, Holtkamp, D, Kjaer, J, Philips, R, Spiess, D Proc. 19th IPVS Congress
2. Polson, D, Yeske, P, Holtkamp, D, Philips, R Proc. 19th IPVS Congress