

Pig wasting syndrome costing farmers millions

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Stark new figures show that a common pig virus, present on 99 per cent of pig farms has major economic implications for individual farmers and the pig industry as a whole, costing British farmers as much as £84 per pig (if the pig dies from the syndrome), and during epidemic periods, such as 2008, costing the pig industry £88M per year.

PMWS, a serious syndrome which results in [emaciation](#) and death in up to 30 per cent of cases. As part of a BBSRC-led initiative into combating [endemic diseases](#) of farmed animals, researchers from the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) have spent the past five years working to understand the factors that lead to farms developing high rates of PMWS and creating models to work out the cost of the disease as well as the potential savings for [farmers](#) by tackling the disease in different ways.

Professor Dirk Werling, from RVC, who led the project, explains: "We've known for many years that this is a serious disease in [pigs](#). It is now endemic globally and will haunt the pig industry for years to come; therefore it is crucial that we understand the [biological basis](#) of the virus as well as the cost implications. Knowing the [financial impact](#) of the illness can help farmers decide how best to improve the welfare and profitability of their herds. These figures are shocking, but are an important step in enabling farmers and the industry as a whole to look at feasible and sustainable intervention strategies."

Dr Pablo Alarcon, Professor Jonathan Rushton and Dr Barbara Wieland, all from RVC, produced a series of mathematical models, factoring in

different scenarios such as the size of the pig herds, the proportion affected by PMWS and the severity of the infection. In the most severe cases where the infected pig dies from PMWS, this costs the farmer an estimated £84, with the least severe case - where a pig is carrying the virus but displays no clinical symptoms – cost £8.

Models were then created to look at the cost implications of employing different control measures at individual farm level, ranging from vaccination of piglets through to total repopulation of a farm's pig stocks. Their model suggests that on farms with moderate to high rates of PMWS the most cost effective strategy is to vaccinate all piglets and increase biosecurity measures, such as a two day quarantine period for people who had come into contact with other pig herds and treating pigs with PMWS in isolation. Savings from this dual approach were worked out to be between £2,947 to £11,500 per year.

BBSRC Chief Executive Professor Douglas Kell said: "Food security and the sustainability of UK farming are seriously undermined by endemic diseases of farmed animals. This important new research shows the significant economic impact that diseases such as PMWS can cause, and highlights the vital role researchers play in working with farmers and industry to improve food security and animal welfare."

More information: The two papers were published in March in the journal of *Preventative Veterinary Medicine*:

Cost of post-weaning multi-systemic wasting syndrome and porcine circovirus type-2 subclinical infection in England - An economic disease model. Alarcon P, Rushton J, Wieland B. *Prev Vet Med*. 2013 Mar 12. doi:pii: S0167-5877(13)00041-X. 10.1016/j.prevetmed.2013.02.010

Economic efficiency analysis of different strategies to control post-weaning multi-systemic wasting syndrome and porcine circovirus type 2

subclinical infection in 3-weekly batch system farms. Alarcon P, Rushton J, Nathues H, Wieland B. Prev Vet Med. 2013 Jan 31. doi:pii: S0167-5877(12)00412-6. 10.1016/j.prevetmed.2012.12.006.

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