

Animal Welfare/Public Health
 

# Are You Considering Raising Pigs Without Antibiotics?

Raised without antibiotics, or RWA, is a production type often associated with a food label being promoted by customers. This may provide new opportunities for producers in a rapidly-changing market and potentially increase their revenue. It is important for producers that are considering transitioning to or opening a new barn using this production type to make an informed decision before committing to a switch. Specifically, producers should consider the potential for added production costs, negative impacts on animal welfare, public health and food safety concerns prior to transitioning to this type of production. This self-assessment tool aims to provide producers with a systematic way to evaluate their ability to convert to this production type. Producers are encouraged to work through this tool with their production team, including their herd veterinarian, to ensure a smooth transition.

## For All Stages of Production

- **What is your herd health history?**
  - What previous disease challenges have you experienced?
  - What is the morbidity and mortality rate and their primary causes?
  - What is your antibiotic use trend over time, including injectable, water-soluble, and feed grade?
- **What is the disease prevalence in your area?**
  - How close are neighboring livestock facilities?
  - Do you know of any recent disease challenges or outbreaks at neighboring facilities?
- **Have you talked to your veterinarian about transitioning to RWA and developed a strategic plan to identify and treat sick animals?**
  - What alternatives to antibiotics could be effectively used to treat sick animals?
  - Have you reviewed your biosecurity protocols with your veterinarian and identified and implemented areas of improvement to prevent disease introduction to the herd?
- **Have you determined what steps animal caretakers should take once they identify sick pigs to initiate isolation and treatment promptly?**
  - How long does this process take?
  - Can you shorten the time it takes to report, isolate, and treat identified animals to prevent additional illness and mortality?
  - Are personnel trained to conduct daily animal observations for early disease control and the protocol for follow-up action?
- **Is your facility capable of separating sick and treated pigs from the rest of the herd, including during transport?**
  - Do you have an identification system that can be used by every caretaker to identify hospital pens, isolation pens or individual animals?
  - Do you have a contingency plan for what to do if a treated animal is not marked and is accidentally introduced into the herd?
- **Have you and your veterinarian discussed potential breaks in RWA production in case of a disease outbreak?**
  - What is your alternative plan or marketing strategy in this situation?
- **Have you considered the potential added cost of RWA system? (Some factors to consider include the following)**
  - Would your vaccinations protocols need to change? Would you need to shift to developing more or fewer autogenous vaccines?
  - How would dietary supplements be impacted?
  - How does this production type affect your personnel training? How would you train your existing employees in this new production system?
  - Are there extra cost factors required by different programs (e.g. bedding or square footage requirements)?
- **What are the marketing program requirements for the RWA production type you are considering?**
  - Are there other aspects such as animal welfare or additional medication restrictions included in this label?
  - Does the program require you to keep additional records or undergo additional certifications or audits?
  - Have you discussed the way to sell antibiotic-treated pigs to your packer or customer?

## Additional Questions for Sow Farms

- **Can you provide appropriately sized farrowing stalls or pens to accommodate older weaning ages?**
  - Have you discussed supplemental feeding for older piglets?
- **Have you considered ways to control disease outbreaks between litters?**

## Additional Questions for Nursery/Finisher Farms

- **Are you able to obtain your herd from a single sow farm to minimize co-mingling at your facility?**
- **Are you able to obtain weaned pigs that were weaned at an older age?**