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pain for producers

Pork cutting demos prepare
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CANADIAN HOG JOURNAL

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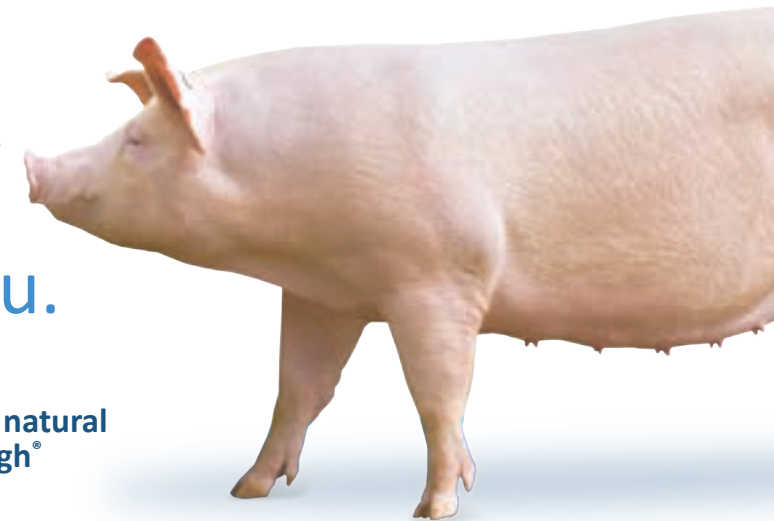
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Sask Pork Symposium brings in record attendance

Bruce Cochrane

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Temple Grandin is a world-renowned animal welfare expert.

AMID AN AIR OF OPTIMISM, the 47th Saskatchewan Pork Industry Symposium was held Nov. 5 & 6 in Saskatoon, attracting another record-setting attendance.

"We welcomed more than 300 people, which is absolutely terrific," said Steve Seto, Communications & Marketing Coordinator, Sask Pork.

The event is all about bringing together hog producers, swine researchers, and product and service providers to learn about the latest developments and to network.

"We had about 270 attendees last year, so we're seeing general interest year-over-year right now, which is great," said Seto. "That is certainly suggesting that the pork industry is strong, it's going to continue to be strong, and there's a lot of optimism going into the years ahead."

Animal welfare highlights first day's agenda

The first day of the event was highlighted by Temple Grandin's discussion on pig handling and welfare.

Grandin is an animal science professor with Colorado State University and has designed livestock facilities in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and other countries. She's also developed an objective scoring system for assessing pig and cattle handling at packing plants.

"The handling of livestock and the understanding of animal behavior have improved dramatically since the 1990s," said Grandin. "There is a much greater awareness of the benefits of superior stockmanship."

Grandin said another really important strategy is walking the pens, preferably every day, and training the pigs to quietly get up and move away so they'll be easier to handle on moving day.

Grandin has two key tips for making handling pigs easier.

"One of the things I emphasize in handling both pigs and cattle is moving small groups. With pigs, for example, on the loading ramp, you bring three to five up at a time, not 10. For years, I've had this battle on group size," she said. "Now, the scientific research is very clear: three to five – small groups – and it's something you constantly have to enforce, because it requires more walking."

Grandin said another really important strategy is walking the pens, preferably every day, and training the pigs to quietly get up and move away so they'll be easier to handle on moving day.

Martyna Lagoda, a post-doctoral fellow with the University of Saskatchewan, provided an update on what is happening at the University of Saskatchewan as part of the NSERC Industrial Chair in Swine Welfare Research program.

"This is a strategic initiative designed to deliver practical solutions to improve swine welfare in Canada and address different welfare issues," she said.

As part of that work, researchers provided newly weaned piglets with enrichments designed to support their natural behavior such as chewable materials, extra space to allow greater interaction among the pigs and regular human contact to socialize them.

Lagoda said researchers saw increased average daily gain, not only during the early life of the pig, but also through its lifetime, along with reduced incidence of tail biting compared to the control group that did not receive the enrichments.

Right now, the Canadian pork sector is preparing for the next update to the National Farm Animal Care Council's (NFACC) *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs*, which was last updated in 2014. The biggest change is the shift to group sow housing, following a review of the code in 2019. The next update is set for 2025.

Stephen Heckbert, Executive Director, Canadian Pork Council (CPC) said the main priority for producers is the long-term economic viability of the sector, and the best way to ensure that is "no surprises." Heckbert encouraged producers to reach out directly to their provincial pork producer organizations and CPC to stay on top of what's happening and provide input.

Market analyst Kevin Grier discussed the competitive status of the industry. Grier is forecasting a modest increase in Canadian pork production in 2025 and higher prices.

"In terms of the outlook for 2025, I'm expecting, based on the last Hogs and Pigs Report, to have a modest increase in production," he said. "We have less beef because of where we are at in the cattle cycle, and we're going to have less beef next year and the year after that, so pork should be able to make competitive gains in the meat case or on the menu at restaurants. So, in some respects, the pork industry is probably hoping that pork can gain market share at the expense of beef."

Grier continued his positive outlook on the sector.

"We still will be aggressive exporters and I'm hoping to see, for the sake of the industry, improved demand in 2025 because of the beef situation so we should have more production," he said. "Probably and hopefully for the sake of producers, we should see an increased price in 2025 compared to 2024."

Food inflation still on the minds of many

Sylvain Charlebois, a professor with Dalhousie University, brought some advice for 'Navigating the Maze: Agri-Food Trends and their Impact on the Pork Industry.' Charlebois said Canada was tracking the U.S., in terms of food inflation, but Canada is now higher due to Canada's own food policies.

"Dairy and meat are pushing food inflation higher, and they're all pretty domestic," he said. "On the concept of competitiveness, I don't think that right now that we're helping agriculture; we're just making it more expensive, so farmers are struggling."

Charlebois suggested Canada's fate is somewhat at the mercy of decisions made south of the border.

