

THE ERADICATION PLAN OF PRRS IN A FRENCH REGION , “LES PAYS DE LA LOIRE”

Philippe Blanquefort

Groupement de Défense Sanitaire des Pays de la Loire La Quantinière TRELAZE France

Introduction

One region of France, called “Pays de la Loire”, was confronted with PRRS in November 1992.

Having got experience in disease eradication, with the previous plan against Aujeszky’s disease, the pig farmers decided together to try to tackle PRRS, and a collective action was right away set up.

This paper describes the methods applied at a regional level, and analyses the results obtained. The pending questions are also mentioned.

Material, history

In the Pays de la Loire region, there are about 2 200 herds and 105 000 sows, on a 20 000 km² territory divided into 5 administrative sections(the French departments). The average herd size was about 100 to 150 sows in farrow-to-finish farms.

In November 1992, the first samples that tested positive regarding PRRS were found when controlling imported gilts from Great Britain. The spread of PRRS infection could rapidly be stopped by serological testing in the recipient herds, and removing positive animals.

At that time, National and European Community rules of control measures as well as epidemiological inquiries were lifted.

Not a single PRRS outbreak had been yet reported in Pays de la Loire. A random serological survey was undertaken and carried out, in one third of the total number of herds.

Surprisingly, several appeared to be positive, and the only relationship underlined was the semen from one infected artificial insemination centre. This AI centre was banned. An exhaustive survey was then settled. New infected herds were found, with clinical signs, and epidemiological links were put in light.

It appeared necessary to define a regional agreement signed by all the members of the pig industry, specifying technical and financial rules. That was done in November 1993, under the aegis of the Sanitary Defence Confederation (GDS). The aim was to control the spread of the infection.

A financial reserve was provided by a bank loan of 430 000 € in order to give farmers a compensation when destocking their herds.

Methods, the plan

The technical methods used have already been described (1).

The measures were purely sanitary, based on epidemiological considerations, on account of the lack of available vaccine at that time.

The replacement gilts still regularly introduced came from PRRS free herds;

Different tools have been used, among which :

- serological survey in all the farms with breeding sows
- additional tests in herds located 2 Km radius from one infected herd
- The circulation of the virus was assessed in infected herds, with enlarged samples

- A strategy for PRRS virus elimination was adopted according to maintenance or stop of virus circulation (2)
- Infected herds were strictly managed separately from the free ones. The groups of farmers did perfectly comply to the rules .

In addition to these technical aspects, the way the plan was run clearly defined the role of each partner. We decided to work in transparency when analysing technical results. Needless to say that we had constantly to convince some rather reluctant farmers of the validity of the measures.

The plan was run on voluntary basis.

The GDS looked after the general project management.

The veterinary research institute of Ploufragan was the scientific expert. National and regional funding could be found, but the farmer’s contribution represented 80% of the global budget.

Results

At the moment (mid 2004) 14 herds still remain infected, among 2200 herds.

The infection rate has never been higher than 2.2 per cent.

From the beginning of the action, 196 herds were detected infected, and 182 cleaned up.

The number of samples per year was about 18 000.

Subsidies for depopulating the infected herds or animals reached 1.3 million €

The cost of the whole plan, per year , per sow, is about 5 €

Discussion

On January 1992 the first, French sanitary authorities handed over” the baton” to pig producers about any action regarding PRRS. The producers decided to move forward by themselves.

The Pays de la Loire region includes few independent pig farmers but more than 95 % of the pig farmers are members of groups of producers (co-operatives), for genetic schemes, feed supply and/or animal trade, and these organizations greatly contributed to the plan on the day-to-day basis.

One originality in France is the existence of those farmer organizations specifically dedicated to animal health . They are called “GDS” (for Sanitary Defence Groups). They are gathering by themselves voluntary farmers , and acting collectively against several diseases. For pig producers, the first aim was the eradication of Aujeszky’s disease in 1985. This was achieved a few years later. It was a first result at the French scale, and this success, shared by all the regional participants, gave hope and confidence. So, when PRRS stroke, because of this previous experience, a collective plan was rapidly set up. One difficulty for such a regional and voluntary plan, is to definitely convince the farmers to accept and adopt on their own the required collective measures, instead of having compulsory rules. Eradication decisions and related procedures might have been hard to apply.

Until now, no American PRRS virus strain have been suspected.

So the situation is easier to manage. There is no need for a broad vaccination. Vaccination is mainly used in infected herds as a help to stop the virus circulation.

Conclusion

In "Pays de la Loire", which is not really a densely populated pig area, PRRS eradication plan was successful.

The regional plan started just at the moment when PRRS arrived in the country. We believe that appropriate measures and strict biosecurity precautions since the beginning did avoid a wide spreading,

However it is currently still necessary to keep a strong motivation; we know that nothing is definitely granted in the field of infectious diseases. PRRS virus remains a permanent threat.

A national agreement to officially define and recognize the "PRRS free status" for the herds would be helpful.

References

- 1 Le Potier M.F., Blanquefort P., Morvan E., Albina E. (1997) *Vet. Microbiol.*, 55, 355-360.
- 2 Blanquefort P., Benoit F. (1999) Symposium on PRRS and Aujeszky's disease, 245-246.