

FM on site *by Lori Weaver, Editor*

Lessons learned from Europe: AGP ban yielded renewed focus on gut health, alternative ingredients



It's been nearly three years since antibiotic growth promoters (AGPs) in farm animals were banned in the European Union (EU).

As EU producers adapted to new management practices and

began sorting out alternative ingredients, the animal agriculture industry worldwide waited, wondering what impact such a ban in the EU—as well as other regions—would have on animal production and performance.

But newly released analyses seem to indicate that a future without AGPs does not necessarily have to equate to poorer performance. In fact, a number of alternative ingredients are performing quite well without the presence of AGPs.

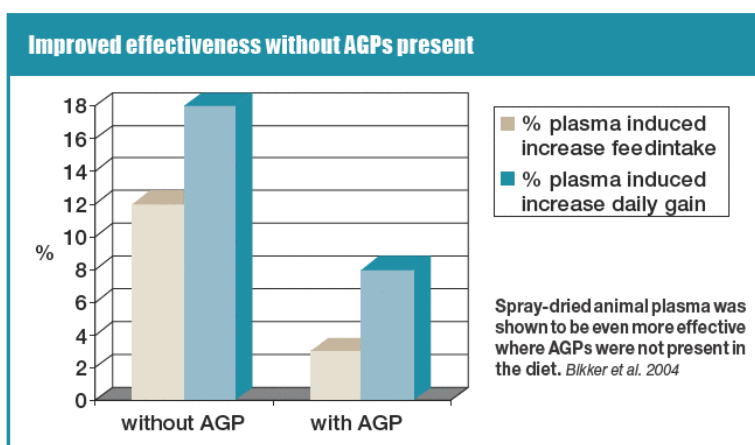
Dr. Albert van Dijk is with Perstorp Performance Additives based in Waspik, The Netherlands. He has looked at data from the EU in an attempt to determine what impact the ban has had on production and also what alternatives are most widely being incorporated into

To read more about Dr. van Dijk's findings, visit www.FeedIndustryNetwork.com.

animal diets in place of AGPs. He says there is some preliminary results on what is happening with pig diets, although information is a bit more spotty for poultry.

"Well-documented information is not available yet in the EU about the effects of the AGP ban since January 1, 2006," van Dijk notes. "But the general experience is that the pig breeders and broiler farmers managed to maintain results comparable to before the ban without big health problems or decreased technical results."

Looking at the effects of the ban, van Dijk points to The Netherlands where the use of AGPs was gradually phased out from 1998 to 2006. During that time, the total amount of antibiotics used remained the same, pointing to an increase in the use of antibiotics for



therapeutic purposes. But has that been the story elsewhere?

Van Dijk says that in Denmark, where AGPs have not been used since the end of 1999, the anti-microbial treatments for diarrhea in the post-weaning period for piglets increased significantly after termination of the AGP use, with some loss in productivity.

He says that in broilers, necrotic enteritis was only a minor health problem, mainly because producers were allowed to continue the use of ionophores for prophylaxis of necrotic enteritis and coccidiosis. Effects on feed efficiency were limited to a 2.3% reduction. The total consumption of antibiotics was reduced significantly from 206 metric tons (active component) in 1994 to 102 metric tons in 2003, a seemingly significant drop.

While the apparent increase in antibiotics for therapeutic use could be seen as a negative effect of the ban, the results do not show the train wreck some may have predicted.

So what are the most common alternatives? Van Dijk says information is somewhat scarce on what alternatives are being most successfully used. But he says a survey in The Netherlands found that organic acids and yeast products were the most common ingredients of choice. He adds that ingredient selection alone doesn't tell the whole picture, however, and that how diets are formulated—adjusting levels of crude protein for example—can help improve

feed conversion and reduce incidences of diarrhea.

One obvious result of the AGP ban has been a boost worldwide in research related to maintaining a healthy gut in the animal, whether through manipulation of formulations, substitution of ingredients or a combination of both.

Increased value without AGPs

Sometimes the non-use of AGPs has had surprising effects on the diet. "Spray-dried animal plasma [SDAP] can be a good alternative for AGPs in piglets, preventing post-weaning diarrhea and improving feed intake and daily gain," van Dijk points out. In fact, his collaborative efforts with others showed the effect of SDAP proved to be much larger in a diet without avilamycin, an AGP, than with it, indicating that SDAP has an increased value in diets without AGP. The use of SDAP in swine feeds has been forbidden in the EU for several years due to BSE fears, but its use has been recently approved again.

Elsewhere in this issue, *Feed Management* talks to three industry representatives on an issue related at least in part to the reduced use of AGPs worldwide—the growth of "natural" ingredients. Much of that growth can be linked to a growing interest in finding that magic bullet to take the place of AGPs for animal performance, both in areas where there is a ban and in areas where there is not. **IFMI**