"Right now, things are good for the pork industry, but they're not going to remain the same," he said. "We've got to be ready for that, and with the U.S. becoming even more competitive under a Trump regime, we're going to have to follow."

Awards recognize excellence in production

The symposium banquet featured the 'Awards of Distinction' for Environmental Stewardship, Lifetime Achievement, and Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan's Champion Award.

"The awards are very important," said Seto. "They recognize individuals and organizations for their commitments to helping establish the pork sector as one of the premier industries in the province and in the country."

The Environmental Stewardship award recognizes producers who have adopted practices or technologies in pork production that highlight environmental sustainability, whether through production, management or any other activity, such as water treatment and barn design. Peter Gross of Sunnysdale Colony, northwest of Saskatoon, was named as this year's recipient. Sunnysdale's technological approach to using manure as fertilizer demonstrates the farm's eco-conscious attitude and benefits profitability.

The Lifetime Achievement award recognizes those who have put years of hard work into the industry and have made a lasting impact. This year's recipient was Florian Possberg, who began farming with his wife in 1976 near Humbolt, east of Saskatoon.



Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan's Clinton Monchuk (right) presented its annual Champion Award to Joe Kleinsasser of Rosetown Colony (not pictured).

"They've been absolute leaders in this industry. When you talk about the hog production in the province, I think the first name that comes to mind is Florian Possberg," said Seto. "He and Betty started out with a 60-sow hog operation and built from there."

The Possbergs are known for the support they've provided for every producer in the province and the extra steps they've taken to ensure that pork production is sustainable, profitable and healthy.

"Without them, I don't know if the pork industry would be where it is today," said Seto.

Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan took the occasion to present its annual Champion Award. Executive Director Clinton Monchuk explained that the award celebrates individuals who have gone above and beyond to increase public trust in farming and food, working for the greater good of agriculture. Joe Kleinsasser of Rosetown Colony, southwest of Saskatoon, was named as this year's recipient.

Kleinsasser has served on the boards of both Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan and Sask Pork, demonstrating his dedication to industry development.

"One of the big things is how much he has been committed to, whether it's the policy and engagement with consumers or trying to make sure every day consumers understand how farmers are ranchers are growing the products," said Monchuk.

Disease prevention, biosecurity remain popular topics

More than 60 countries and territories around the world have reported the presence of African Swine Fever (ASF) to date, and new cases continue to be reported in Asia and Europe, increasing the risk to uninfected areas.

Bobbie Lundquist, Emergency Preparedness Director, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) provided an update on 'ASF Preparedness, Zoning and Zoning Arrangements.' 'Zoning' is the establishment of a controlled, isolated area around the location of a foreign animal disease outbreak, to prevent the spread of the disease. Outside of that zone would be considered disease-free.



Producers and industry partners remain on guard against African Swine Fever (ASF), which was discussed again at this year's symposium.

"When a zone is placed, it's a 10-kilometre radius around an infected farm or premise and, when we go to a trading partner, what we're saying to them is that we are confident in the epidemiology of the outbreak thus far, and that we're comfortable with the disease being contained," said Lundquist.

Canada currently has zoning agreements in place in the U.S, European Union (E.U.), Singapore and Vietnam, representing just under 40 per cent of the Canadian pork export market. Agreements continue to be pursued with other trading partners, including Japan, the U.K., Mexico, the Philippines, South Korea, Chile and Peru.

Brad Chappell, Director of Veterinary Services, Topigs Norsvin Canada discussed biosecurity. His 'Back to Basics' presentation suggested that the main goal of biosecurity is to keep pathogens out of your barn so you have happier, healthier pigs that grow more efficiently and are ultimately processed in less time.

Chappell acknowledged that the level of attention paid to biosecurity has increased dramatically, driven by disease



challenges like porcine epidemic diarrhea (PED), which has been spreading in Canada.

"Each barn is unique, influenced by both the design of the barn and the people working in it," he said. "You can come up with the best possible protocol, but if people don't follow it, it's useless."

Another successful symposium in the books

With the 2024 Saskatchewan Pork Industry Symposium complete, planning has begun for the 2025 edition. Seto applauded the efforts of those involved in the 2024 edition.

"It takes a lot to get the symposium going, and we need to thank everyone on the advisory committee for all the work they do to make sure it's a great success," he said. "It's also important to recognize the exhibitors and sponsors that make it possible." 🗨️



Pork cutting demos prepare up-and-coming butchers

Jeremy Yim

Editor's note: Jeremy Yim is National Marketing Director, Canada Pork. He can be contacted at 'yim@canadapork.com.'

Canada Pork frequently collaborates with provincial associations to help educate and grow local culinary and butcher programs.



Culinary program students at NAIT in Edmonton received a masterclass of pork butchery recently as part of Canada Pork's Distribution Education Program.

CANADA PORK IS THE NATIONAL marketing association for the Canadian pork industry. One of its key goals is to serve as a source of education and resources for industry professionals. Canada Pork targets culinary and institutional colleges as a key area where its Distribution Education Program (DEP) can benefit both students and the industry. As students prepare to enter the workforce, Canada Pork aims to ensure they have a solid understanding of what makes Canadian pork an excellent product.

Canada Pork frequently collaborates with provincial associations to help educate and grow local culinary and butcher programs. Recently, Alberta Pork and Canada Pork partnered to host a DEP at NAIT in Edmonton, where we presented to 29 culinary students. The presentation covered key topics, including the Canadian pork industry, the qualities of Canadian pork, Alberta Pork, Verified Canadian Pork and the resources available to students as they begin their careers.

Following the presentation, a live butcher demonstration showcased the versatility of pork. The group was introduced to more than 40 different foodservice value-added ideas that can be created from the sub-primals of a pig. The goal is for students to incorporate these new ideas into their careers, helping to increase the presence of pork on restaurant menus and special features.

The presentation was highly interactive, encouraging students to ask questions, take pictures and record videos. Canada Pork offers similar presentations to both retail and foodservice professionals, adapting the content to make it more relevant to each specific audience.

