



You Can't Disinfect a Turd

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Not surprisingly, my Chinese clients have been expressing renewed interest in strengthening their biosecurity programs considering the recent African Swine Fever developments. As I've documented in other venues, the risks are very real and the potential rewards of remaining free of the disease are compelling. As I've worked with clients to identify and address weaknesses in their programs, I've often repeated a comment I first heard as a young manager new to the industry. I wish I could remember who told me this more than 20 years ago so I could give credit, but here it is: "You can't disinfect a turd." When I say this in training or consulting sessions, it often gets a laugh, but it's a surprisingly common issue. Let me share a few examples from my recent discussions with clients.

One client asked me about the effectiveness of foot baths. I told them that they were mostly ineffective given the way they're typically managed. Research conducted by Dr. Sandy Amass and her colleagues at Purdue University indicated that in order for footbaths to be effective, you'd need to completely remove fecal material, replace the contents frequently and provide sufficient contact time (at least 30 seconds to a minute) for the disinfectant to be effective. The typical way they're implemented, briefly dipping dirty boots in day-old disinfectant solution, likely provides zero benefit. You can't disinfect a turd.

Another client asked about risks of trucks. They were not washing trucks or trailers between loads, even loads that took trucks outside their system. They were asking the driver to disinfect a dirty truck before arriving at the farm and then, at the farm, they were disinfecting it a second time. I told them that to protect themselves from disease transfer, the truck/trailer had to be washed, disinfected and dried and that the most important step of the three was a thorough wash that removed all fecal material. Disinfecting a dirty trailer, whether once twice or 10 times would provide little benefit. You can't disinfect a turd.

Still another client asked about the practice of disinfecting a room with pigs in the room and without washing, a common practice in China. I told them that, at least in theory, that might result in a slight overall reduction in pathogen load in the room but the benefit would be minimal and probably not worth the time and expense. They are certainly not going to break any disease cycles with such a strategy. You can't disinfect a turd.

As much as we consultants like to position ourselves as practitioners of advanced management strategies, the reality is that most consultants, the good ones at least, spend a high percentage of their time imploring their clients to focus on the fundamentals. It doesn't get more fundamental than basic

farm hygiene. The power of all in all out management with a good wash, disinfectant application and sufficient drying time can be one of our most powerful tools to improve biosecurity and manage herd health. So, the next time you're reviewing your biosecurity or herd health management strategies, don't forget the simple, but powerful statement...you can't disinfect a turd.

If you would like to find out how SwineTex Consulting Services can help you with your training and consulting needs, email us at info@swinetex.com or visit us at www.swinetex.com.