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LICE ON PIGS
(CONTRIBUTED BY THE VETERINARY BRANCH)

LICE infestations are responsible for serious losses in the pig industry as, apart from
the reduced growth rates and loss of condition resulting from the constant irritation,
the lice are carriers of disease.

Only one species of louse affects the pig, but it is the largest sucking louse found
on domesticated animals, often reaching a length of \( \frac{1}{4} \) in.

The sucking louse of the pig, (Haematopinus suis) is greyish-brown in colour
with brown and black markings. The parasites are commonly found in the folds
of the neck and jowl, on the back and flanks, in and around the ears and on the
inside of the legs.

The female louse lays three to six eggs
daily and as many as 90 in her lifetime,
attaching the pearly-white “nits” to the
bristles close to the pig’s skin. They are
commonly found on the lower half of the
abdomen and on the neck, shoulders and
flanks.

The eggs hatch in 12 to 14 days under
normal conditions, but in cold weather
may take up to 20 days. The young lice
or nymphs closely resemble the adults and
grow rapidly, reaching maturity in about
ten days and commencing egg-laying (in
the case of the females) about two days
later, so that a complete life-cycle—from
egg to egg—can occur in about 28 days.

Pig lice cannot live for very long away
from their hosts and usually die within
two or three days if they become detached
from the pigs and fall to the ground.

SYMPTOMS

Constant rubbing or scratching in at­
ttempts to allay the irritation are the main
indications of the presence of lice, al­
though similar symptoms may be caused
by mange infestation. Both pig lice and
mange mites may often be found on the
one animal.

Rubbing may continue until the skin is
hairless, torn and bleeding.

Pig lice have been shown to be trans­
mitters of swine fever and it has been
suggested that they might also spread
swine erysipelas.

They have been also held responsible for
the transmission of swine pox, louse-borne
dermatitis and impetigo (a pin-point der­
matitis in baby pigs due to the inoculation
of bacteria into the skin).

Lice cause red spots on the skin which
shows up as a “crocodile leather” appear­
ce of the dressed carcasses and this
tends to depreciate their value.

In white pigs, a heavy infestation with
lice or fleas seems to render the skin more
liable to sunburn.

Heavy infestations of lice are more liable
to occur when the pigs are suffering from
malnutrition or from any disease causing
loss of condition.

CONTROL

Improved hygiene and appropriate
treatment with dusts or sprays will usually
control the parasites.
The standard treatment for many years was to cover the pigs with an oily substance such as neatsfoot oil, crude oil or even sump oil.

This was applied by hand, or a three-to-six-inch layer of oil was floated on water in a dip. Many pig-raisers had rubbing posts in the sties or yards. These were covered with layers of hessian which were kept oiled by drips from a pierced tin attached to the top of the post.

A serious disadvantage of the oily dressings was that they rendered the pigs liable to scalding and blistering if they were exposed to sunshine soon after treatment.

White pigs in particular were very susceptible to scalding and it was a wise plan to keep them in the shade for some time immediately following treatment or to apply the oil late in the afternoon.

The best and most effective modern treatment is to use DDT or BHC in the form of a suspension or an emulsion. DDT in concentrations of 0.2 per cent. to 1 per cent., or BHC in concentrations of 0.1 per cent. gamma isomer, will kill all adults and nymphs or young lice. It should be lightly brushed over the animals or applied as a spray.

Owing to the movements of lice over the body it is not necessary to treat the whole of the skin surface, and good results may be obtained by herding the animals into a corner and spraying them.

Every member of the pig herd should be treated at the one time and re-treatment is advisable after an interval of three to four weeks to kill off lice which have hatched in the meantime and have not succumbed to the residual effect of the insecticide.

Because the parasites can only live for two or three days away from the hosts, no extensive treatment of infested premises is required. Ordinary cleanliness and the absence of pigs from the premises for a few days should be adequate protection for the next batch of pigs to be placed there.

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