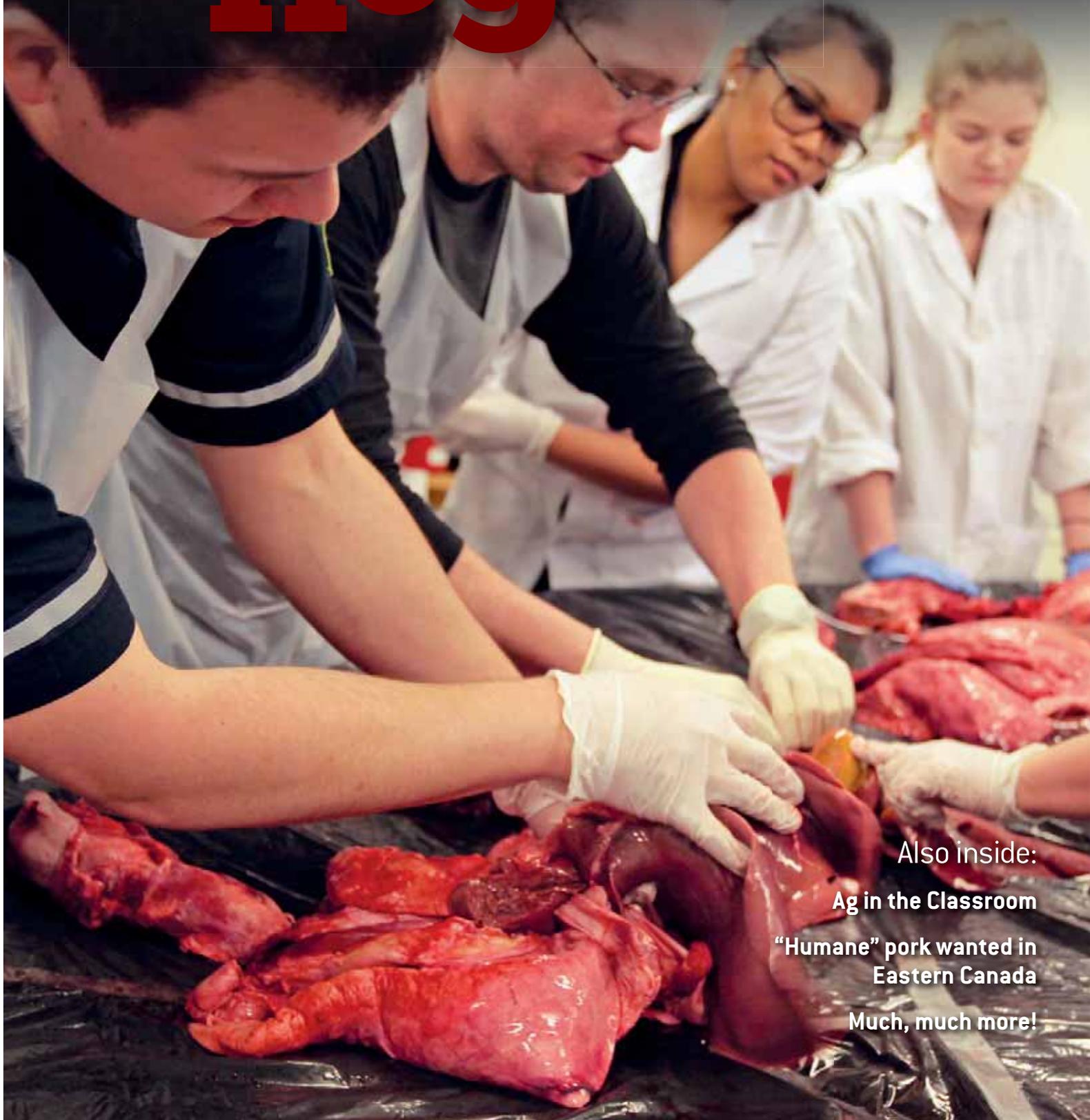


Western Hog JOURNAL

Canadian Publication Mail No. 40062769



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Phone: 780-474-8288
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Email: info@albertapork.com

Publications Mail Agreement
No. 40062769
Return Undeliverable
Canadian Addresses to:
Circulation Department
4828 - 89 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T6E 5K1

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Emergency Medicine Technician students use pig organs and tissues to practise their skills at Lethbridge College. Swine research is valuable not only to agriculture, but also to human health. See our story on page 51!

Photo by Judith Walter



Ag in the Classroom

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Western Hog JOURNAL

Message from the editor

First off, congratulations to **Matthew Wipf** of the **Souris River Colony** in Elgin, Manitoba for winning our survey contest! We received a ton of great answers and feedback, and we will have it all compiled for our summer issue. It was really rewarding and interesting to hear from producers in three different provinces, and it made me feel really proud of the job we do at Western Hog Journal in order to bring you the most important industry news. Matthew, we will be in touch soon, or feel free to give me a call so we can arrange your prize!

It's been a busy season so far for me, and from the sounds of it, the entire industry. My fingers are crossed for a profitable, safe and healthy summer for everyone, and stability for the industry.

In the past six months, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have all had elections. In Alberta, the Conservatives were tossed and the NDP were elected. In Saskatchewan, the ever-popular Brad Wall and his Saskatchewan Party remained on top, and in Manitoba, the NDP were knocked out in favour of the Tories. I still lived in Manitoba in 1999 when Gary Filmon's Conservatives were defeated by Gary Doer's NDP. It was quite the upset, and at the time, I worked at Winnipeg's top-rated news and talk radio station. I remember even some of the news room veterans were surprised. Over the years, I've learned never to pledge allegiance to any one party. Instead, I try to learn about the issues, candidates and platforms for each election. And despite people's various political leanings, I believe many would agree it was time for a change in Manitoba. I'm optimistically awaiting the good news of new barns being built and inventories growing in the province where I lived most of my life.

Although the name of this magazine is still Western Hog Journal, we've really worked hard to grow our scope of coverage to include all of Canada. As we all know, the industry has consolidated and that has brought all of closer together. I think it's really important that producers and stakeholders in all provinces stay connected and keep up on the news that matters to everyone. To that end, I'd like to introduce our talented Ontario-based writer, Trenea Hein. Trenea has a wealth of experience covering agriculture and we're excited to have her on board. We're looking forward to increasing our depth of coverage right across the board, and as always, we want to hear from you. Please send me your story ideas, whether they are local, regional, provincial or national. Your input and your personal views are valued and appreciated.

