

# Swine Industry Facing Prolonged Disease Challenges

BY RHIANNON BRANCH  
FarmWeek

US pork producers have been battling increased disease pressure the past few years. Rita Frazer with the RFD Radio Network interviewed Jim Lowe, executive associate dean and professor at the University of Illinois Department of Veterinary Clinical Medicine, about swine diseases impacting the industry and what Illinois producers need to know.

Pseudorabies  
Earlier this month, five boars in Iowa tested positive for pseudorabies, a herpes virus of pigs. While the disease was officially eradicated from the U.S. commercial swine herd in 2004, Lowe said it is still present in feral swine and occasionally infects domestic pigs.

"Those pigs in Iowa were imported from Texas and the farm in Texas where they originated was an outdoor production facility, so clearly there was some contact between feral pigs and that herd in Texas, which was



also positive," Lowe said.

The veterinarian for the Iowa herd saw the risk and proactively tested the boars for pseudorabies, detecting it before introducing them to the healthy herd.

"So there's no spread and there's no real risk to the U.S. swine herd," Lowe said. "But it's certainly a reminder that the oldies but goodies come back every once in a while."

Porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome

Porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) became endemic in the U.S. after the first detection in 1989. But new variants of the

virus are more aggressive and transmit more effectively, creating a greater threat to the swine herd.

"These outbreaks have been really severe in terms of mortality in both growing pigs, which has been historical, and now we've even had some adults dying post-infection, which is pretty abnormal for a virus," Lowe said.

As the virus has evolved, traditional control approaches have not been as effective. Lowe said academics are doing research to learn more about PRRS transmission and producers will need to think creatively about what can be done to slow the spread.

"We've known for a long time the routes and how it can get from farm A to farm B. The question is how frequently is it along each one of those routes? And therefore, how do we think about control more effectively to cut off transmission?" Lowe said.

The ability to use high-

end computing has been helpful in better understanding the virus.

"When we get a genetic sequence, we can do a lot more things than we could even two or three years ago because our computer power is better," said Lowe, who noted it will take time to get answers.

"But I think there are some paths there that are maybe going to pull the veil back a little bit about where to think about biosecurity and where to put our emphasis to try to control transmission," Lowe said.

With plenty of sows in the U.S. herd, Lowe does not expect the disease to cause an immediate increase in pork prices for consumers, but PRRS is one more factor driving costs upward for producers.

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit [FarmWeekNow.com](http://FarmWeekNow.com).

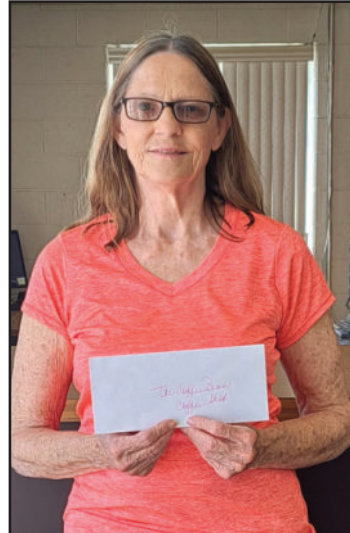
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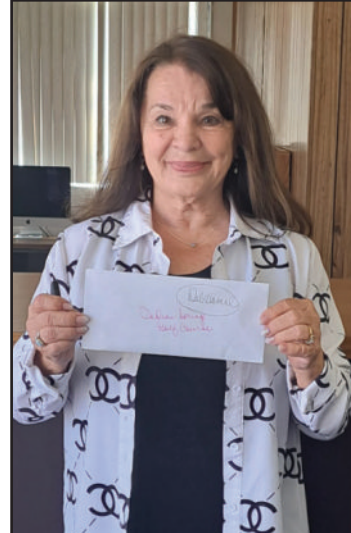
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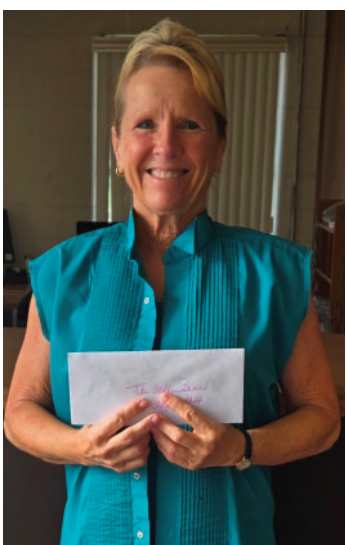
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