

1 **Dual infections of CD163 expressing NPTr epithelial cells with influenza A virus and**  
2 **PRRSV**

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26

27 **ABSTRACT**

28 In the pig, respiratory co-infections involving various pathogens are far more frequent than  
29 single infections. Amongst respiratory viruses, swine influenza type A virus (swIAV) and  
30 porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV) are frequently associated.  
31 Previously, we performed co-infections with swIAV and PRRSV in porcine alveolar  
32 macrophages (PAM) and precision cut lung slices (PCLS). With these two approaches it was  
33 practically impossible to have co-infections of the same cells as the main target cell of swIAV  
34 is the epithelial cell while the main target of PRRSV is the PAM. This constraint makes the  
35 study of interference between the two viruses difficult at the cellular level. In the current  
36 report, an epithelial cell line expressing, CD163, the main receptor of PRRSV was generated.  
37 This cell line receptive for both viruses was used to assess the interference between the two  
38 viruses. Results showed that swIAV as well as PRRSV, even if they interacted differently  
39 with the modified epithelial cells, were clearly interfering with each other regarding their  
40 replication when they infected a same cell with consequences within the cellular antiviral  
41 response. Our modified cell line, receptive to both viruses, can be used as a tool to assess  
42 interference between swIAV and PRRSV in a same cell as it probably happens in the porcine  
43 host.

44

45 **INTRODUCTION**

46 In pigs, as in many species, respiratory co-infections are far more frequent than single  
47 infections (Choi et al., 2003; Fablet et al., 2012). Amongst viral co-infections, the association  
48 between swine influenza type A virus (swIAV) and porcine reproductive and respiratory  
49 syndrome virus (PRRSV) is frequent (Choi et al., 2003; Fablet et al., 2012). However, the  
50 assessment of the outcome of co-infections at molecular level is still very limited in the  
51 literature. Previously we assessed the impact of swIAV/PRRSV *in vitro* in alveolar

52 macrophages (Porcine Alveolar Macrophage, PAM) and *ex vivo* using precision cut lung  
53 slices (PCLS) (Dobrescu et al., 2014). Results showed that whereas a first infection of PCLS  
54 or PAMs by PRRSV did not affect the local H1N1 swIAV infection 3 h later, primary  
55 infection of PCLS or PAMs with swIAV partially inhibited their infection by the PRRSV 3 h  
56 later and some modifications in the host response. However, it was not possible to identify  
57 clearly co-infected cells in PCLS even if cells such as small populations of dendritic cells and  
58 in some circumstances type 1 pneumocytes can be targeted by both viruses. Moreover, there  
59 are still questions regarding full replication of swIAV in PAMs. These constraints make  
60 difficult the study of interference between the two viruses at the cellular level. To overcome  
61 that issue it was decided to generate a cell line susceptible to both viruses. Thus, newborn pig  
62 trachea (NPTr) cell line (Ferrari et al., 2003) was modified to express CD163, the main  
63 receptor of PRRSV (Calvert et al., 2007), allowing infection with both viruses. Using the cells  
64 we selected a protocol similar to the one used previously (Dobrescu et al., 2014), we  
65 evaluated the impact of one virus on the replication of the other, and we determined the  
66 consequences of co-infection at the host level by an assessment of the expression of various  
67 transcripts involved in viral recognition and resistance. Generated data were then compared to  
68 previous results obtained in a less constrained system based on PAMs and PCLS.

69

## 70 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### 71 **NPTr cell line**

72 The newborn pig trachea epithelial cell line (NPTr) was kindly provided by Dr. M. Ferrari  
73 (*Instituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale*, Brescia, Italy) (Ferrari et al., 2003). The NPTr cell line  
74 was cultured in Minimum Essential Medium (MEM) (GIBCO®-BRL, ON, Canada)  
75 supplemented with 10% Fetal Bovine Serum (FBS) (Wisent Bioproducts, QC, Canada), 1 mM

76 sodium pyruvate, 10 I.U./mL of penicillin, 10 µg/mL of streptomycin and 250 g/L  
77 amphotericin B solution (Wisent Bioproducts) (Ferrari et al., 2003).