Have a safe and happy summer! ■

sherimonk@gmail.com

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E. coli is one of the most important causes of post-weaning diarrhea in pigs.¹ But not all *E. coli* are the same. The severity of post-weaning diarrhea caused by *E. coli* varies by strain.

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¹ Fairbrother, J., Nadeau, E. and Gyles, C. 2005. *Escherichia coli* in postweaning diarrhea in pigs: an update on bacterial types, pathogenesis, and prevention strategies. *Anim. Health Res. Rev.* 6(1): 17-39.

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News and Views from Far and Near

FCC adds \$500 million to Young Farmer Loan

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) is adding \$500 million to its ongoing commitment to a loan program aimed at helping young farmers become established in the industry.

Launched in March 2012, FCC's commitment to the Young

Farmer Loan has grown to \$2 billion over four years, with almost 6,000 loans worth more than \$1.3 billion approved, as of Dec. 31, 2015.

"FCC is proud to support the next generation of farmers through every stage of their career," FCC President and CEO Michael Hoffort said. "Products like the Young Farmer Loan can make a real difference for producers looking to enter the industry or grow their business."

The Young Farmer Loan provides qualified producers, under age 40, with loans of up to \$500,000 to purchase or improve farmland and buildings. The loan includes variable lending rates at prime plus 0.5 per cent, a special fixed rate if producers choose that avenue of repayment and no loan processing fees.

Shawn Paget, owner of Riverview Farm Corporation,



used a Young Farmer Loan three years ago to acquire more land for his Hartland, New Brunswick-area potato farm.

"FCC's Young Farmer Loan was exactly what we needed to expand our operations in order to grow a wider variety of cash crops, such as soybeans, corn and cereals," Paget said. "Access to flexible financing is very important when you are starting out or trying to become more established in the industry. It's more than a loan - it's an investment in the future of farming."

Enabling young producers to borrow with no fees at affordable interest rates helps them develop a solid credit history and build their business.

"The long-term success of Canadian agriculture relies heavily on our ability to attract and retain young, innovative people to the business of agriculture," said Lawrence MacAulay, minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. "By helping the next generation become established in this vital industry, FCC is fulfilling an important part of its mandate and a key commitment of this government."

To find out more about the demographic impact of young farmers on Canadian agriculture, read the latest Ag Economist blog post at www.fcc.ca/AgEconomist.

The Young Farmer Loan enhances FCC's suite of existing products and services that support young producers, such as the FCC Transition Loan, FCC Ag Knowledge Exchange events, FCC Publications, FCC on Campus, and FCC Management Software for both accounting and field management.

In 2014-15, FCC approved more than \$2.4 billion in financing to farmers under age 40, representing more than one-quarter of the \$8.6 billion in disbursements last year to help customers expand or start their operations.

For more information on the FCC Young Farmer Loan, visit www.fcc.ca/youngfarmerloan or producers can call the local FCC office at 1-800-387-3232.

Alberta Feed and Consulting introduces two new products

Alberta Feed and Consulting Ltd., recently introduced two new proprietary specialty products in their line of hog feed products

Bio-Gest is intended to be used in the Pre-Grower to Finishing phase. The use of probiotic type feed additives aims to improve the intestinal health of the animal to create conditions that will maximize the digestibility

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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and absorption of nutrients to influence the rate of gain and feed efficiency. Efficiency translates to better feed conversions which results in more economical gains. Enzymes have been known primarily for their ability to break down feed nutrients such as fibre, protein and starch. More recently, research has focused on how enzymes help with gut health and animal performance.

Pre-Track is intended to be fed to lactating and gestating sows as well as hot nursery pigs. Pre-Track specifically targets the micro flora in the gut, increasing beneficial bacteria thereby reducing harmful bacteria resulting in a healthier gut which improves immunity and improved animal performance. Both products are available through in feed inclusion or individually bagged.

For more information please visit www.albertafeed.com or call 1-800-661-4647.

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A conventional air inlet valve set for minimum ventilation creates a long, narrow opening. As a result, the cold, incoming air has too little mass, decreases in speed too rapidly and drops down on the animals. The special jet stream of the Fantura air inlet valve bundles the incoming air, creating a better throw, and directs the air to the ridge of the house where it can mix with the warm air inside the house. For more information contact Glass-Pac at 403-337-3767 or bsnyder@glass-pac.com.



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Osborne Unveils New Website

Osborne Industries, Inc., invites visitors to explore their new website that is designed to provide the ultimate user-friendly experience, with easy to use navigation and improved functionality throughout. The company, which specializes in the design and development of advanced livestock systems, hopes the new site will further elevate their online presence. With improved user experience and increased functionality, the new site allows access to the company's extensive product line and technical services that provide the safest and most efficient solutions for the professional farmer.

The new website, online store and services offer customers rich online content which is simple to navigate and share with others.

The website has been designed using the latest technology, making the site responsive and compatible with today's browsers and mobile devices. "Our new website utilizes the latest technology, allowing visitors to access osbornelivestockequipment.com not only on desktop computers, but on smartphones, tablets, and more," says Jim Hindman, marketing representative at Osborne Industries, Inc. Hindman continues to express his enthusiasm for the new website's capabilities by saying, "Our customers now have the opportunity to get product information wherever they are and whenever they need it."

This increased flexibility and mobility supports the company as they continue to provide customers with the best available livestock management equipment, and offers farmers the best starting point for a successful operation.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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1. No-corrosivity; Data on file. September 2011. 2. Biodegradability; Data on file. November 2014.

CID-16-9001-KENOSAN-JOUR/AD-E

New livestock building fan motor cuts energy consumption by half

Canarm AgSystems and Intelia are combining their expertise in ventilation and intelligent controls to create the agriculture industry's first EC motor for livestock building ventilation systems.

The patent-pending ECsmart™ motor is an electronically commutated (EC) direct current (DC) motor which is more controllable and energy efficient than common alternating current (AC) motors. That means 25 to 70 per cent energy savings, through more efficient operation and more precise variation of the motor.

EC motors have become commonly used in heating and

appliances, but Canarm and Intelia will lead the agriculture market in North America with the first EC motors in agricultural applications.

"We know farmers are challenged by rising electricity costs," says Doug Matthews, vice-president, agricultural and HVAC products, Canarm AgSystems. "Our ECsmart motor is a significant energy saver that will improve livestock building efficiency."

The electronics in the motor are the key to the system. It allows the patent-pending ECsmart motor to be connected to any TRIAC supply signal. That



means that the ECsmart motor can be retrofitted on any control system which works with AC motors, including Intelia's controllers.

