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Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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CONTROL OF LICE ON PIGS

(CONTRIBUTED BY THE VETERINARY BRANCH)

LICE 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 ¼ in.

The sucking louse of the pig (Haematopinus suis) is greyish-brown 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 a day 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. They grow rapidly, reaching maturity in about ten days. The females start egg-laying 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 attempts to allay the irritation are the main indications of the presence of lice, although 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 transmitters 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 dermatitis 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" appearance of the dressed carcasses and this tends to depreciate their value.

In young pigs heavy infestations may reduce the growth rate.

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

Pig lice may be controlled by spraying with one of the organo-phosphorus compounds (Delnav, Diazinon, etc.), which are formulated as dips and sprays for the treatment of stock for lice. These should be used at the concentrations recommended by the manufacturers.

For best results it is advisable to spray pigs twice at intervals of 14 to 21 days.

All pigs on the property must be treated at the same time and each animal should be thoroughly wetted, paying particular attention to the situations where lice gather, such as the folds of the neck and jowl, the ears, and inside the legs and flanks.

As pig lice are unable to propagate or survive more than two or three days away from their hosts the risk of re-infestation from houses, yards or vehicles is remote. However, the extra precaution could be taken of burning all bedding and litter and thoroughly spraying the sties with one of the above preparations.
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