

Improvac – the Mexican experience

As the revolutionary boar taint vaccine makes its debut in Europe, Mexico is already experiencing the benefits of the new technology throughout its pork supply chain.

The launch of Improvac[®], from Pfizer Animal Health, has given Swiss farmers a commercially viable alternative to the physical castration of piglets. But the benefits of this new vaccine go far beyond an improvement in animal welfare.

Launched to the Mexican market in June 2006, Improvac has been welcomed by producers and processors, not just for its ability to prevent boar taint but also because of the added economic benefits it delivers.

“Improvac has been perceived as an innovative product that provides advantages for the pork supply chain, especially in integrated operations where those involved can see the full range of benefits,” says Pfizer Animal Health Mexico’s **Swine Product Manager**, Sergio Medina.

“The commercial conditions have shown that pigs given Improvac experience improved feed conversion and have a leaner carcass, thanks to performance characteristics that are closer to those of natural, intact boars,” Mr Medina says.

However, as with any fundamental shift in tradition, there were those who were sceptical of the product and its effect on pork production.

“The new technology is set to revolutionise the way the swine industry handles boar taint, and requires changes to entrenched practices such as physical castration, which have been part of the global industry for many years.”

/more

Improvac – the Mexican experience / Page 2

“All the industry stakeholders were interested but waited to see if the pioneer producers would be successful in the use of the product.”

“I guess it was understandable that there were some in the industry who were apprehensive about such a fundamental change. In the early stages few processors wanted to deal with entire males because of their perceived odour risk. But once they began to see results for themselves, they were encouraged by Improvac’s efficacy and are now appreciating the value of Improvac-vaccinated boars. ”

One decisive factor for producers was the effect of feed conversion and the subsequent economic savings, Mr Medina says.

“As the rising price of grain reduces profit margins across the industry, producers are particularly interested in the feed conversion benefits that Improvac delivers.”

Such benefits were shown in early commercial trials conducted in Mexico, where feed conversion rates improved 8% on average.

“That equates to a sizeable return on investment, and reinforced the messages that we had been saying about the product.”

“We have found feed savings of 20 to 22kg per pig, which equate to about five or six US dollars [\$5 or \$6USD]. Other important advantages include less back fat [by 18-25%] and hence more lean meat.”

“These benefits, together with the vaccination cost per head [about \$4USD], have given tangible impetus to the introduction of vaccination to control boar taint. In general vets, producers and processors are now aware of the cost-

/more

Improvac – the Mexican experience / Page 3

benefit advantages, particularly in relation to feed conversion, and in many cases the wider financial windfalls.”

These results have borne witness to a turning point in Mexican pork production, with a growing number of producers starting to use the revolutionary technology since its launch.

Mr Medina admits that while integrated producers were the first to realise the benefits, non-integrated producers (who sell live pigs to processors), proved a bigger hurdle. In Mexico there are still a number of non-integrated producers – 70% of the biggest farms.

“This has been challenging”, Mr Medina says. “When there is high pork demand, processors accept almost anything. This can include lighter pigs, females, castrated males and higher prices, among other things. But when pork demand is low, processors put a lot of restrictions on the purchase of pigs and can be reluctant to take entire males – even if they believe the carcass can be more profitable.”

“This has a lot to do with perception and traditional practice, but with the increasing adoption of Improvac, processors are realising the worth of the product. It’s been a matter of some producers breaking with tradition and others seeing the benefits and following suit.”

For integrated producers, who are able to see the economic returns across the production chain, the advantages are immediately visible, Mr Medina says.

“Most of the integrated producers are exporting pork to Asia, in particular Japan and South Korea. This has typically been quite a sensitive market, and so some producers were apprehensive in using any new technology.

/more

Improvac – the Mexican experience / Page 4

“Now we have a producer who is exporting Improvac-vaccinated pork to Japan and South Korea, and other producers are becoming more interested.”

Mexican producers who hadn't had the opportunity to witness the technology first hand were eager to see its performance within another market, Mr Medina says.

“So we recently invited a group of producers to Brazil so they could see Improvac in action, and weigh up the benefits of the product against the changes that would need to be made. It was a very positive experience and put many minds at rest.”

Mr Medina says in addition to producers and processors, swine veterinarians have also welcomed the benefits of Improvac.

“The administering of Improvac is much easier than the procedure of physical castration, and obviously avoids the associated risk of injury and treatment cost. And while the new technology delivers heavier pigs, vets and producers realise the economic advantages this brings to profitability.”

In some cases vets have also observed a reduction in death loss and culls, depending on the general health status of the farm, Mr Medina says.

However the welfare benefits of vaccine castration over physical castration, which are likely to be welcomed in the Swiss release of Improvac, are not so influential in Mexico at this stage.

“The concept of animal welfare is still relatively new in the Mexican market, so this hasn't been too much of a factor in effecting change,” Mr Medina says.

“However, as global market stakeholders begin to examine all facets of food production, the issue of welfare will only become more important.”

/more

Improvac – the Mexican experience / Page 5

With today's economic climate, those in the pork supply chain need to be more efficient and respond to the changing demands of the market, Mr Medina says.

“The replacement of traditional physical castration by a vaccine is one of the major adaptations that will help the pork industry make the most of future opportunities.”

“The introduction of Improvac to the Mexican pork supply chain demonstrates how initial hurdles can be overcome to achieve tangible economic benefits. Changing such old traditions can be challenging, but it's vital to ensuring future profitability within the industry.”

/ends

1080 words approx

Improvac is a registered trademark of Pfizer Inc. Improvac contains a protein antigen that stimulates production of antibodies to endogenous GnRF which leads to a temporary immunological castration. Improvac is a boar taint management tool developed for use in entire male pigs as an animal-welfare friendly alternative to surgical castration.

Pfizer Animal Health, a business of Pfizer Inc, is a world leader in animal health, committed to providing high-quality, innovative health products, including pharmaceuticals and biologicals for livestock and companion animals. Pfizer Inc, a research-based pharmaceutical company with global operations, discovers, develops, manufactures and markets leading prescription medicines for humans and animals.

PFIEUSWI/IMP/050/08