"We are constantly innovating in agriculture, in order to bring better solutions to farmers," says Dominic Desy, Intelia chief executive officer. "We are excited by the potential value the ECsmart motor can bring to them."

Another big benefit of the ECsmart motors is that they will last longer than conventional motors because they run cooler.

Energy savings, plus longer life mean the payback for the motors will be quick on Canadian farms.

The ECsmart motor will be available through Canarm AgSystems and its dealers across Canada, as part of the new Canarm VentChoice lineup of ventilation products.

Canarm AgSystem's ventilation products with Intelia's three levels of controllers can provide a solution for every barn from simple to very sophisticated, with the service you have come to know from both.

Watch for more smart barn management innovations coming from Canarm and Intelia. For more information see www.canarm-intelia.com.



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New Gestal mobile app and handheld stick reader

For the last three years the Gestal 3G and its modified free access stall system by Jyga Technologies has proven to be an economical and highly effective way to feed group sows in gestation. New for 2016 a value-added handheld stick reader with Gestal's mobile software application is available for all 3G customers. The proprietary mobile app is installed on a smart device and is paired to an RFID stick reader using Bluetooth.

The app allows an operator to scan the electronic ear tag on a sow while she is in a breeding stall and easily register her to a gestation pen, assign her to an appropriate feed curve, and input her service date.

If a producer enters a pen of sows he can scan an specific animal and her farm identification and transponder number will pop up along with her current day

in gestation, day of farrow, feed curve, and the last seven days of consumption history. The producer can filter a pen of sows and prioritize his search by any of these categories and any necessary settings or configuration changes to a sows profile can be done on the handheld.



The communication and information sharing between the handheld and the Gestal PC software is dynamic and two-way, providing maximum usability. Search criteria can be chosen and

initialized at the PC and transferred to the hand held. Synchronization is performed either wirelessly or via USB cable with the main computer.

The Gestal mobile app is extremely user-friendly, utilizing simple icons and provides all the features and information required to feed sows in pens without over-complicating things. For more information on the Gestal 3G system and the new mobile app and handheld stick reader, please contact Jeff Mah at Envirotech Ag Systems Ltd., at 800-233-6913 or jmah@envirotechag.com.

Ontario Pork re-elects chair and vice-chair

The Ontario Pork Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Amy Cronin was re-elected as chair and Eric Schwindt was re-elected as vice chair at the April 12 board meeting.

As well, Chris Cossitt from Grey Bruce was appointed as

board member for zone three in March. Other board members include Doug Ahrens, John de Bruyn, Oliver Haan, Arno Schober, Teresa Van Raay and Bill Wymenga.

“Sitting as chair of this organization again is a welcome responsibility,” says Amy Cronin, chair of Ontario Pork. “In a year when we released our inaugural social responsibility report, I am excited to work with the board and Ontario's pork producers to further the industry in a positive and transparent way. I am grateful for the continued opportunity to work together with my colleagues on behalf of farmers in our commitment to strengthen the province's pork sector.”

Ontario Pork represents the 1,369 farmers who market 5.17 million hogs in the province. The organization is engaged in many areas, including research, government representation, environmental issues, consumer education and food quality assurance. Ontario Pork is the first livestock commodity group

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



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in the province to set social responsibility benchmarks, demonstrating pork producers' commitment to sustainable farming. Ontario's pork industry "farm to fork" generates \$3.2 billion in economic output and 20,459 in full-time equivalent jobs.

Merck Animal Health introduces first injectable Ileitls vaccine

Merck Animal Health is pleased to introduce PORCILIS™ ILEITIS, the first injectable

vaccine that offers a 20-week duration of immunity (DOI) to aid in the control of ileitis caused by Lawsonia intracellularis, on the Canadian market. Ileitis can significantly impact the health and performance of finishing pigs, curbing average daily gain by 38 per cent and feed efficiency by 27 per cent.

Given as a single, intramuscular vaccination to pigs as young as 3 weeks of age, PORCILIS ILEITIS provides substantially longer protection - 13 additional weeks - compared to the water-administered vaccine on the market. PORCILIS ILEITIS aids in ileitis control, aids in reduction of colonization of L. intracellularis and aids in reduction of duration of fecal shedding. To learn more about PORCILIS ILEITIS, visit <http://www.porcilis.ca>.



Maximus is nominated for Product of the Year at the 2016 World Pork Expo

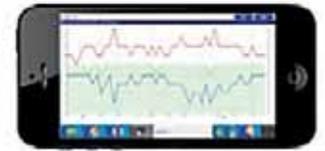
QMA Electronics, a Quebec-based company that markets the state-of-the-art Maximus automated farming

management system, gets exceptional visibility. This Saint-Hubert SME is nominated in the prestigious "Product of the year" category at the 2016 World Pork Expo, the world's largest pork-specific trade show in North America, which will be held in Des Moines, Iowa on June 8-10.



Because of its new Positive-Pressure Ventilation feature, Maximus is now among the best innovations of 2016. "We are very proud of this nomination not only because of the resulting visibility but also for what it says about our company. We have developed this functionality to meet the demands of our customers. And this translates perfectly our philosophy: team up with producers to improve the performance of their facilities and the well-being of their animals", said André Spilmann, Maximus engineer and executive chairman.

The positive-pressure feature ensures animal health protection by reducing the



Average static pressure reading of .15 in the attic - Last 24 hours



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risk of air contamination. It is as easy to use as all other Maximus functionalities thanks to the intuitive software that allows authorized users to quickly adjust temperature and static pressure data, and monitor in real time, from their smart phone or tablet, what is happening in their farm.

Innovative new E. coli solution for nursery pigs now available

Surmax® 200, a new swine product from Elanco Animal Health, represents a first-in-class, animal-use only antibiotic for reduction in the incidence and severity of



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diarrhea in the presence of pathogenic *Escherichia coli* in groups of weaned pigs. Surmax® 200 is an orthosomycin antibiotic, a new class of antibiotics now on the market for animal use only. Administered solely under the direction of a veterinary feed prescription, Surmax® 200 is a solution for pigs up to 14 weeks of age. Fed continuously for 21 days based on clinical assessment, Surmax® 200 is administered in feed to pigs at risk of developing, but not yet showing clinical signs of, diarrhea. Surmax® 200 features a zero-day withdrawal period.

A 2011 efficacy trial compared diarrhea incidence rates* among newly weaned pigs who received Surmax® 200 (80 g/tonne) and a non-medicated control group. The trial found a 31.2 per cent reduction¹ ($p < 0.01$) in diarrhea incidence rate in pigs that received Surmax® 200 compared to the non-medicated control group¹.