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'Pandemic prevention' bill targets livestock, meat

Andrew Heck

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While activists are no strangers to using every opportunity to take shots at the industry, their tactics tend to fall flat more often than they're successful.



Canadian commercial hog production features strict biosecurity protocols to protect animal welfare and food safety.

IF COVID-19 TAUGHT US ANYTHING, it's that paranoia provides great leverage for influencing people.

Stoking fear, creating division and using coded language as a means of strengthening ideology is nothing new, but when it comes to animal rights activism, it's recently found a dangerous home in the House of Commons with Bill C-293: *An Act respecting pandemic prevention and preparedness*.

The bill was introduced in June 2022 by Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, (Liberal) Member of Parliament (MP), Beaches-East York (Ontario) – a small but densely populated constituency near downtown Toronto. As Bill C-293 approaches second reading in the Senate,

there is concern that it could become law, despite advocacy efforts by stakeholders across Canadian livestock and meat value chains.

In principle, Bill C-293 is inoffensive enough: *Who wouldn't want to prevent a pandemic?* Digging deeper, the bill includes some spurious clauses that single out livestock and meat. While activists are no strangers to using every opportunity to take shots at the industry, their tactics tend to fall flat more often than they're successful. Even more frequently, these initiatives lack teeth, from a legal standpoint. Bill C-293 is a noteworthy and unfortunate exception, and its passage could further legitimize efforts to end Canadian livestock production while adopting an official government stance against meat consumption.

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COVID-19's association with livestock

With the spectre of COVID-19 likely to linger for years to come, members of the public and policy-makers alike have begun unpacking what went wrong and how issues can be mitigated in the future. That's a perfectly reasonable response, albeit incredibly challenging.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes Wuhan, China as the source of the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for the pandemic. While no single origin has been pinpointed by experts, one theory suggests that Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market – commonly called a 'wet market' – may have been ground zero for the virus' spread to humans, as many of the first cases were identified in workers there.

Wet markets are characterized by their eclectic mixture of fresh goods for sale, including wild-harvested and farm-raised meats. These markets remain the dominant source of food for Chinese consumers, despite growing competition from modern supermarkets. While the sale of live wildlife is technically banned in Chinese wet markets, it's estimated that 38 wildlife species were sold for food or as pets at Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market around the time that SARS-CoV-2 emerged. The lack of food safety and biosecurity standards, combined with cramped quarters for people, food and animals, certainly would've provided the perfect breeding ground for zoonotic disease transmission.

However, looking at Canadian intensive livestock production, there's no comparison – something that activists would like everyday Canadians and politicians to overlook, in favour of conflating the situation in overseas wet markets with the highly controlled conditions in Canadian hog barns and pork processing facilities.

How does Bill C-293 impact hog production?

Bill C-293 puts forth recommendations for various federal government ministries, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), related to preventing and preparing for pandemics. These recommendations cover everything from public health services and vaccines, to foreign affairs, to wildlife management and land-use planning, to livestock production and meat, including:

- (2) *The pandemic prevention and preparedness plan must...*
 - ... (i) *reduce the risks posed by antimicrobial resistance,*
 - (ii) *regulate commercial activities that can contribute to pandemic risk, including industrial animal agriculture,*
 - (iii) *promote commercial activities that can help reduce pandemic risk, including the production of alternative proteins...*

The back-to-back clauses read like an instruction guide for pushing the Canadian food system away from livestock and meat. In isolation, these clauses address three separate but intrinsically connected ideas, regarding antimicrobial use, animal health on-farm and food consumer choice. This is no accident, but the context is likely lost on those outside the industry. More importantly, it's possible and necessary to set the record straight.

Hog producers are already reducing antimicrobial use

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is indeed a serious issue. While the positive effects of responsible antimicrobial use (AMU) are known, the potentially harmful impacts of AMR on human health

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are being more closely monitored by global authorities and industry stakeholders.

Starting in 2018, the federal government stepped up its efforts against AMR by requiring veterinarians to prescribe all medically important antimicrobials – those with human health implications – for use in livestock. This legislative change wisely relied on the existing relationships between producers and their herd vets, rather than a heavy-handed approach.

Between 2018 and 2021, Alberta Pork analyzed data from 20 farms, with a total of 7,500 sows, to create an AMU pilot benchmark for the provincial industry. The results of this three-year study were shared widely at the time, showing an overall decrease in most types of AMU. The study has received renewed funding to 2027, to expand its scope. This not only contributes to the fight against AMR, but it highlights just one example of the industry's proactive approach to the problem.

Other studies have been taking place across the country, with research organizations like Swine Innovation Porc (SIP) continuing to support projects that aim to reinforce the judicious use of antimicrobials when they are needed, and to encourage their reduction through practical means. The most compelling aspect of this transition, for producers, is the cost saving associated with using fewer production inputs. With that in mind, it's clear the industry is moving in the right direction, with progress quickly being made.

Hog production is already federally regulated

When it comes to "regulat[ing]... industrial animal agriculture," the clause is over-simplified to the point of being deliberately misleading.

The National Farm Animal Care Council's (NFACC) *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs*, for instance, outlines recommendations and requirements for various aspects of production, including herd health management, humane treatment and disease response.

The small but vocal minority of critics argue that the code is insufficient to ensure adherence, and that code itself doesn't do

enough to protect pigs; however, when it comes to adherence to the code, the industry itself is largely responsible for its implementation. That fact concerns extremists who would rather see an end to animal agriculture through any means – even if politically authoritarian – rather than its constant improvement, which tends to be industry-led.

NFACC's purpose is laid out in a black-and-white fashion: "NFACC's scope concerns national animal care issues related to farmed animals, with a primary focus on animals raised for the production of food for humans." From the outset, anyone opposed to this purpose is going to take issue with the organization. While the industry and activists will have to 'agree to disagree' on NFACC's core mandate, it's worth noting that NFACC's membership includes representation from

When it comes to "regulat[ing]... industrial animal agriculture," the clause is over-simplified to the point of being deliberately misleading.

various sectors, including the industry itself, veterinary professionals and even animal welfare groups.