78

### 79 **Creation of PRRSV-permissive NPTr cells**

80 In order to modify the NPTr cell line to be permissive to PRRSV, a cDNA copy of the mRNA  
81 sequence of CD163, a known receptor of PRRSV (Calvert et al., 2007), was stably integrated  
82 to the genome. To do so, primary porcine alveolar macrophages (PAMs) were isolated from  
83 pathogen-free pig lungs (Provost et al., 2012). After RNA extraction with Trizol Reagent  
84 (Invitrogen™, New-Mexico, USA), a RT-PCR was performed using primers CD163-*HindIII*-  
85 F (5'-AAGCTTAAGCTTATGGACAAACTCAGAATGGTGCTAC- 3') and CD163-*Clal*-  
86 Reverse (5'- ATCGATATCGATTCATTGTACTTCAGAGTGGTCTCCTGAGGGATTTAG  
87 -3') with SuperScript® One-Step RT-PCR for long template (Invitrogen), the full mRNA  
88 sequence of CD163 was expected at approximately 3623 bp (Genbank: DQ067278.1). The  
89 resulting product was digested by *HindIII* and *Clal* restriction enzymes (New England  
90 Biolabs, Ipswich, MA, USA) and inserted into the retroviral plasmid pLNCX2 (Clontech  
91 Laboratories Inc., California, USA). The integrated sequence was analysed to accurately  
92 match the cDNA sequence of CD163 (Genbank DQ067278). To stably integrate the coding  
93 sequence of CD163, the protocol from a retroviral transduction kit, the Retro-X System®  
94 (Clontech Laboratories Inc.) was followed. Briefly, the CD163 cDNA was introduced in the  
95 pLNCX2 plasmid. The pLNCV2-CD163 plasmid was then co-transduced with pVSV-G®,  
96 coding for mammalian retrovirus envelop proteins, in provided Eco-Pack® GP2-293 cells  
97 (Clontech Laboratories Inc.). This enabled the production of non-replicating mammalian cell  
98 specific retrovirus containing the pLNCX2-CD163 plasmid. NPTr cells were then infected  
99 with the supernatant of the GP2-293 cells for 8 hours (h), left for 12 h with fresh medium,  
100 then re-infected with the same retrovirus for 8 h. Cells were then cultured in G418 (Sigma-

101 Aldrich, Missouri, USA) for clone selection. CD163 integration was determined by PCR and  
102 transcription by RT-PCR, as described below, and expression of the protein was assessed by  
103 IFA with mouse monoclonal anti-pig CD163 antibody (AbD Serotec, Oxford, UK), as  
104 previously described (Provost et al., 2012).

105

#### 106 **Detection of CD163 mRNA by RT-PCR**

107 The extraction of total RNA was done by Trizol® reagent (Invitrogen). A reverse-  
108 transcription was performed following protocol of QuantiTech Rev. Transcription kit  
109 (Qiagen™, Mississauga, ON, Canada). To facilitate detection, a new reverse primer was  
110 designed: CD163-detect-R (5'-CCAGAGAAACTGACAGCACTTCCACATTCA- 3') to be  
111 used with the forward primer CD163-*HindIII*-F, as described above.

112

#### 113 **Sequence analyses**

114 The nucleotide sequencing of CD163 gene was performed by the Diagnostic Laboratory of the  
115 *Faculté de médecine vétérinaire* of *Université de Montréal* and the gene analysis was done  
116 using the Geneious bioinformatics version 5.4.6 (Biomatters, Ltd., Auckland, New Zealand).

117

#### 118 **Cells and viruses**

119 For influenza virus propagation, Madin-Darby Canine Kidney (MDCK, ATCC CCL-34) and  
120 NPTr cells were cultured while for PRRSV propagation MARC-145 monkey cells (ATCC  
121 CRL-12231) were used. These cells were cultured as previously described (Delgado-Ortega et  
122 al., 2014b; Dobrescu et al., 2014). PAM cells were obtained from lungs of 2 to 14 week-old  
123 pigs as previously explained (Lévesque et al., 2014). To collect the PAM cells, animals were  
124 humanely sacrificed following the ethic protocol 12-Rech-1640. This protocol was approved  
125 by Université de Montréal ethic committee, which is following the guidelines of the Canadian