As one of the most important causes of post-weaning diarrhea in pigs², *E. coli* can significantly impact herd health and performance. “Elanco Animal Health Canada is excited to be incorporating Surmax 200 into our strong portfolio of products to manage post weaning diarrhea due to *E. Coli*” said Trenna Derald, Monogastric Director Elanco. “With the increasing complexity of *E. Coli* in Canada and the challenges this creates for veterinarians and producers, we are pleased to offer a comprehensive range of solutions.”

Surmax® 200 Important Safety Information Caution:

- As Surmax® 200 Premix is only indicated for use in weaned pigs, responsible antimicrobial use limits its use to pigs less than 14 weeks of age.
- The effectiveness of Surmax® 200 Premix has only been demonstrated when avilamycin-medicated feed was offered before the onset of diarrhea. Use of Surmax® 200 Premix for the treatment of established cases of clinical diarrhea in weaning pigs has not been demonstrated.

Hypor invests in feeding stations in Canada, increases testing capacity by 25%

Hypor is growing the number of pigs it tests by 25 per cent with the addition of several Pig Performance feeding stations at its nucleus facility in Abernethy, Saskatchewan.

The feeding stations are expected to be installed by June 2016. Pigs from the Hypor nucleus facility in Ontario will be moved to the renovated Saskatchewan facility to increase the level of genetic value testing.

“By increasing our feeding stations we’ll be able to collect more phenotypes and make faster genetic improvements for the whole swine industry,” says Hypor Director of Research and Development Abe Huisman. The new Nedap Pig Performance Test stations are the first to be located in Canada.

The Nedap Pig Performance Test stations record the amount of feed intake and the weight of the animal each time the pig visits the feeder. “This is something new and exciting for the industry—traditionally pigs are weighed only five times between birth and the end of the testing period,” says Huisman.

Data from the feeding stations shows the difference in daily feed intake and the daily weight gain of individual

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

Story Ideas?

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Email the editor!

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pigs and will advance the ability Hypor has to select pigs that meet the North American market demand for high feed efficiency later in the growing period.

“Feed costs account for 60 to 70 per cent of the total cost of production,” says Huisman. “If we can make pigs a little more efficient, we’ll be able to help producers be more profitable.”

Hypor will use the data from the feeding stations to determine at what point a pig’s rate of daily gain slows down.

“We want to select the pigs that are lean and efficient at the end of the growing period as well at the beginning of the growing

period to stay in-line with the markets,” says Huisman. North American slaughter weights have increased steadily over the past 20 years.

To meet this market demand for lean, quality pork in heavier pigs, Hypor uses a real-time ultrasound device, versus a computed tomography (CT) scanner, to measure the marbling and muscle-to-fat ratio.

“The ultrasound device allows us to collect more data than we would using a CT scanner which is limited to use on pigs that weigh less than 220 pounds,” says Hypor North America General Manager Luis Prieto. “The average live weight of market pigs is around 290 pounds.”

Utilizing technological advances is one more way

Hypor is able to serve North American pork producers. Hypor tests thousands of pigs in Canada annually for individual feed intake, and provides two commercial sow lines and three boar lines for North American customers. Hypor’s Magnus, Maxter and Kanto boar lines are selected on the ability to maintain feed efficiency longer in the growing period and to produce quality meat at heavier weights.

For more information, please visit www.hypor.com and www.hendrix-genetics.com.

35th million pig in the Topigs Norsvin Pigbase

On January 1, 2016 pig number AG00027053 was born on the breeding farm



of Mai and Geir Aannerud in Reinsvoll, Norway. Reinsvoll is located about 10 kilometers west of the office in Hamar. This pig is a male from the Norsvin Landrace line. It is also the 35th million pig in the breeding database Pigbase. Topigs has been using Pigbase since 2006 and has included the data from the Norsvin since the merger in 2014. Pigbase is the foundation of the Topigs Norsvin breeding and genetic program. ■

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Inventory Report

StatsCan released the January 1, 2016 hog inventory report in late February. The report showed that the Canadian sow herd increased by 1.6 per cent at the start of this year compared to last year. That is about 0.6 per cent more than I was expecting. Eastern sow numbers increased by 1.2 per cent while the western female breeding herd increased by 2.2 per cent. Eastern sow numbers were up by 7,500 head while western sows increased by 12,200 head.



By Kevin Grier

Within the provinces, the Quebec herd increased by less than .5 per cent while the Ontario herd increased by two per cent or 6,000 sows. In Manitoba the herd increased by 1.5 per cent or 4,700 sows and Saskatchewan increased by five per cent or 5,000 sows. The Alberta herd increased by 1.8 per cent or 2,400 sows.

With regard to market hogs, the New Year started with an increase of 75,100 market hogs in Canada compared to 2015. There were 59,400 more market hogs in eastern Canada and just 15,700 additional market hogs in western Canada. The relative difference in market hog numbers compared to sow numbers

is reflective of the larger numbers of weaners that leave the Prairies to go south each week compared to eastern Canada.

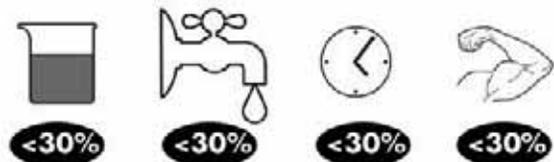
The likely source of the increase in the sow herd came from repopulation of the barns that were mothballed by the federal hog transition program. Under that program barns had to remain empty for at least three years after depopulation. The program began in 2009 and ended in 2011. There has been periodic re-filling of sow barns that had been idled over the past 1-2 years, but no new sow barns.

Questions on the Prairies

There is always ongoing discussion and debate as to how or why there has not been more expansion or at least more finishing barns on the Prairies. For example, Farmscape.ca, April 5 reported that the Saskatchewan Pork Development Board has been working to stimulate interest within the province in building new finishing barns to accommodate a growing demand among the processing plants in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan for slaughter hogs. Sask Pork Chair Florian Possberg is quoted as saying, "Our slaughter capacity has outstripped our supplies in western Canada whereas in the U.S., they've continued to grow there. In the Midwest there's literally thousands of barns going up in the last number of years. Their hog finishing capacity in the Mid-west has supplied plants there that have been running near full capacity. Our plants are nowhere near

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capacity and so there is quite a need for additional hogs here in western Canada.”