Likewise, Canadian Pork Excellence (CPE), covering more than 99 per cent of all hog production in Canada, stipulates best practices meant to create conformity in production, including animal health. CPE is the veterinary-audited quality assurance certification that producers need to be able to sell their hogs to slaughter facilities licenced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Without CPE certification, a producer's options to market pigs would be greatly diminished, which would be counter-intuitive, business-wise.

Moreover, even beyond the extensive programming and monitoring that voluntarily cover disease prevention in Canadian hog production, anyone concerned with potential mistreatment should refer to their provincial authorities' existing legislation on animal care, which is backed by enforcement powers that are usually delegated to humane societies and SPCAs. Some SPCAs have drifted increasingly toward stronger activist sympathies, while others, like the Alberta SPCA, continue to foster goodwill, understanding and partnership with the industry, which provides the best outcomes for all.

Playing favourites and deceiving consumers

Perhaps the most outrageous of the three clauses of concern is the "promot[ion]" of "alternative proteins." Understandably, these proteins are an alternative to meat, which comes from livestock. That's obvious, but explaining it this way truly distills its intent: Bill C-293 is asking the federal government to side with plant-based protein manufacturers, at the expense of livestock producers and meat processors.

Not only is this particular clause fundamentally flawed, but it speaks to the growing ideology that meat isn't good for you. Another



prominent example is the newest version of Canada's Food Guide, published in 2019, which conspicuously snubbed animal-based foods. As most nutritionists and dieticians will tell you, that's simply not good for your health, yet the rhetoric persists, disguised as policy reform. Perhaps most importantly, it has nothing to do with pandemic prevention or preparedness, making its presence in the bill all that more ominous and inappropriate.

Will Bill C-293 come to fruition?

Bill C-293 is a reflection of its time, in terms of the COVID-19 fallout, food fads, and the federal political atmosphere. Canadians' sense of public health is heightened, and some are beginning to reduce or cease consumption of animal-based foods.

Bill C-293 demands that a comprehensive plan be developed and presented in Parliament within two years of its passage. The text of the bill concludes with a proposed amendment to the *Department of Health Act*, which would appoint a Public Health Agency of Canada official as the coordinator responsible for implementing the plan.

This is where the specifics end and uncertainty begins. The appointed coordinator would have significant power over the livestock industry and meat processing to make sweeping decisions, under the right circumstances, that could be incredibly disruptive to the Canadian pork value chain.

Is all hope lost? Not even close. Bill C-293 represents activist propaganda flying under the radar of politicians who, like all of us, understand the importance of pandemic prevention and preparedness, but that doesn't mean tearing down a prominent industry that is responsible for feeding tens of millions of Canadians and even more abroad.

Even if passed, farming groups and concerned Canadians should continue to fight hard against legislation that unreasonably discriminates against livestock and animal-based foods, for the sustainability of their livelihoods and the ability to continue supplying high-quality, delicious, nutritious protein to a hungry world. In the end, we also need to be mindful of food security, sustainability, affordability and safety. 🐷

Most consumers still aren't on the fake meat bandwagon, despite widespread marketing efforts.



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Wild boar present a pain for producers

Geoff Geddes



The menacing tusks of a wild boar skull make for a unique conversation piece about the importance of wild boar eradication. This specimen, collected as part of eradication efforts in Alberta, made an appearance at Alberta Pork Congress this year.

IN THE CANADIAN PORK SECTOR, there is always a new challenge to address, and the latest one involves wild boar. Considered an invasive species, they are like a cancer infesting the industry.

"These animals cause ecological harm, wildlife habitat destruction and crop damage, and they serve as a reservoir for diseases that can affect wild and domestic pigs," said Colleen McElwain, Executive Director, Animal Health Canada.

While the problem is nationwide, it hits particularly close to home for western Canadian hog producers.

"Wild boar at-large are one of the most destructive invasive species on the planet," said Megan Evans, Executive Director, Alberta Invasive Species Council (AISC). "I think all Albertans should be concerned about them – farmers in particular. There's a lot at risk when it comes to these populations."

Apart from the damage done to wildlife, crops and the environment, wild boar pose a risk of potentially spreading diseases like African Swine Fever (ASF).

"We learned the hard way that wild boar are a challenging species to address," said McKenzie. "They reproduce quickly, are highly intelligent and adapt rapidly to any kind of pressure."

"This problem began in the 1980s when governments encouraged farmers to diversify their livestock," said Hannah McKenzie, Wild Boar Specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation. "We soon realized that these animals are hard to contain and, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, can survive our harsh winters."

To combat the problem, the Government of Alberta launched a bounty program in 2003 that was delivered by municipalities throughout the province to incentivize the killing of wild boar.

"We learned the hard way that wild boar are a challenging species to address," said McKenzie. "They reproduce quickly, are highly intelligent and adapt rapidly to any kind of pressure."

Hunting for answers

With hunting, for example, they are able to recognize the danger and change their behavior to become more wary of external threats.

"I must stress that recreational hunting is not an effective control measure for wild boar eradication," said Charlotte Shipp, Industry Programs Manager, Alberta Pork. "Hunting can be a fun activity, but it actually makes the problem worse by causing the animals to scatter when they hear gunshots. The areas where we have had pressure from hunting contain some of the most difficult wild boar to capture, because they are now very well educated when it comes to human activity."

In an alternative approach, the Government of Alberta created the Wild Boar Control Program, similar to the province's strategy in combatting rats, which included expanded monitoring and professional trapping of wild boar, as well as crop insurance to mitigate the damage they cause.

When it comes to battling wild boar, it really does take a village. For their part, AISC adopted the 'Squeal on Pigs!' campaign that was started by invasive species authorities in the U.S., to raise awareness

of the problem. The program encourages the public to report wild boar sightings.