126 Council of Animal Care. The swine influenza strain A/Sw/Saskatchewan/18789/02  
127 (swIAV/Sk02) of H1N1 subtype was isolated from pigs in Saskatchewan in 2002 (Karasin et  
128 al., 2004). The titer of influenza virus was determined on MDCK and NPTr cells by a plaque  
129 assay, as described previously (Shin et al., 2007). Stock of the virus reached titer of  $9.5 \times 10^7$   
130 plaque forming units (pfu)/mL after purification. The virulent PRRSV strain ISU-12-SAH  
131 was obtained from ATCC (ATCC VR-2385, Hanassas, VA, USA) and the quantitation of  
132 PRRSV was performed in MARC-145 cells. The titer ( $4.8 \times 10^6$ ) was calculated and  
133 expressed as TCID<sub>50</sub>/mL (Reed and Muench, 1938).

134 Series of six wells of CD163 expressing NPTr cells (NPTr-CD163) ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/well) in a  
135 24-well plate were single-infected or co-infected with swIAV and PRRSV at a MOI of 5.  
136 Additionally 6 non-infected wells were used as controls. Virus attachment was allowed for 1 h  
137 at 4°C. Cells were then incubated at 37°C. One hour after the temperature shift, the cells were  
138 washed twice with phosphate buffered saline (PBS) and maintained at 37°C in 1 mL of MEM  
139 (GIBCO®-BRL) supplemented with 10% FBS and 1% antibiotic/antimycotic (Anti-Anti 100x,  
140 GIBCO®-BRL). Fifteen and eighteen hours after the temperature shift the culture medium was  
141 removed, clarified twice by centrifugation (1,000 x g), divided into aliquots, and stored at -  
142 80°C. For superinfections, six wells of NPTr-CD163 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/well) were first  
143 infected with swIAV (MOI of 5), then superinfected with PRRSV (MOI of 5) 3 h later. In  
144 parallel, six wells of NPTr-CD163 cells were infected with PRRSV (MOI of 5) and  
145 superinfected with swIAV (MOI of 5) 3 h after infection with PRRSV. The 3 h delay between  
146 infections was selected based on previous studies where interference between the same  
147 viruses or others was intensively assessed *in vitro* and *in vivo* (Dobrescu et al., 2014; Meurens  
148 et al., 2004b; Schynts et al., 2003). After the first infection, virus attachment was allowed for  
149 1 h at 4°C. Cells were then further incubated at 37°C and superinfections were performed 3 h  
150 after the temperature shift. One hour after the temperature shift and 1 h after each

151 superinfection cells were washed twice with PBS and further incubated at 37°C in 1 mL of  
152 MEM (GIBCO®-BRL) supplemented with 10% FBS and 1% antibiotic/antimycotic (Anti-  
153 Anti 100x, GIBCO®-BRL). Additionally 8 non-infected wells were used as controls. Fifteen  
154 hours post-superinfection, the culture medium was removed, clarified twice by centrifugation  
155 (1,000 x g) and stored at -80°C.

156

### 157 **Gene expression analysis using quantitative real-time polymerizing chain reaction**

158 Real-time PCR Primers (targeting M protein gene of swIAV, Open Reading Frame 7 (ORF7)  
159 of PRRSV, DAI, LGP2, MDA5, RIG1, TLR3, TLR8, IFN $\alpha$ , IFN $\beta$ , IFN $\lambda$ 1, IL6, CCL20,  
160 MX2, OAS, and PKR transcripts) were designed and optimized using Clone Manager 9  
161 (Scientific & Educational Software, Cary, NC, USA) and were purchased from Invitrogen  
162 (Carlsbad, CA, USA) as previously described (Table 1) (Dobrescu et al., 2014). NPTr-CD163  
163 cells were suspended in Trizol reagent (Invitrogen) with ceramic beads (BioSpec Products,  
164 OK, USA) and total RNA was isolated using RNeasy Plus Mini Kit (Qiagen). The absence of  
165 genomic DNA contamination was verified using prepared RNA as a template for quantitative  
166 real-time PCR (qPCR). RNA concentration was determined by measuring optical density at  
167 260nm (OD260) and the RNA quality was assessed by calculating OD260/OD280 ratio and  
168 by capillary electrophoresis (Agilent 2100 Bioanalyzer, Agilent Technologies Inc., Santa-  
169 Clara, USA). cDNA was generated from 100-200 ng of RNA per reaction and RT-PCR was  
170 performed using the SuperScript™ III Platinum® Two-Step RT-qPCR Kit as per the  
171 manufacturer's recommendations (Invitrogen). The generated cDNA was stored at -80 °C.  
172 qPCR assays were carried out as previously described using the three most stable reference  
173 genes (Delgado-Ortega et al., 2014a; Dobrescu et al., 2014). qPCR data were expressed as  
174 relative values after Genex macro analysis (Bio-Rad) (Vandesompele et al., 2002) using the  
175 Cycle quantification (*C<sub>q</sub>*) from the samples for the different transcripts.

