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10-20-09

PRESS RELEASE

USDA study demonstrates Newport Laboratories-manufactured vaccine effective against nH1N1 in pigs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Newport Laboratories Worthington, MN - Press Release
Newport Laboratories announces manufactured vaccine effective against nH1N1 in pigs
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WORTHINGTON, MN – The wait is over for pork producers looking to vaccinate their pigs against the novel H1N1 influenza (nH1N1).

In a study conducted by the USDA National Animal Disease Center, a swine vaccine manufactured by Newport Laboratories was shown to neutralize the nH1N1 influenza strain. The study's author concluded that Newport's nH1N1 vaccine "demonstrated significant protection" against nH1N1 in pigs. The vaccine was built using strains of traditional swine influenza that Newport was able to identify as having the ability to neutralize the nH1N1 virus. As cross-neutralization is a common characteristic among swine influenza strains, it was a natural step to look for strains that would neutralize the nH1N1, explained Dr. Randy Simonson, COO of Newport.

"While transfer of the virus from pigs to humans is uncommon, all influenza viruses share certain genetic characteristics," he said. "Some are closer than others; those that are closer are more likely to demonstrate cross-immunity."

Newport is the leading manufacturer in the United States of autogenous or "custom" vaccines for traditional swine influenza.

One of the most pressing concerns surrounding pigs and nH1N1 is the possibility of the animals to contract different strains simultaneously, then for the viruses to recombine within the infected animal and be transmitted back to humans. Vaccination against nH1N1 should considerably lessen this risk.

Earlier this year, several vaccine companies were permitted by the USDA to begin working on a conditionally licensed swine vaccine containing the human strain of the virus. This product is not available to swine producers yet, and could actually lead to more problems in disease detection in the future. As Simonson explained, using human strains in an attempt to protect pigs could make diagnostics and tracking the disease difficult, if not impossible.

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“Injecting a vaccine containing a killed version of the human strain of nH1N1 into pigs could prevent us from being able to monitor the presence of the disease in the animals,” he explained. “Once a pig was vaccinated, the nH1N1 strain would show up in diagnostic screenings. The problem, then, would be determining if that pig had the strain due to receiving the vaccine, or if they had contracted it from people.

“We don’t use swine influenza strains to vaccinate people against the flu,” he said, “so why would we want to use human strains to vaccinate pigs?”

Newport has not been alone in their work to identify cross-neutralizing swine influenza strains against nH1N1. Researchers at the University of Minnesota, Iowa State University, and Kansas State University have conducted their own research, and they have come to the same conclusion.

Simonson said Newport will continue to develop new diagnostic and preventative tools for swine influenza.

“We are very fortunate to have the excellent scientists that we have,” he said. “People like Dr. Russ Bey (Director of Research and Development), Tracy Oleson (Research Scientist) and Ben Hause (Director of Diagnostic Services) are working hard to keep us at the forefront of swine influenza research, diagnostics, and prevention. These three have been at the heart of our nH1N1 work, and are still pushing to learn more about the disease.”

In humans, the new strain of nH1N1 has been linked to seven deaths and nearly 500 hospitalizations in Minnesota since it emerged in the spring. While human health has been the primary concern during the nH1N1 outbreak, it has had a major impact on the United States swine industry as well, fueled primarily by erroneous labeling of the disease as “swine flu” by the media. According to Neil Dierks, CEO of the National Pork Producers’ Council, United States pork producers have lost $2 billion since April 24 when news of the disease first broke.

Minnesota is the country’s number-three pork producing state behind Iowa and North Carolina, with 7.3 million of the nation’s 66.6 million pigs as of September 1. The pork industry contributes nearly $1.5 billion and more than 21,000 jobs to the state’s economy, according to the National Pork Producers Council.

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