At present, the focus in Alberta is on detection and removal of these interlopers, an effort driven largely by Alberta Pork.

"We have solid elimination efforts in place and scaled up our efforts this summer by doubling our staff of eradication specialists from two to four," said Shipp. "In collaboration with Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation, we also hosted Canada's first wild boar training session for our new hires. As part of this training focus, Alberta Pork reached out to several municipalities throughout the province and instructed their problem wildlife specialists, as well as training trappers from a number of Indigenous groups. The instruction has really increased the resources and knowledge base in Alberta around the trapping and eradication of wild boar."

A captive audience

Work on wild boar is bearing fruit, with three captures reported by Alberta Pork in recent months. Traditionally, harvest season can be a tough time of year to target these animals, as food is abundant with crops coming off the field, and the flurry of activity on farms tends to scatter the creatures.

"Given the timing, we are very excited by these captures and what this could mean for the months ahead," said Shipp.

Next up in the boar war is a collaring project in partnership with the University of Calgary, where GPS collars are carefully attached to the animals as a means of tracking their movement. As with any species, the priority of male feral pigs is searching for females, so following boars could really pay off in the end.

Though numbers can be hard to come by with these elusive creatures, some current figures bode well for the pork sector.

ASF could leave us SOL

"For the ag industry, the spread of a reportable disease in a barn or processing plant is a scary prospect," said Evans. "It would be devastating, however, to see such an outbreak in a wild boar population that we can't easily control."

In a worst-case scenario, the presence of ASF on a hog farm would have massive implications for the trade of Canadian pork. In response, Animal Health Canada has developed a surveillance tool called CanSpotASF, a national surveillance program for the early detection of ASF in Canada.

"The goal of this tool is to detect ASF early on and help in proving to our trade partners – through testing – that Canadian pork is free of the disease," said McElwain.

While it's common to think that wild boar invaded Alberta and other provinces from the south, the truth is much closer to home.



Canada's first-ever training session for wild boar eradication specialists was held in Alberta earlier this year.

SQUEAL ON PIGS!

This awareness and reporting program aims to track the distribution of invasive wild pigs, manage their spread, and support management efforts in Canada.

The 'Squeal on Pigs!' program has included in-person and digital public engagement, including social media, along with traditional tactics like billboards

"To date, we have captured 458 wild boar," said Shipp. "That includes 63 from our initial pilot project and 395 that were snagged by Alberta Pork's eradication specialists. I'm looking forward to what may come this winter with our expanded team and hoping to see those numbers climb."

Part of growing that total involves harnessing technology such as drones and cameras. By setting up a bank of cameras in a small area, users can better understand wild boar populations and how they are distributed in the province.

"The habitat favored by these animals is one that features food and shelter, and that tends to be agricultural zones where there are bushes and crops," said McKenzie. "Our main problem spot is north-central Alberta and the zone around Highway 16, coming in at Lloydminster, through the parkland region, and up towards Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt. We've also had wild boar established for some time in the Lac St. Anne area."

Another approach involves the use of remotely monitored corral traps – a highly effective method of controlling and catching large groups of wild boar. Composed of utility panels, square mesh and steel posts, they are usually designed as a circular trap, preventing captured animals from piling into corners and escaping over the top.

"When you factor in the reproductive capacity of a pregnant wild boar sow over a few years, removing an entire group is tremendous; it's a huge win," said Evans.

Winning the boar battle

As the battle continues, there are some steps that could help the 'good guys' in the war on wild boar. For example, there are currently

no provincial prohibitions on new wild boar farms in Alberta. Unless you live in a municipality that has enacted a bylaw to ban such farms, you are free to open one, potentially adding to the problem for industry.

"That is definitely a problem in my mind," said Evans. "The lack of a prohibition is low-hanging fruit that should be addressed as soon as possible."

Though there is currently strong collaboration throughout the industry on this issue, more is always better.

"I think it will help to have a more coordinated approach nationally, which is what we're working to build through the National Wild Pig Leadership Group," said McElwain. "At present, all the reporting goes through different channels, so when someone calls in a sighting, it can be quite resource intensive to identify where the pig is, determine if it was actually a wild boar, and collect samples where possible."

Given the potential implications of ASF reaching our country, McElwain views streamlining the process as critical for demonstrating that Canadian domestic pigs are not infected with the disease if a case should ever be reported here in wild boar. It could also aid in finding any cases quickly and containing them.

"I'm heartened to see that when it comes to preventing and preparing for ASF in Canada, we have had unprecedented collaboration among Animal Health Canada, provincial and territorial governments, the livestock and meat industries and, most recently, the National Wild Pig Leadership Group," said McElwain.

Work is also ongoing with groups like the Canadian Council on Invasive Species, the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative and other organizations, including Indigenous groups.

"Together, we are starting to raise awareness of how important it is to manage wild pig populations," said McElwain. "Because they are an invasive species, elements such as prevention, preparedness and surveillance are vital and continue to be a priority for our animal health stakeholders nationwide."

Of course, there are no checkpoints asking wild boar for ID and turning them back at provincial borders, so this is truly a national dilemma.

Better together

"We certainly work closely with other provinces, especially Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as they encountered wild boar around the same time as we did, and have been through the same process," said McKenzie. "As well, they have similar climates. We try and share what has been working in each province and what could be done differently. Although everyone knows their own province best, we all struggle with the same thing: wild boar are here, they reproduce quickly and they are a challenging species to control."

Given those challenges, Albertans are encouraged to report any wild boar sightings to the authorities as soon as possible. You can report sightings through EDDMapS, by calling 310-3276 (FARM) or by filling out the 'Report Wild Boar' form on the Government of Alberta's website.

There is still much work to be done in getting a solid grasp of numbers and the full extent of the threat. When it comes to wild boar management, however, Alberta has been a leader and was the first province to develop a formal control program.

