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A close-up portrait of Tracy Fant Colvin, DVM, smiling warmly. She has shoulder-length, light brown hair with bangs and is wearing a dark blazer over a white top with a floral pattern. She is also wearing a necklace with blue and gold beads. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

TRACY FANT COLVIN, DVM
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How VETERINARIANS CAN HELP KEEP TEXAS PIGS HEALTHY



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This is a story about making money, raising a family, cross-country travel, life and death, and veterinarians. Does it sound like an interesting novel? I hope so, because the story is being written right now. And oh, by the way, the lead character is a pig.

There is an emerging disease in the swine world called Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea (PED) that may be a game-changer for the pork industry. The corona virus has caused such high mortality rates in young pigs that there is speculation it could affect the availability of pork if it continues to spread unabated. The swine industry is struggling with effective biosecurity measures against a virus found in manure that can be spread through animal contact, fomites such as trucks and trailers, and, most probably, food sources.

But then again, who is the swine "industry"? This is one of the struggles an animal health agency deals with routinely when considering new rules or policy. To a certain degree, industry, or stakeholders as some would call them, are whoever speaks up. To date, the swine industry has routinely been considered to be the large, corporate, highly integrated national businesses that raise hogs by the thousands on a single farm.

But as you may recall in a prior article, I explained that, in my mind, there are actually four swine industries in Texas. They are the corporate "commercial" swine entities mentioned above, the show pig industry, small rural backyard/hobby farms and the feral swine industry. All are distinct populations of hogs.

The commercial industry made it plain to the 50 state veterinarians since PED was diagnosed in the U.S. in 2013 that they wanted us to stay out of their business in regard to PED. They did not want PED to be regulated in any way. But this is where the story really begins.

The show hog industry is not the commercial industry, but they employ many of the same cutting-edge tech-

niques related to biosecurity practices and genetic selection for desirable traits. They are also more often small family-run businesses dedicated to raising good-quality swine. To them raising swine is more than a job; it is a way of life and often a passion.

The show hog industry is the one that came to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and asked for relief and protection related to PED entering their farms in Texas. PED is actually already in Texas in the large commercial operations up in the panhandle. In fact, they are actively managing the effects of the disease while waiting for an effective vaccine. In the meantime, they have seen death losses as high as 90 percent in weaner-size baby pigs. That costs the large corporations money, but to a smaller operation with quality sows expecting to sell their babies for top-dollar as show prospects, losing 90 percent of the crop could put those folks out of business.

So in concert with the Texas show industry folks, the TAHC recently put out notice to veterinarians in other states that we don't want PED-exposed show pigs coming to our state. There are some who would argue that the concept of certificates of veterinary inspection protecting animal health has come and gone, but I would beg to differ, and this is proof.

In this case, TAHC announced to veterinarians and show hog breeders in other states that we don't want PED in our show hogs. We don't believe we have it now and hope to keep it that way. Interestingly enough, we were the first state to go on record that PED does need some regulatory oversight to protect a segment of our swine industry, but other states soon followed. The first week after our announcement that we wanted statements of assurance from veterinarians writing certificates of veterinary inspection (CVIs) in other states that the hogs were not exposed or coming from PED-affected farms, four other states followed suit. Many more state veterinarians told me

they wished they could, but they operate under a different regulatory structure that limits their ability to make quick changes to their entry requirements.

I also was contacted by state veterinarians reminding me that the commercial industry did not want PED regulated and asking if I was worried about making them upset. The truth is we did listen to that industry as well. Our new request for veterinarian verification for PED health assurances does not apply to commercial swine but only to "non-commercial" swine (aka, show hogs) moving interstate, so we were able to accommodate the concerns of both industries.

I don't know if ultimately this request will make any difference, but I did want to share the story about how animal health rules can be influenced by industry and, more importantly, how veterinarians can play a role.

So to sum this up, if a veterinarian will discuss the importance of all health issues with a client before issuing a CVI to move animals to another farm or to a show or sale, including discussion of "non-regulatory" diseases such as PED, it is a win for everyone. The professionalism of veterinarians will once again save the day and reinforce the importance of certificates of veterinary inspection.

As the story plays out now, healthy swine will come to Texas, they can grow up to raise a family of show pigs that aren't sick, the producer makes money at his prospect sale, the buyer reaps a profit when the hog makes the sale at the local livestock show, and our children across the state learn about caring for animals with their local 4-H or FFA project. Is this story fact or fiction? Only time will tell, but I sure hope so.

Finally, don't be surprised if many other states ask Texas veterinarians to assure swine moving to their state are not coming from PED-affected farms as well. It only makes sense, and truthfully, it is the right thing to do. [TV](#)