176

## 177 **Statistical analysis**

178 Data for the comparison of differences in relative mRNA expression between cells and tissues  
179 were expressed as relative values. All statistical analyses were done using computer software  
180 Prism 6 for Windows (version 6.02; GraphPad Software, San Diego, CA, USA). One-Way  
181 ANOVA was used to detect differences among the groups. To account for the non-normal  
182 distribution of the data, all data were sorted by rank status prior to ANOVA statistical  
183 analysis. Tukey's test was used to compare the means of the ranks among the groups. *P* values  
184 less than 0.05 were considered significant.

185

## 186 **RESULTS-DISCUSSION**

### 187 **Creation of a new model to study PRRSV and influenza co-infections *in vitro***

188 To study PRRSV and swIAV co-infection, NPTr cells have been genetically modified to  
189 express the protein CD163, which is one of PRRSV's principal cell receptor (Calvert et al.,  
190 2007; Das et al., 2010). Many other papers have shown that expression of CD163 protein  
191 enabled PRRSV permissivity to cells (Lee et al., 2010; Lee and Lee, 2010; Patton et al., 2009;  
192 Van Gorp et al., 2010). NPTr cell line did not show any CD163 mRNA production by RT-  
193 PCR (Figure 1A). As such, CD163 cDNA was isolated from PAMs and cloned into the NPTr  
194 cell line using a retroviral transduction kit. To verify the stable introduction of the CD163  
195 cDNA into the new genetically modified NPTr cells genome (NPTr-CD163 cells) and the  
196 expression of the protein, a RT-PCR and a specific porcine anti-CD163 immunofluorescence  
197 assay (IFA) was performed (Figure 1). RT-PCR detection revealed the presence of CD163  
198 mRNA in NPTr-CD163, as compared to non-modified NPTr cells (negative control) and  
199 primary PAMs (positive control) (Figure 1A). IFA by porcine anti-CD163 confirms high  
200 expression of the protein (Figure 1C). Furthermore, the permissiveness of the modified NPTr-



201 CD163 cells to PRRSV type II Quebec reference strain (IAF-Klop) was evaluated by IFA  
202 with polyclonal pig anti-PRRSV serum (data not shown).

203

#### 204 **PRRSV and swIAV single and co-infections of NPTr-CD163 cells**

205 NPTr-CD163 cells were then single or co-infected with PRRSV and swIAV for a maximum  
206 of 18 h (Figure 2). Co-infections were carried out simultaneously or with a 3 h delay between  
207 the two viruses.

208 The replication of both viruses was assessed by RT-qPCR at the end of the experiment. We  
209 observed that PRRSV impacted the replication of swIAV especially when the cells were  
210 simultaneously co-infected and when PRRSV virus was added to the cells 3 h after swIAV  
211 ( $P < 0.05$ ) (Figure 2). On the contrary co-infections with PRRSV added to the cells 3 h before  
212 swIAV did not show any impact on swIAV replication. Regarding PRRSV replication it could  
213 be observed that PRRSV replication was clearly decreased when swIAV infected NPTr-  
214 CD163 cells 3 h before PRRSV (Figure 2). Thus, when these data were compared to previous  
215 ones where PAMs and PCLS were similarly single and co-infected with the same viruses a  
216 difference was identified (Dobrescu et al., 2014). Indeed, in cells permissive to both viruses  
217 PRRSV could interfere with swIAV replication which was not the case in co-infections of  
218 PAMs or PCLS (Dobrescu et al., 2014). Interference between viruses was clearly observed in  
219 NPTr-CD163 cells. Since both viruses are RNA viruses mobilizing similarly cellular  
220 machinery and defenses this strong interference was expected and here confirmed. Variations  
221 in the impact of interference on the replication of the second virus could be explained, for  
222 instance, by differences in penetration kinetics between viruses as previously observed with  
223 other enveloped viruses (Meurens et al., 2004a).