Another article in Farmscape.ca dated April 1 quotes Andy Cardy, a marketing representative with h@ms, as saying that the construction of new finishing barns in Manitoba would allow more of the weanlings currently being shipped to the U.S. to be grown and processed in Manitoba. Cardy says, “As we know, Saskatchewan has never had an interruption in expansion where Manitoba has and we’re hoping to get Manitoba back on stream with some extra barns...”

Of course, the reasons for the lack of finishing space have been discussed for a few years. The reasons for the lack of expansion run the gamut from the Manitoba NDP malevolence toward the hog industry, high construction costs, the Canadian dollar, and feed spreads. As well, packer competition or lack thereof also plays a role.

During 2015, according to StatsCan data, there were 3.7 million weaners/feeders that left western Canada for the U.S. That compares to 3.24 million in 2014, an increase of 14 per cent. During the first two months of 2016 (latest official data), the number of w/f going south has increased by another four per cent according to StatsCan.

Demand for those pigs is only going to grow as the 20,000 head per day Morrell plant in Sioux Falls just started taking Canadian w/f finished pigs in April. Hormel is likely going to start taking Canadian finished pigs in a month or two. That is in addition to the fact that Tyson and JBS have been taking Canadian w/f pigs even during COOL.

Neither Morrell nor Hormel is likely to take market hogs any time soon. Tyson takes a limited number of Ontario-based market hogs at its Logansport plant but there are no plans to increase numbers there or anywhere else now. JBS of course has been talking Ontario market hogs for a couple of years in Louisville, but again no real desire to increase the numbers coming from Canada to that plant.

The point is that while there may not be a U.S. floor for Canadian market hogs, the U.S. still provides an indirect floor through its increasing demand for w/f pigs. The w/f pigs provide real competition for prairie packers. The 3.7 million head that left the prairies is more than enough to add another 20,000 head per week to Brandon and a second shift of another 45,000 head to Red Deer. The added 20,000 at Brandon would nicely top up their current 70-74,000 weekly tally and make the plant very cost efficient.

The question often asked by producers is why Olymel and Maple Leaf don’t compete more – or at all – for hogs. The refrain is often that if there was just \$5 more per pig, they would get all they needed. Of course, the reality is much

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

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different given the last two years of very good returns and yet only steady kills and more numbers going south. In other words, higher prices and record profits did not generate notable expansion numbers. Given that evidence, the two bigger packers must consider that pricing competition through more lucrative contracts would be a zero sum game. Any numbers taken from one would likely be lost again in any price war. The other reality is that there are not many other places in the world where two plants that are 1,200 kilometers away from each other are expected to be in fierce competition for live hogs. Given geography a natural balance takes place while smaller packers such as Britco/Thunder Creek have no need or desire to stir the market. HyLife of course competes for hogs at the margins but the bulk are filled with their own supplies or joint ventures. An outsider looking in would ask what would be the point of vigorous price competition.

The bigger picture however, is that the record profits of 2014 and strong returns of 2015 only got equity-strained hog operations back onto their feet after the financial carnage of the previous years. That two-year sample size should not be seen as evidence that higher prices would not lead to expansion. It is likely that producers would need to see a pricing commitment from packers in order to see through an

investment in barns. As such, while it may not make sense to directly pull producers from another packer through pricing competition, there is an argument that an aggressive pricing move could generate more investment on the prairies. It is only an argument, however, and the risk is that the higher prices simply would be money left on the table with no supply response.

Ironically the fact that the U.S. is aggressively expanding slaughter capacity is another reason for Canadian packers to keep their powder dry. There are new plants going up in the U.S. and in a few years, U.S. kill capacity could be up to about 2.8 million per week compared to the current 2.4 million now. While now might be a profitable time to be a packer, by then packers will likely be spending long periods in the red.

The bottom line is that while it appears quiet in the West, there is plenty going on under the surface in the western hog industry. ■

Kevin Grier Market Analysis and Consulting provides industry market reports and analysis, as well as consulting services and public event speaking. You can reach him at kevin@kevingrier.com to comment or to request a free two-month trial of the Canadian Pork Market Review.

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“Humane pork” wanted in Eastern Canada

Écolait, duBreton and others want more farmers to produce humanely-raised pork in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes

By Treena Hein

It’s no secret that the tide is changing in Canada’s livestock industry. For example, the Canadian egg industry is turning away from battery cages due to restaurant and retailer pressure. Gestation crates for sows have been banned in several U.S. states, Australia, New Zealand and the entire European Union.

techniques, business has leveraged the issue to create niche marketing plans throwing words like “humane” and “organic” around to plug into the mindsets of socially conscious – if not informed – consumers.

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You have to know that farms producing under the new Code would not meet our standards. CH and organic production require more space, no farrowing crate, bedding at all stages of production, no physical alteration (tail docking or teeth clipping), no antibiotics, etc. ~ Vincent Breton, President of duBreton

In Canada, a turning point for pork production may have been reached in December of 2012 when CTV’s released the infamous W5 video. By 2014, the National Farm Animal Care Council had released a new Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs, outlining how pigs should be treated on farm. The code mandates that all newly-built facilities must feature group sow housing instead of gestation crates. It also specifies larger pen space allowances, and includes a requirement to provide pain control and environmental enrichment for the animals.

As the industry has adapted and continued to improve its production

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Within a year, U.S.-based fast food chain Chipotle Mexican Grill made headlines on the pig welfare front when it stopped serving carnitas (a type of pork sandwich) in many of its restaurants. It stemmed from company animal welfare auditors suspending purchases from one supplier who violating standards. On its website, Chipotle is clear about its definition of humane: “Our ‘Responsibly Raised’ pork comes from pigs that are raised with outdoor access or in deeply bedded pens, free of breeding, gestation, and farrowing crates.”

Market research tells us the demand for organic food is going to continue to grow over the next three years and Field Gate Organics is working to meet market needs. ~ President Ted Soudant

Sourcing pork which met Chipotle’s in-house definition of humane wasn’t easy. The chain had to go outside the U.S. to two suppliers in the United Kingdom (Karro Food and Tulip) and now also buys humane pork from Canada’s duBreton. By mid-November of 2015,



Pictured: duBreton President Vincent Breton

carnitas were again available in all Chipotle restaurants.

