Pig pox: its presence in W.A. is suspected but not yet confirmed

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F. C. WILKINSON, B.V.Sc., answers some questions concerning PIG-POX

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A PIG-FARMER recently asked for information on pig-pox and inquired whether the disease occurs in Western Australia. The first part of the question is easily answered, as pig-pox is a typical pox disease caused by a virus and resulting in roundish, red areas appearing on the pig's skin. The disease is in fact very similar to the other more commonly known pox diseases—chicken-pox in the human population, fowl-pox in poultry and cow-pox in cattle. The characteristic red patches which appear are followed by a scab formation with healing two or three weeks after the first signs of the disease have been seen.

As to the question, does the disease occur in pigs in Western Australia, this has not been confirmed. During the last 12 months, three properties have been visited where some of the pigs have shown typical symptoms of pig-pox, but laboratory attempts to prove the disease was pig-pox, by trying to artificially infect other pigs, were not successful. The typical pig-pox seen in Australia is not a severe disease. It mainly affects young pigs from soon after birth until weaning, but occasionally cases are seen in older pigs, from weaner to baconer weight. The disease is spread from pig to pig in a herd by biting insects such as lice, mosquitoes and fleas. Several days after the insect has infected the pig, raised red areas develop on parts of the skin where it is thin and has little hair covering, that is along the belly, under the jaw and inside the legs. In bad cases the lesions extend up along the sides of the pig and the pig may be off food and feverish for one or two days.

The early reddening stage is followed by some weeping of the reddened areas and then the formation of a scab. This scab remains for about three weeks and then drops off, leaving the skin free of blemishes. The disease can run quickly through all the young pigs in the piggery but it causes very little damage in well-cared-for pigs apart from a very slight check in growth rate. Death due to pig-pox is rare but if
other diseases such as paratyphoid or pig pneumonia occur at the same time, then death rates can be high.

Treatment is of little effect and is really a waste of time as healing of the pox sores cannot be hastened to any great extent. If left untreated the sores heal in about two or three weeks.

If the disease is seen in your pigs then you can try to prevent the spread of the disease by segregating the affected animals and treating all the pigs on the property to eradicate lice.

To summarise, pig-pox is a somewhat minor disease of pigs, which is thought to occur in pigs in Western Australia, but its presence has not been proved. The disease can easily be recognised by the owner who should not be unduly worried because if the affected pigs are kept well housed and fed, no deaths should occur and the setback to the pigs' growth will be slight.

If any pig-owner living in or near Perth sees the disease in his pigs, it would be appreciated if he could inform the Veterinary Branch of the Department of Agriculture. We can then obtain some material which might help us to definitely establish that the disease is present in Western Australia.

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The man who owns stock should realise the value of shade and shelter. A rough, sandy patch covered with scrubby trees will often provide a greater return if left intact than it would if cleared and laid down to pasture.

So many of us too, are prone to follow the example handed down from early generations of selecting the top of the highest hill on the property on which to build. This was sound practice in the olden days when castles were elevated in order to gain knowledge of the approach of the enemy; but today, the greatest enemies of the stockowner are the cold wind and rain of winter and excessive heat in the summer. Therefore when clearing a new property and choosing a site for the house and farm buildings, advantage should be taken of existing shelter in the form of hills and standing timber, while providing also that the breezes of summer are not excluded.

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