224 Regarding the antiviral response of the NPTr-CD163 cells and the potential impact of co-  
225 infection on it, several observations could be made. First, in line with previous data (Dobrescu

226 et al., 2014), our strain of PRRSV – ISU-12-SAH – was a very poor inducer of the cellular  
227 antiviral response as observed with the low expression of several transcripts related to its  
228 response (Figure 3) confirming previous observations with PAMs and PCLS (Dobrescu et al.,  
229 2014). On the contrary the strain of swIAV (A/Sw/Saskatchewan/18789/02) was clearly  
230 triggering the expression of various transcripts (see LGP2, TLR8, IFN types 1 and 3 in Figure  
231 3), especially IFN $\lambda$ 1 mRNA. However, it did not seem to have consequences on the interferon  
232 stimulated genes (ISGs) we assessed. IFN type 3 mRNA were more expressed than IFN type  
233 1 mRNA suggesting a particular role for these IFNs in epithelial cells. This observation  
234 confirms previous results showing a preferential expression of IFN type 3 in primary airway  
235 epithelial cells (Ioannidis et al., 2013) and clear expression of IFN $\lambda$ 1 mRNA in NPTr cells  
236 and PCLS in response to an European strain of H3N2 swIAV (Delgado-Ortega et al., 2014b).  
237 When PRRSV was added to the cells on the same time or after swIAV, transcript levels of  
238 expression were similar or decreased (see for instance IFN $\lambda$ 1, Figure 3). PRRSV effect was  
239 less obvious when the virus was infecting the cells before swIAV. For ISGs, even if both  
240 viruses were poor inducer after 18 h of stimulation, it appears that transcript levels of  
241 expression were very low in the experimental conditions involving a PRRSV infection before  
242 or after swIAV infection (Figure 3). Globally, the two viruses were also interfering with each  
243 other at the cellular level, usually with one decreasing the induction triggered by the other,  
244 probably as a consequence of their altered replications. However, neither synergistic nor  
245 additive effects were observed at the cellular level when the two viruses were simultaneously  
246 infecting NPTr-CD163 cells. Additive and synergistic effects between PRRSV and swIAV  
247 were reported previously (Dobrescu et al., 2014) but it was not in a single pure cell population  
248 like here, but in tissue slice where various cell types were present and could communicate  
249 through cytokines network. Thus, it seems that at the cellular level, early in the infection  
250 process, both viruses are mostly interfering. While at tissue level, even if there is still

251 interference there is also the establishment of synergistic and additive effects when the host  
252 response is considered.

253 In the current report interactions between two strains of PRRSV and swIAV were assessed  
254 early in co-infections of a same genetically modified target epithelial cell line expressing the  
255 PRSSV receptor, CD163. Results using this new tool showed that both RNA viruses can  
256 clearly interfere with each other when infecting the same cell with consequences on the  
257 antiviral cell response. Further researches are needed to assess the impact of this observed  
258 interference later in the infection process and on the protein production that cannot be  
259 assessed at early times. Moreover, interactions between various cells types exposed to both  
260 viruses would undoubtedly need further assessment too. Finally, additional *in vivo* and field  
261 experiments taking advantages of the recent developments in porcine immuno-microbiology  
262 and the new tools available should be performed to clarify complex relations between micro-  
263 organisms in the respiratory tract and the lung.