With the demand for so-called humanely-raised pork rising, and duBreton is one of two Quebec-based meat firms calling on more producers in eastern Canada to sign contracts with them to help meet the demand. Based in Rivière-du-Loup, duBreton

is already the largest producer and processor of organic and natural pork in North America. It already works with about 350 small family farmers already (about 10 per cent of these are organic), but won’t say exactly how many organic or humanely-raised pigs they market. President Vincent Breton does say that roughly 40 per cent of their sales

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In September 2015, duBreton committed to marketing an additional 300,000 organic and CH pigs by 2018, from within its own production facilities (investment of \$30 million) and also outside contracted farmers. When asked what instigated the decision, Breton says it had nothing to do with the new code of practice. "We started to support and invest in organic and CH hog production a long time ago," he explains. "You have to know that farms producing under the new Code would not meet our standards. CH and organic production require more space, no farrowing crate, bedding at all stages of production, no physical alteration (tail docking or teeth clipping), no antibiotics, etc."

DuBreton's humanely-raised pork is certified by 'Humane Farm Animal Care' and 'Global Animal Partnership' and its organic pork complies with Canadian, U.S. and international standards, with independent audits at least once a year. Organic and humanely-raised certification requires that pigs have more space (with organic pigs fed only organic, non-GMO feed) and air quality must be better as well. On conventional pig farms, enclosures measure a minimum of 0.6 by 2.1 metres, while in organic/humane facilities, they are at least 2.7 by 2.7 metres. Pigs on humane and organic farms are also provided with hay for resting and rooting.



Wanted happy and alive: "humanely-raised" pork

Further explaining the decision to expand humane production, Breton says, "We chose to go this direction because it's a very competitive industry. The environmental regulations in Quebec are tougher than anywhere else, and we're not a huge company compared to others out there. We wanted to be different and it also suits our values as a family business. We want to do things that others don't do, and our customers are very supportive that we are serving the organic and CH markets." In addition to supplying Chipotle Mexican Grill, duBreton sells pork to Whole Foods, Sobeys, Longo's and more, throughout Canada, the US, Japan, Australia and beyond.

For both the farms owned by duBreton as well as contracted family farms, Breton is hopeful that a complete conversion to organic and CH pig rearing will be completed a year or two after the 300,000 additional pigs are added by 2018.

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the conversion/construction itself. The investment part is the most difficult. The barns require double the investment a commodity barn would require (with animals getting close to the triple the space a commodity animal gets). In our case, we work with farmers on a cost of production base and we take a huge part of the risk...No market exposure – this is the biggest selling point of our program.”

Ontario Pork was “instrumental” in launching the duBreton program, says Ontario Pork marketing manager Patrick O’Neil, “simply to create new market opportunities for Ontario producers.” He explains that in the early stages, “we hosted a meeting with potential farmers and a feed supplier to talk about the potential program. It was a small market when it was first developed, so matching supply to demand was important. Ontario Pork introduced new farmers to the program as it grew.”

O’Neil notes that interested producers and feed representatives are talking to Ontario Pork every week about the opportunity, but describes it as “still very much” a niche market. “The organic option offers the most premiums and the most cost, as outdoor access is complicated and feed costs are expensive and often difficult to source,” he observes. “Our focus is to make sure that farmers understand the premiums and the responsibilities of making the commitment.”

“It is a long and costly process,” he notes, “getting the contract approved, looking for financing, getting the plans and lay out done and approved, getting the authority permits and

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<http://www.grassfedbeefontario.com/Pasture-Pork>

Thatcher Farms <http://www.thatcher-farms.com>

MeadowSweet Farm (organic)

<http://www.meadowsweetfarm.ca/beef-and-pork>

Harley Farms <http://www.harleyfarms.ca>

Magda Farms pasture-based pork

<http://magdafarm.blogspot.ca>

Heatherlea Farm <http://heatherlea.ca/butcher/>

Sideroad Natural Farm

<http://sideroadnaturalfarm.com>

Alverstone Farm <http://www.alverstonefarm.ca>

Everdale

<http://everdale.org/our-site/animal-welfare/>

Ashton Glen pasture pork

<http://www.ashtonglenfarm.ca/>

In Quebec, Rheintal organic farmers

<http://www.rheintal.ca/en/our-farms/pastured-pork>

Many more natural or organic operations in each province are listed here:

<http://www.eatwild.com/products/canada.html>

O'Neil points to Écolait Limited of St-Hyacinthe, Quebec and Field Gate Organics of Zurich, Ontario as other companies also looking for new farmers to sign contracts to produce humanely-raised/organic pork. "We will be a party to any contract with Écolait, reviewing grading data and ensuring prompt payment," he says. "At the moment, [deals for] many animals going to Field Gate are often done directly with the plant. Most of the options right now are based on cost of production plus \$50 in premiums (for shipping animals in the correct weight range as well as meeting the production criteria). Turn-around farrowing crates, raised without antibiotics and, finished with bedding are three of the big costs." O'Neil says the costs of converting vary by operation, so a return-on-investment timeline is impossible to provide.

The pork production of Field Gate Organics is all based in Ontario, but the company won't provide numbers of pigs or farms involved. When asked about new recruitment goals, President Ted Soudant says "Market research tells us the demand for organic food is going to continue to grow over the next three years and Field Gate Organics is working to meet market needs. We are always interested in hearing from new

organic farmers or farmers willing to make the transition...We have put a support program in place."

Media outlets also report that in August 2015, Écolait signed several contracts with producers in the United States for pigs raised under specific animal welfare protocols. These are apparently annual contracts recurrent for five years. Écolait has also reportedly signed eight-year deals with pig farmers in Prince Edward Island. In addition, in 2014 the firm began a unique relationship with the University of Prince Edward Island's veterinary school to develop best farming practices to protect animal well-being.

Outside of these big companies calling on more producers in Eastern Canada to join them, there are more and more independent operations in Eastern Canada marketing natural and humanely-raised pork (see sidebar). Toronto-based Rowe Farms for example, states that strict environmental and animal welfare protocols are upheld on partner farms through annual inspections, an annual third-party audit, signed affidavits and more. Nutrafarms, based in Barrie Ontario, offers natural, humane antibiotic-free meat, poultry and fish, with pigs raised crate-free. ■

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Industry News

Covering the bases - Alberta Pork goes to bat for producers

Submitted by Alberta Pork

For baseball fans, April means spring training, so it's fitting that Alberta Pork is in full swing these days on behalf of producers. What does that mean exactly? To us, it's about covering all the bases.