"We don't yet have an abundance of data, but there is considerable research underway," said Evans. "The synergies created by government, academia, Alberta Pork and other organizations is beautiful to see, and it bodes well for the future."

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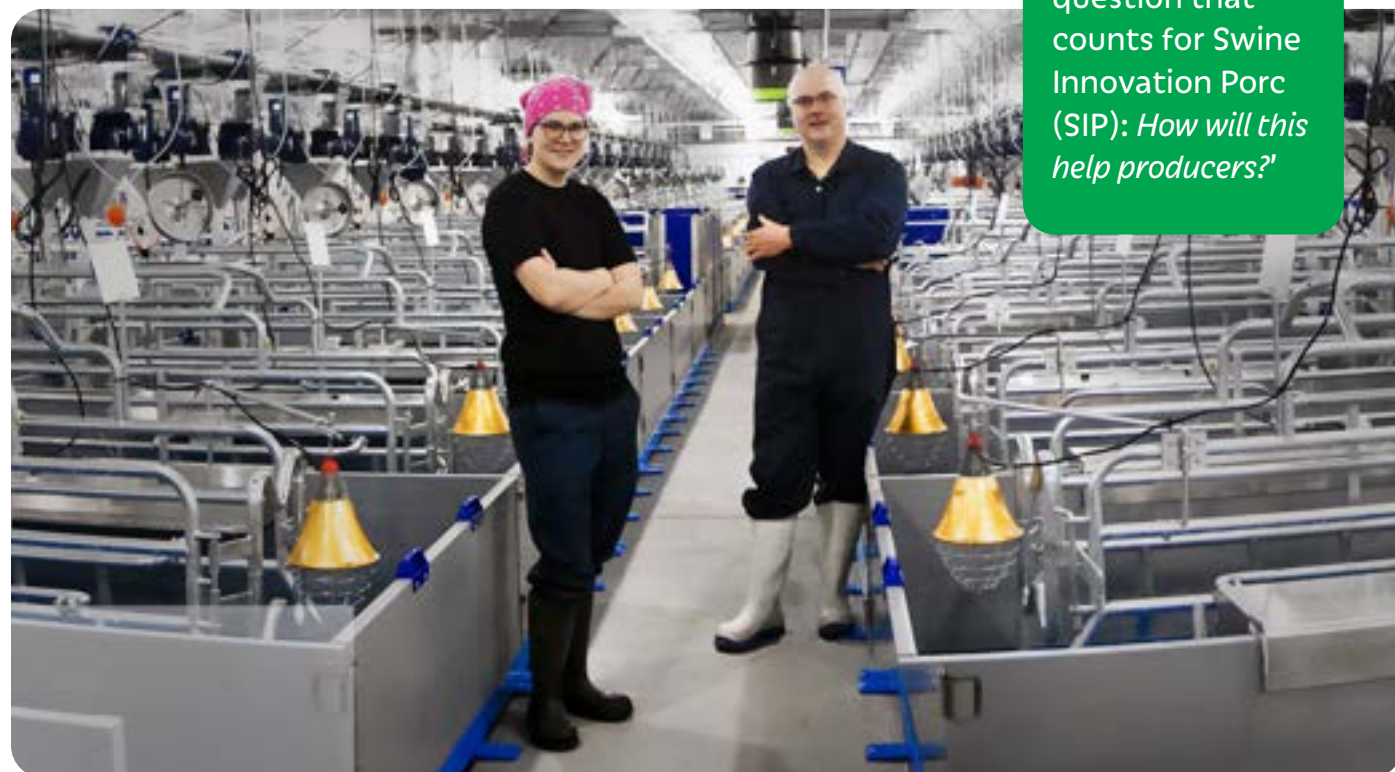






Producers flock to on-farm research trials

Swine Innovation Porc



While most research is performed at specialized facilities like Prairie Swine Centre and the Centre de développement du porc du Québec (CDPQ), shown here, on-farm demonstrations help bridge the gap for producers.

Designing research projects is all about asking the right questions. But when it comes to granting funds for those studies, there's one question that counts for Swine Innovation Porc (SIP): *How will this help producers?*

DESIGNING RESEARCH PROJECTS is all about asking the right questions. But when it comes to granting funds for those studies, there's one question that counts for Swine Innovation Porc (SIP): *How will this help producers?* A prime example is the on-farm demonstration projects, which are an important element of SIP's knowledge transfer strategy under the Swine Cluster program.

"On-farm demos differ from other 'R&D' cluster projects in the sense that they build on previous project results," said Laurence Maignel, geneticist at the Canadian Center for Swine Improvement (CCSI) in Ottawa.

These demos aim at transferring, testing and demonstrating the new technology, knowledge or applications – developed in research barns and laboratories – into the 'real world' of commercial farms. The goal is to accelerate the application of innovation in the swine industry by understanding a producer's experience through

interviews and regular follow-ups and showing the impact on herd performance.

"Most projects have knowledge transfer included in their work plan, but this usually consists of scientific and extension papers, and presentations to the scientific community or industry," said Maignel. "Taking it one step further, we want to identify early adopters and aid them in applying new research insights and applications in their barn."

Testing, testing

On-farm demo studies help assess new technologies for use in a current commercial context: *Is it available? Is it affordable? Is it practical?* As well, they enable objective economic assessments of new practices, which is difficult to perform in research conditions.

"Above all, the best person, by far, to convince a farmer to adopt a new technology or practice is another farmer," said Maignel. "By sharing their experience in producer meetings, videos and social networks, they help show the value of research and its practical impact on their operations."

In Swine Cluster 3, which took place between 2018 and 2023, SIP collaborated with Prairie Swine Centre (PSC) and Centre de développement du porc du Québec (CDPQ) to set up on-farm demonstration projects in Western Canada and Eastern Canada, respectively. Projects from the first and second clusters were selected based on their readiness for adoption. In the process, two main topics were addressed: rotation strategies for enrichment objects for group-housed sows, and the use of water meters in nursery pens for early detection of health issues.