264

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## 274 **COMPETING INTERESTS STATEMENT**

275 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

276

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354

## 355 **FIGURE CAPTIONS**

### 356 **Figure 1: NPTr-CD163 cells express the CD163 protein**

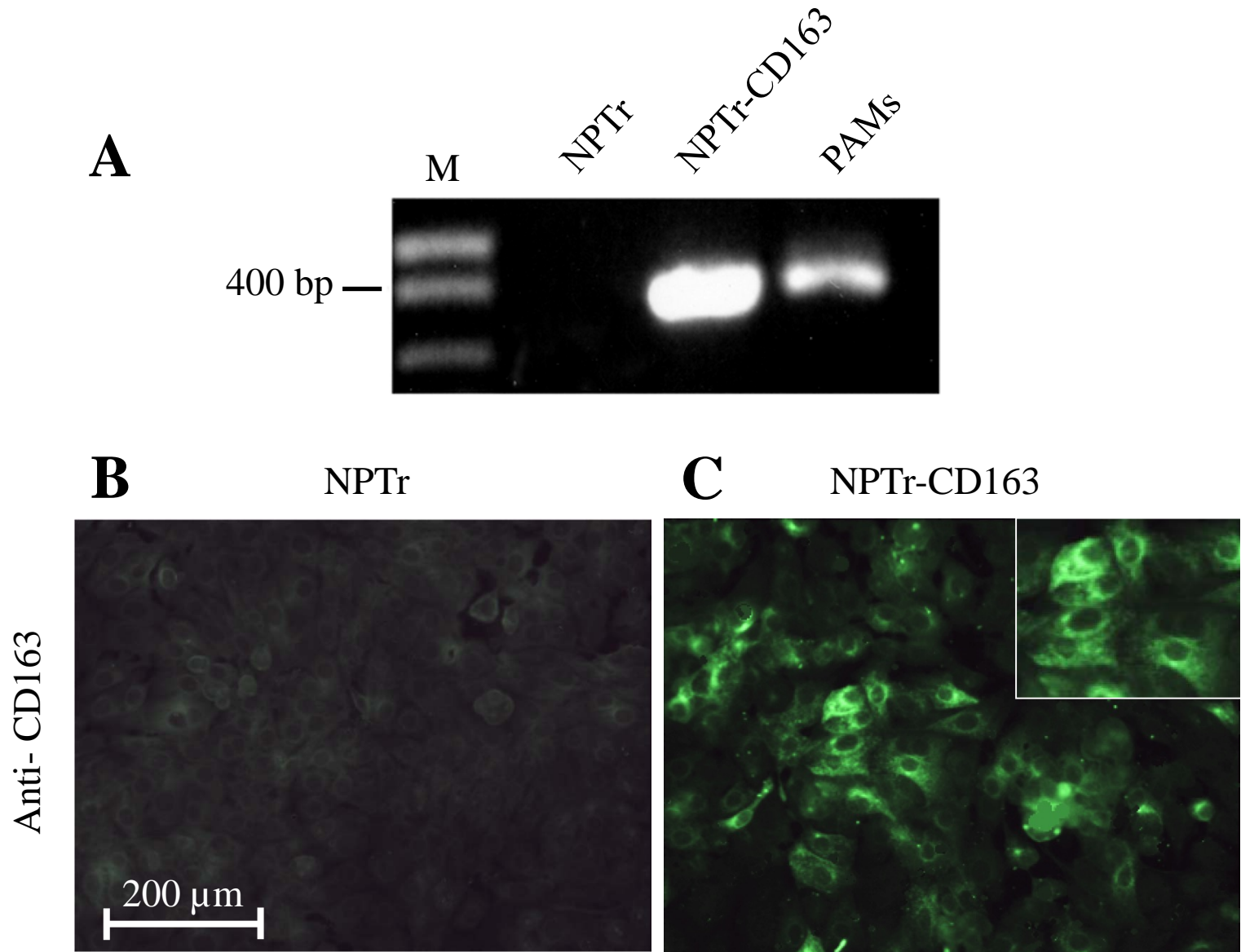
357 NPTr cells were infected with a CD163-coding retrovirus, selected, cloned and tested for  
358 expression of the protein CD163. RT-PCR detection of mRNA of partial CD163 in NPTr,  
359 NPTr-CD163, and PAMs (A). Immunofluorescence against CD163 protein in NPTr (B) and  
360 modified NPTr-CD163 (C) cells. White scale bar represent 200  $\mu$ m.