Producers

Nobody works harder at a more important job than these men and women. That's why I love what I do, especially when regional meetings come around. In late May and early June, we'll be seeing a lot of producers at gatherings throughout the province. This year, the agenda will be jam-packed with talks and updates around a number of issues facing our industry, including Bill 6, changes to CQA, social licence, ractopamine, transportation, biosecurity and the revised code of practice. Fortunately, Frank and Darcy have a knack for covering a lot of ground in a short time, making these meetings fast-paced and informative. The meetings are also a prime opportunity for producers to offer feedback on what we're doing and advice on how to do it even better. While we always strive to stay on the cutting edge when it comes to communication and new technology, nothing beats face-to-face for really connecting with the people that matter most. And if meaningful dialogue with your colleagues around burning issues isn't enough to draw you in, there's always the free pork dinner.

Speaking of feedback and interaction, we'd like to thank everyone who participated in our recently concluded producer survey. In order to get a clear picture of where our industry stands today, we spoke with almost every Alberta pork producer over the last several months, allowing us to better represent them in our work with government, consumers and the media. Staff burned the midnight oil (or at least the six o'clock oil) to get it done, and the results (we'll be distributing a summary of them soon) were well worth it.

Consumers

Producing world-class pork is half the battle; marketing it is the other half. To that end, we run a number of events throughout the year to spotlight Alberta producers and their product. Next up is the amazing and

steadily growing Porkapalooza BBQ Festival organized by Alberta Pork and the new Porkapalooza BBQ Festival Society. Now in its third year, the event runs June 17-19 at Clarke

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

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Industry News

Park/Stadium. In a city filled with festivals, Porkapalooza stands out as the only one to offer a triple threat – the best bands, finest food and most talented team in Canada, the Grey Cup champion Edmonton Eskimos. For the first time, Porkapalooza offers a ticketed event that includes some of the biggest names in music and Canada's largest tailgate party at the first home game for the recently crowned CFL champs. The only thing that can make it better is if producers come out and help us promote them. As Canadians, we tend to treat "blowing our own horn" like a federal offence. But when you have the best pork on the planet, the real crime would be keeping it to yourself.

Another way we engage the public is through annual events such as Aggie Days, which wrapped up another year in early April. Over five days in Calgary, we spoke to thousands of families about our producers: Who they are, what they do and how they do it. We invest a lot of time and effort in these activities because they're a great chance to dispel misinformation around the pork industry and give people a glimpse of what life on the farm is really like. In July, we'll be doing it again but for more people over a longer time span at the Calgary Stampede. A few producers have already expressed an interest in attending, and we're hoping for a lot more. Whether you can spare a couple of days or just an hour or two, there's no better place to share the Alberta pork story with the public, and no one they'd rather hear it from than you.

Future consumers

Also known as "children", these young people are the key to sustaining our industry for the long haul. Since most of them have never visited a farm, let alone lived on one, education is critical to capture their interest early on and help them separate myth from reality as they grow up. That's the impetus for several initiatives that Alberta Pork is either spearheading or actively involved in these days.

As part of "Pork in the Classroom", we've hired a pair of nutritionists for presentations in Edmonton, Red Deer and Calgary to grades 4, 9 and 12, with cooking classes for the two higher grades.

During Ag Literacy Week, we served breakfast to 500 high school students in Beaumont and 200 in Calgary. That was accompanied by some "food for thought" as we taught them about the importance of agriculture and highlighted some career opportunities to keep in mind.

In addition to Aggie Days and Stampede, Alberta Pork will be part of AMAZE-ing Agriculture in Edmonton and City Slickers in Stony Plain, where we'll be talking to students and sparking their interest with our new Super Pig tattoos and info sheet about the industry.

We're also excited to be involved with the Classroom Agriculture Project (CAP), in which volunteers teach rural kids all about agriculture. This is another place where producer participation would have a huge impact, so please let us know if you'd like to help educate some Grade 4 children about the pork industry and have a lot of fun in the process.

Government

As Bill 6 and Bill C-246 – concerning animal cruelty – are currently demonstrating, building strong ties with government is more critical than ever. Politicians are hardworking and well intentioned, but nobody can be an expert on everything. That's where Alberta Pork comes in. Through ongoing communication, meetings and events, we inform the provincial and federal governments on the state of our industry. In doing so, we hope to improve the odds that future legislation and decisions will reflect the unique demands of pork production and the immense contribution we make to the economy. While it's a long term process that doesn't always bear fruit, even small successes in this area can have a big impact on the producer's bottom line.

Whew! Between producers, consumers, students and government, it's a lot of ground to cover. And I haven't even talked about how we are assisting producers with Growing Forward II applications, biosecurity, swine health or business risk management issues. Just as in baseball, there are hits and misses along the way. But if, at the end of the day, producers end up safe at home, we know we've done our job.

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Olymel, ATRAHAN tickled pink with new pork partnership

By Geoff Geddes

What do you get that hard-to-buy-for person on their 25th birthday? Socks and neckties have been done to death, so what about a new hog slaughtering partner? Okay, it's not for everyone, but for Olymel L.P., Canada's largest hog processor, it's the perfect fit.

No wonder then that as they celebrate 25 years in existence, Olymel was thrilled to get the green light from the Competition Bureau of Canada for their business partnership announced last year with ATRAHAN Transformation Inc. After extensive negotiations, the two companies agreed to merge their hog slaughtering, butchering and processing operations. While the value of the deal was not disclosed, the parties involved make it noteworthy to say the least.

Follow the leader

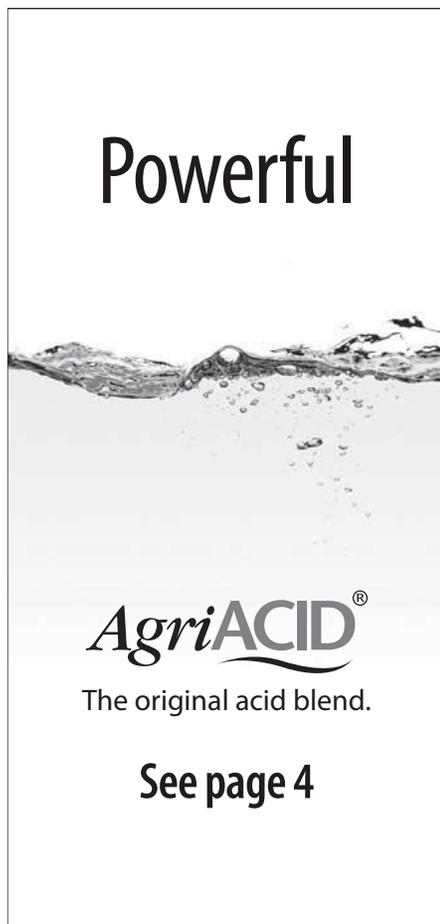
With over 10,000 employees, including 7,000 in Quebec, Olymel L.P. is a leader in the production, processing and

distribution of pork and poultry meats in Canada. The company has large facilities in Ontario, New Brunswick, Alberta and Saskatchewan and boasts annual sales of \$2.8 billion. In giving his perspective on the deal, Olymel President and CEO Rejean Nadeau emphasized the "sum of the expertise and know-how possessed by [the] two companies".

