

INEXPENSIVE, EASY-TO-USE ON-FARM STRATEGIES

Farm Animal Pain Research

Dr. Joseph Stookey is the lead researcher of a study to address pain management in farmed animals. It looks at mitigating painful procedures in piglets and calves.

The study investigates using the sow as a vehicle to deliver pain medication to piglets. Researchers are assessing the transferability of pain medication from sow to piglet via the sow's milk. "This could be a very ergonomic way of delivering pain medication and preparing piglets for processing," says Dr. Stookey.

The calf study looks at the implications of lidocaine blocks. And, it looks at if the age of dehorning the calf influences

the memory of the procedure. To date findings show:

- Calves dehorned without painkillers at one month of age or younger do not seem to remember the procedure any more than calves dehorned using a lidocaine block.
- Strong behavioural evidence exists that unblocked calves experience extreme pain during hot-iron dehorning compared to blocked calves.

Lidocaine is inexpensive, less than 40 cents per calf, according to Dr. Stookey. "It is our hope that producers will work with their local veterinarians in learning how to administer a lidocaine nerve block prior to dehorning." ■

Pain medications in livestock and food safety regulations ...

"Resolving animal welfare issues will be no different than resolving food safety, biosecurity, or environmental issues. We should not have to give up animal welfare concerns to provide safe food; that seems inherently wrong. I would like to believe that if we are successful in our research that industry will take the necessary steps to adopt the technology. To disallow such technology seems contrary to our commitment to high animal welfare standards, that the general public expects and our animals deserve." - Dr. Joseph Stookey, University of Saskatchewan



SURVEY OF CANADIAN VETERINARIANS

The Use of Pain Management in Livestock

Researchers at the Atlantic Veterinary College in

Charlottetown, PEI are completing a national survey of Canadian veterinarians, to assess the use of painkillers in cattle, pigs, and horses. The goals are to determine:

- **The extent painkillers are used in these species;**
- **Why veterinarians do or do not use painkillers.**

Veterinarians across Canada were randomly selected to participate. Initial results indicate:

- ✓ Most veterinarians do not provide pain relief when castrating calves or piglets.
- ✓ Some veterinarians believe that pain management is not necessary when

using an elastrator, or with procedures involving young animals.

- ✓ Veterinarians almost universally use pain control when dehorning calves and for major surgeries (e.g., caesarian sections).
- ✓ Veterinarians are more likely to treat lame sows with pain relievers than lame cows.
- ✓ Veterinarians feel there is a need for long-acting, affordable painkillers for farm animals.
- ✓ Veterinarians feel that the long, or unknown, withdrawal periods for some painkillers hinder their usage in food production animals.

Lead researcher **Dr. Caroline Hewson** says, "The knowledge of pain and the pain pathways is developing very quickly.

We now know that old assumptions, such as that farm animals are stoical, or that routine surgical procedures don't hurt much, are not borne out by the physiology."

However, difficulties exist with the regulation of drugs for use in farm animals, and the unavailability of suitable drugs for some species. "Farmers and veterinarians are being put in a difficult position when it comes to relieving pain in livestock. A solution is badly needed, one which includes the constructive engagement of consumers; a strong commitment by government, drug companies, and the veterinary profession; and continuing education of veterinarians and farmers," says Dr. Hewson. ■