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■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Protecting pig farms from bacterial infections

Following the EC's ban on in-feed antibiotics in pig farms across the EU, stakeholders are keen to find alternative ways to protect pig health without the indiscriminate use of antibiotics.

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The HEALTHYPIGUT project focused on building a robust knowledge base on pig gut physiology and thus discovering those factors that might promote animal health and well being. One of the initial undertakings of project partners was to gain an understanding on gut morphology, physiology and intestinal ecology.

Particular emphasis during the study was placed on the post-weaning period, at which point piglets have to rely on their own defence mechanisms without the added help of maternal immunity. Piglets are particularly susceptible to enteric infections during the weaning period and therefore delineating ways to boost their immunity is crucial in the absence of in-feed antibiotics.

Research focus was placed on physiological, morphological and bacterial aspects of the pig gut. These characteristics were studied under different feeding conditions and the ensuing changes were observed. The results showed that the post-weaning period is characterised by two almost distinct phases.

The first phase is dominated by the gut's reaction to fasting and the second post-weaning phase corresponds to an adaptation of the gut to the weaning diet. These observations are of particular importance to ascertaining those parameters that are linked to enteric infections, and how they can be altered to promoted health and well being in the absence of antibiotics.

Country: FRANCE

Information Source: Result from the EU funded LIFE QUALITY programme

Collaboration Sought: Further research or development support; Information exchange/Training; Private-public partnership; Available for consultancy

Date: 2006-02-20

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