361

362 **Figure 2: Viral replication** - Relative viral expression (ORF7-PRRSV and M protein-swIAV  
363 genes) after 15 h or 18 h of infection of NPTr-CD163 cells. For every situations n=6 + median  
364 except control where n=8 + median. Dot plots within each graph with no common  
365 superscripts are significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ).

366

367 **Figure 3: Viral recognition (LGP2, MDA5, and TLR8), Interferons (IFN $\alpha$ , IFN $\beta$ , and**  
368 **IFN $\lambda$ 1), and Response to Interferons (MX2, OAS, and PKR)** - Relative expression of  
369 transcripts after 15 h or 18 h of infection of NPTr-CD163 cells. For every situations n=6 +  
370 median except control where n=8 + median. Dot plots within each graph with no common  
371 superscripts are significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ).



**Figure 1**



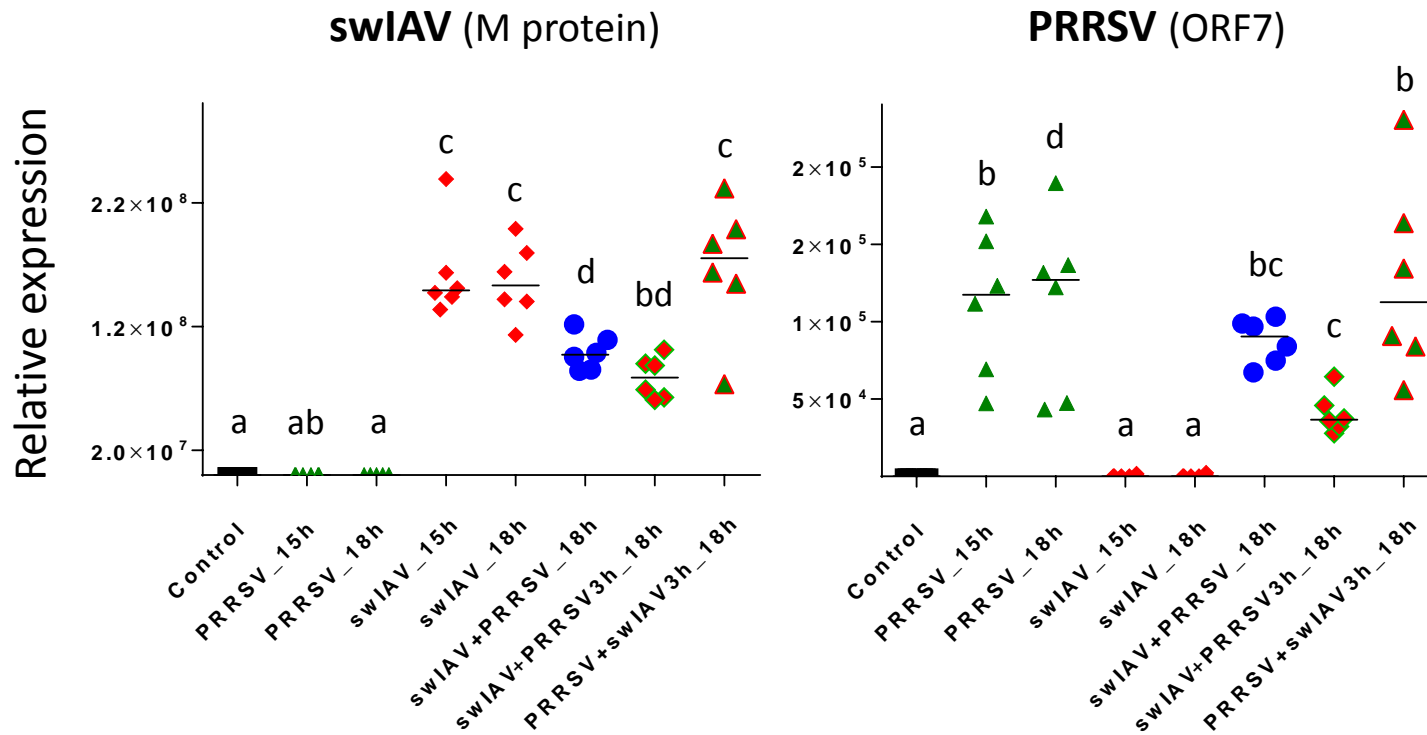


Figure 2

Relative expressions

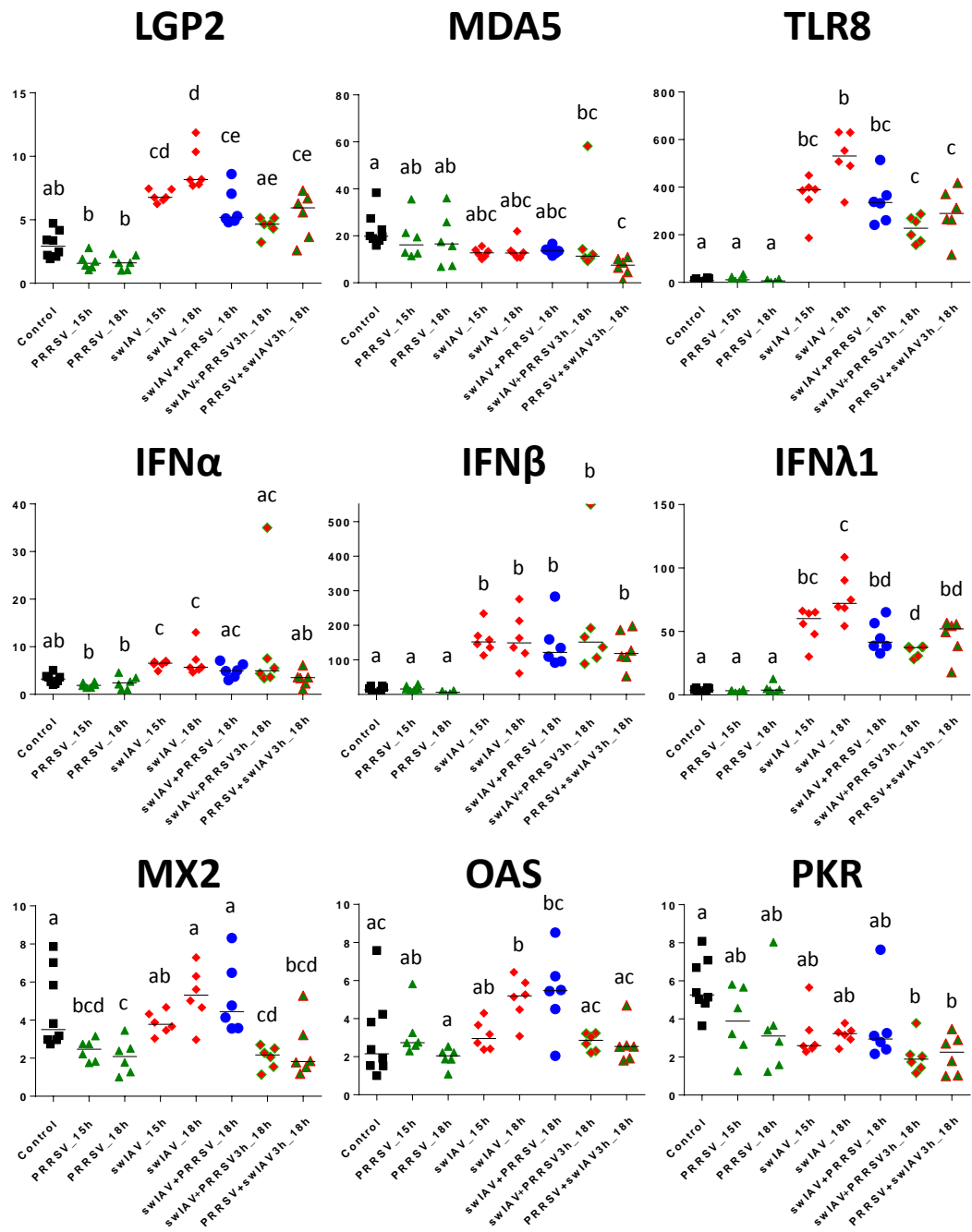


Figure 3