

Sick Pigs and Sick Trade Tariffs

I have been asked to post an update on our pigs. If you recall, a few weeks ago I talked about how very sick our pigs were. In fact, the worst we have seen in many years. And I am also going to give my two-cents worth on the tariff issue.

Sick Pig Update

The sickness all started about the middle of February. We didn't know what we were dealing with or how to treat it. After many visits and conversations with multiple veterinarians and a lot of diagnostic testing, we determined our pigs had a nasty strain of [PRRS](#) and flu. Yes, quite a few pigs died. We tried our best.

I am happy to report they are looking better. We left on vacation mid-March and came back about 10 days later and we could tell they were better when we returned than when we left. If history is any lesson, they probably will continue to give us health problems-just a lot of lingering health damage. The other concern we have is "will they be ready for market in time?" They lost a lot of growth time from being sick. Our next pigs are coming in July and this group needs to be sold and the barns need to be washed and sterilized before the next ones come.

Future Concerns

So, concerns going forward: keep them healthy and hopefully they grow fast and our last concern: we have a new group of pigs on another farm. We DO NOT want this group to come down with the same virus. So we have changed how we are taking care of them to reduce the amount of foot traffic between the home farm and the offsite farm. We have also heard (just this past weekend) that other farms near us are possibly dealing with this same PRRS strain. We think the virus is moving by air and it was windy over the weekend. So here we are - on pins and needles "hoping" this new group does not become infected.

One more thing we are doing on our home farm is putting in wire fence netting underneath the hog barn eaves. This will prevent birds from coming in the air outlets. I am hoping to have a video of exactly how we are doing this. Again, another step to prevent a way to transmit viruses.

The Ugly China Pig Tariff

The next thing I want to talk about is the [25% tariffs put on pork by China](#). I talked to a Wall Street Journal reporter today about how this will affect us on the farm. Here is my take:

I am EXTREMELY nervous about what will happen to our markets. Because we sell on a market system, we don't dictate our selling price. If we can't sell as much pork through exports (because of

the tariffs) means we will have an over supply of pork, which will result in lower market prices, which will result in a smaller check for us, which will more than likely mean we will lose money.

Farming is a volatile business. There are many factors that affect us and the markets. Things we are not in control of such as weather conditions (for crops), viruses and diseases (think of PEDv), costs of inputs, regulations, etc. It's just plain crazy at times. But, we DON'T need the government to put additional pressures on our markets. I am truly worried for our future.

And it's not just tariffs, it's also about NAFTA

And it seems to change daily. It's exhausting. One day, it looks like NAFTA will be a go and the next day we hear it's not. We are the BEST farm producers in the world. We export about 26-27% of our pork and 60% of our soybeans. We NEED exports. If our export markets go away, we cannot consume the additional pork we produce.

Can't just shut the barns down

So why don't we just shut our barns down for a while to reduce the supply? We really can't. We have farm and barn payments to make--bills to pay. We have sows that are bred and ones that are ready to give birth. There is a long pipeline of pigs that can't just be shutdown. Farming is a very complex business. Where will our animals go? And if you shut a pig farm down, the expense to start it up again will be significant and for many, completely out of reach. There just is not enough cash to startup again. In addition, you can't just hang on to pigs and sell them "later." It doesn't work that way.

And all of this at not fault of our own. I mean, honestly, how do you plan for something like this?

So with that, the pig markets were down significantly today. I can only hope that our lawmakers and government personnel understand how detrimental these tariffs are. We are not just individual farmers, but also individual businesses.

Fix it!

Let's hope those in power can figure things out. It's just not fair to throw U.S. farmers under the bus to help out another economic segment such as the steel industry. Period.

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