In total, eight participating barns were identified, where PSC and CDPQ experts developed demonstration protocols and collected producer feedback and barn data.

In Swine Cluster 4, which takes place until 2028, new topics for on-farm demonstrations include piglet feeding strategies to reduce antibiotic usage, solutions to mitigate pig building deterioration, and testing environmental footprint analyses.

An enriching experience

A prime example of these demo studies was the SIP-funded project "From Innovation to Adoption: On-farm Demonstration of Swine Research", which was led by Ken Engele at PSC and Geneviève Berthiaume at CDPQ. One aspect of the project examined environmental enrichment and strategies to improve laying areas for gestating sows.

After performing audits at 18 nursery facilities, the project gained insights on the adoption of best management practices related to enrichment in barns.

Boosting enrichment numbers was another key focus of this project, gathering producer experiences in using three types of enrichment: a chain suspended from

Though the cost and time involved in providing enrichment will vary from farm to farm, enhancing your pigs' environment is an investment that can pay big dividends in the long run

the ceiling, a piece of wood suspended by a chain, and a toy ring of aromatic plastic, also suspended by a chain.

"Among the benefits of enrichment cited by participants, several noted a reduction in pen aggression," said Engele. "Of course, as this project demonstrated, enrichment must be carefully thought-out and designed with the pigs in mind. Above all, material should be stimulating and possess various qualities to capture and maintain the user's interest: they should be destructible, edible, deformable, chewable, odorous and clean."

Though the cost and time involved in providing enrichment will vary from farm to farm, enhancing your pigs' environment is an investment that can pay big dividends in the long run: improved animal performance in areas like feed intake, average daily gain (ADG) and feed conversion ratio (FCR); fewer incidents of abnormal behaviour

such as biting, tail-biting and aggression; and reduced animal stress.

Given their value for producers in terms of providing research insights with direct on-farm applications, it's no wonder that on-farm demos are a continual focus for SIP.

If you're a hog producer who would like to take part in one of these on-farm demonstration projects and see the benefits of research come to life right on your farm, stay tuned for information on how to get involved.

These days, the pork business in Canada is more competitive than ever, with a growing need for science-based solutions to strengthen productivity and competitiveness. When it's a matter of testing research findings in the barn and gathering feedback from producers, on farm demonstration projects help turn science into practice. 🐷

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Eliminating mycoplasma pneumonia prevents profit losses

Trenea Hein



Healthy herds are key to profitability. When left unaddressed, mycoplasma pneumonia is thought to cost U.S. producers \$2 to \$5 USD per market hog.

Interest in Mhp elimination programs began growing in the U.S. in the 2010s, and the industry now has many large production systems and independent producers who are Mhp-negative.

MYCOPLASMA PNEUMONIA IS COMMON on Canadian hog farms, and like many diseases, it presents costs to producers through medication but also through decreased feed efficiency and average daily gain. And while it's possible to eliminate the bacteria responsible – *Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae* or 'Mhp' – from swine breeding herds, there are costs to these programs too. These expenses represent not just vaccines and antimicrobials, but also production-related costs.

As David Baumert, Senior Technical Services Veterinarian, Zoetis explains, now is a good time to eliminate this bug.

"Interest in Mhp elimination programs began growing in the U.S. in the 2010s, and the industry now has many large production systems and independent producers who are Mhp-negative or actively working to reach that status," he said. "I expect that the trend toward Mhp-negative status would be similar in the Canadian industry."

After all, the health of breeding herds directly impacts the health ceiling of downstream operations.

"A healthy sow herd will produce a healthier, and intuitively, a more profitable pig flow," said Baumert. "I expect producers will

achieve this in the future through the use of breeding herd health improvement plans, including disease elimination programs. With the current level of technology, Mhp elimination is within reach for most hog producers. And now is a good time to do it."

Elimination requires eight-month herd closure

An Mhp elimination program typically involves a herd closure period lasting about eight months to ensure active shedding of the bacteria is stopped. During this period, gilts obviously do not enter the breeding herd to replace sows lost through any reason. These gilt 'non-entries' also creates 'holes' in the breeding herd inventory, resulting in missed breeding targets, missed piglets farrowed and missed pigs weaned over time.

"If we look at routine maintenance of breeding herd inventory, it generally involves 50 per cent annual replacement rates in response to routine sow culling and mortality," said Baumert. "If we stop voluntary sow culling, we cut the typical needed four per cent



While implementing an elimination program naturally comes with losses, it's important to remember these are one-time, versus longer-term, disease-related losses.

Mhp elimination program costs are typically a one-time expense and primarily include the cost of vaccines and antibiotic medications.

"Therefore, from the point of 'return on investment' and using an example of a \$30 elimination cost versus a \$50-to-\$125 annual cost of disease, ROI ranges from less than three months to just over seven months," he said. "That's a relatively short time for financial recovery. Even an elimination program that is not successful will often provide enough months of relatively high health pig production to justify the cost of the initial elimination program. My personal expectation is that Mhp will be eradicated from the U.S. commercial swine industry within the next 10 years as more and more producers move to eliminate Mhp from their breeding herds and the subsequent downstream pig flow."

Now is the time

Although it might initially seem like a bad idea to implement an Mhp elimination program during a poor market environment, Baumert pointed out that "the economic impact of the production losses related to missed breeding targets are significantly less than when pig prices are higher. Producers should consider the current economy as an opportunity to eliminate this disease and not wait for the overall market economy to improve. In other words, if temporary production losses are an expected part of a disease elimination program, it remains wise to take those production losses during a period when loss of profit was not attached to that loss of productivity."

When producers are ready to put an Mhp elimination program in place, a four-step Mhp elimination program is recommended, implemented in collaboration with experts and your vet. The four steps are determining the breeding herd's Mhp status, assessing intervention options, implementing chosen intervention strategies and monitoring outcomes.

'Personalization' of the plan involves looking at farm-specific characteristics: farm location, biosecurity, gilt availability, pig placement logistics, pig production contractual obligations, Mhp elimination success rates and farm-specific capabilities.

"For example, if we determine by diagnostic testing that a production system currently has a mix of Mhp-infected farms and non-infected farms, we need to be certain that the changes in routine production practices during an Mhp control or elimination program do not result in the inadvertent infection of those farms that are currently not yet infected," said Baumert. "Similarly, customization means determining first if Mhp management is better performed as a simple control program or a more complex elimination program."

He added that fine-tuning actual program timing and extent is also critical, as is ongoing communication among all parties working with a system – from producers and barn workers to transporters and feed mills – so that they remain unified throughout the elimination program. 🐷

monthly replacement rate by half; however, the portion of that rate attributed to sow mortality and involuntary culls, which is upward of two per cent per month, is more difficult to manage. It results in 'inventory holes' of about two per cent of each group of due-to-breed animals."

During the first half of an eight-month herd closure period, sow replacement can be covered through preliminary overstocking of gilts. But after they run out, the 'inventory holes' increases by two per cent every month that the gilts are not allowed to enter the herd.

"Total monthly missed breeding herd targets, starting from the fifth month of a herd closure, relative to annual production, results in a loss of more than two per cent in piglet production for the year," said Baumert explains. "At that rate, a herd that had expected to produce 25 pigs per sow per year would produce only 24. At a time when a weaned pig may be valued at \$50 USD per head in the U.S., this loss is equivalent to \$30 per sow."

Baumert notes that producers can mitigate the cost of herd closure on losses of weaned pigs through using an off-site breeding project; however, it typically requires the acquisition and operating costs of an additional facility and associated staffing.

The cost of not eliminating

When asked about the cost of continuing production with ongoing cycles of mycoplasma pneumonia versus eliminating, Baumert noted it's a case of ongoing, disease-related production losses versus one-time costs.

"While the actual cost of disease will vary with the presence or absence of other compounding respiratory diseases, the cost of Mhp disease to the U.S. industry is commonly accepted to be \$2 to \$5 USD per head. Loss of performance and increased medication may cost up to \$10 per head," he said. "Conservatively, a herd that produces 25 pigs per sow per year could be losing \$50 to \$125 per sow per year, which is an ongoing, annual cost to the system for as many years as the herd remains impacted by Mhp."

On the other hand, Mhp elimination program costs are typically a one-time expense and primarily include the cost of vaccines and antibiotic medications. These costs will vary by farm, but Baumert suggested premium programs have been prepared for as little as \$30 per sow.

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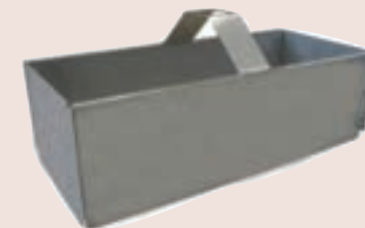
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REDUCED RATE FOR BREEDERS

PROGRAM

All conferences will be presented in simultaneous translation. The letter **F** indicates that this conference will be presented in french by the speaker.

Visit the website for more information on the lectures

DECEMBER 10

3:00 pm	LE PORC SHOW OPENING EVENING AND VISIT OF THE BOOTHS
4:00 pm	PANEL PORK IN A CHANGING WORLD: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD? F
5:30 pm	EXHIBITORS' OPENING COCKTAIL

DECEMBER 11

7:00 am	NETWORKING BREAKFAST AND VISIT OF THE BOOTHS	
9:15 am	POLITICS, MARKETS AND CONSUMERS: GLOBAL PORK INTO 2025 Brett Stuart, MBA, President, Global AgriTrends	
10:05 am	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN SWINE PRODUCTION: WHERE DO WE STAND IN 2024? F Jacquelin Labrecque, Eng., M. Sc., Chief Executive Officer, Ro-Main	
10:55 am	CAN WE WITHSTAND CHINA'S PRESSURES? F Guy Saint-Jacques, B. Sc., Consultant, Speaker and Administrator	
11:45 am	LUNCH AND VISIT OF THE BOOTHS	
WORKSHOP	ANIMAL HEALTH	2:05 pm EMERGING DISEASES, CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES IN SWINE PRODUCTION F Luc Dufresne, DVM, Consultant veterinary, Demeter Services Vétérinaires, Swine Veterinary Partners
		2:50 pm WASHING IS NOT ONLY SOAP AND RINSE! F Yves Garceau, Agr., Senior agronomy advisor, Les Éleveurs de porcs du Québec
	FARM MANAGEMENT	2:05 pm IMMUNOCASTRATION: USERS' GUIDE - 10 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE RECAP F Karine Talbot, DVM, Senior Director of Animal Health, Nutrition and R&D, HyLife
		2:50 pm DECIDING WHERE TO PUT MORE EFFORT TO DO BETTER IN FARROWING? F Emmanuelle Lewis, Agr., M. Sc., Swine nutrition, Olymel S.E.C./L.P.
	MARKETING	2:05 pm FINDING PORK IN THE GROCERY CART, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE RETAIL TRADE F Stéphane Bergeron, Quebec Director, produce merchandising and meat group replenishment, Sobeys/IGA
		2:50 pm CHOICE CUTS OF PORK DECLINED IN DIFFERENT FLAVOURS F Christian Blais, Agr., General Manager, Isoporc inc./Gène Alliance Pierre-Paul Martin, Consultant
3:55 pm	MANAGE CRISIS OR BE MANAGED BY THEM! F Jean-François Lisée, Journalist, author and former leader of the Parti Québécois	
5:00 pm	EXHIBITORS' COCKTAIL	

Starting at 6:15 pm **CELEBRATIONS** — COME CELEBRATE THE EXCELLENCE OF OUR SECTOR



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...with Viking roots



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- Meat quality