There is clearly a differentiation being made between pork operations in the East and West. ~ Kevin Grier, market analyst

All in the family

While smaller in size, family-owned ATRAHAN Transformation Inc. and its staff of 350 bring 60 years of experience to the table. Based in Yamachiche in the St Maurice Valley in Quebec, they have \$200 million in yearly sales and an annual slaughtering capacity of nearly one million hogs.



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“The Trahan family sees this alliance as an assurance that it will be able to take the company it has developed over the past six decades to a new level,” said President Denis Trahan.

Meeting of the minds

As any good divorce lawyer will tell you, not all pairings are well conceived. But Olymel’s corporate communications spokesperson feels this match was meant to be.

“We share many values in terms of how we do business,” said Richard Vigneault. “As well, Olymel exports to over 65 countries and ATRAHAN to over 50, so there will be some very interesting synergies generated by this partnership.”

The meaning behind the meeting

Assessing a big deal means looking at the big picture. Kevin Grier, a leading market analyst and owner of Kevin Grier Market Analysis and Consulting Inc., said that “unlike much of the industry in Quebec, these two companies are not vertically integrated and still deal with independent producers. By working together, they can pool their resources on procurement with those producers.”

Grier has heard from certain Quebec producers that ATRAHAN was weighing the option to sell for some time.

He sees this transaction as giving them access to Olymel’s resources for marketing and merchandising around the world and to branded products.

For Olymel, the reasoning behind the deal may be more involved.

“While mentioning the positive results for western (Red Deer) pork, the [Olymel] annual report noted that margins in the eastern fresh pork sector were the lowest of the past ten years,” said Grier. “There is clearly a differentiation being made between pork operations in the East and West.”

If there was any doubt about the differentiation, Grier pointed to a segment of the report that said “in 2016, the continuing difficult situation in the Eastern Fresh Pork Sector requires drastic steps to optimize our operations in order to return to profitability.”

In Grier’s view, “that is a dramatic statement for an annual report to make”.

Vigneault also referenced that report, but from a “glass half full” perspective.

“We have announced in our annual report this year that the persistently difficult conditions in the Eastern fresh pork sector will require us to take robust efforts to optimize our

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



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operations and ensure a return to profitability,” said Vigneault. “We are going to work hard on this sector so we can meet our expectations and serve all of our clients’ demands, no matter where they are.”

Let’s make a deal (or two)

Rarely in business is a move made in isolation, and this partnership is no exception.

“Last November, Groupe Robitaille – a Quebec livestock producer and processor – and Olymel announced the signing of an agreement in principle to enter into a business partnership with Aliments Lucyporc of Yamachiche,” said Grier.

Aliments Lucyporc is a hog slaughtering, butchering and processing firm owned by Groupe Robitaille. For Grier, the deals with ATRAHAN and Lucyporc reinforce that while Olymel is a global company, “its plant structure in Quebec is outdated and in need of restructuring”. Change is in the air, and Grier said those changes will be related to ATRAHAN and Lucyporc.

“With these two partnerships, it regroups five plants (3 Olymel, 1 Trahan and 1 Lucyporc),” said Grier. “The Lucyporc plant is dedicated to a niche product, so it’s probably safe (easier traceability). For the Trahan plant, its geographic position and a good pool of suppliers will probably help it stay online.”

Onwards and upwards?

To ensure enough competition in the marketplace, the rules around transactions like the Olymel-ATRAHAN partnership require approval from the Competition Bureau of Canada before a deal can be finalized. Now, with that approval in hand, what’s next?

“Considering that Olymel is a major player and the main pork exporter in Canada, this move is good for us and for the industry,” said Vigneault. “We bring very high standards of operating and processing, and together, the two companies can reinforce their markets while tapping into new ones. That means jobs, sales and economic activity, so it’s positive all the way along.”

For ATRAHAN’s customers, Vigneault said they can be reassured that partnering with a company the size of Olymel is a secure signal for the future and good news for all stakeholders.

According to Grier though, not everyone will be reassured by the deal.

“Quebec hog slaughter capacity is running at just about 80 per cent with Quebec-based hogs. That is, Quebec markets about 140,000-150,000 Quebec-based pigs per week, but the slaughter capacity is over 180,000.”

Therefore, Grier said that “there are over 20,000 head per week coming from Ontario which are topping up the kills. The producers who are going to be most concerned about all of this are the Ontario producers that ship those hogs. They might have been a little nervous about the new hog production up in northern Quebec, but this (the Olymel-ATRAHAN transaction) is much more of a direct threat.”

Furthermore, Grier observed that “from the outside looking in, this looks like Olymel is slowly buying Trahan.” He cautions that “they must move carefully, because producers supplying the Trahan plant often do so because they want to sell to an independent as opposed to Olymel”. ■

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Ag in the Classroom cultivating connections

A national initiative continues to sow the seeds of knowledge by cultivating a link between agriculture and education

By Jennifer McFee

A national initiative continues to sow the seeds of knowledge by cultivating a link between agriculture and education.

Agriculture in the Classroom Canada is rooted in a philosophy that's as easy as A-B-C by providing accurate, balanced and current resources to schools.



Photo: Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

Board chair Johanne Ross explains the program aims to plant an interest in agriculture so students know where their food comes from.

“The goal is about creating an awareness and understanding of the agriculture industry. That’s an overlying mandate of what we do,” Ross says.

It allows them to grasp the concept of where their food comes from. ~ Laurel Lyons, Manitoba Pork

“It’s about trying to inspire kids to take an interest in the industry and understand it because there’s all sorts of hot-button topics. Lots of folks who aren’t involved in agriculture would love to tell the agriculture story – but they’re not doing a good job of telling our story for us, so we need to tell the real story.”

At the same time, the program presents agriculture as a viable career option, even to young sprouts who aren’t rooted in a farming family.

“They often think you can only get involved in agriculture if you’re going to be a farmer. You get a lot of kids not even looking at agriculture because they don’t think they belong

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

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there. However, we have so many dynamic careers in agriculture,” Ross says.

“There’s so much opportunity and we’re not filling all the roles that we need to fill right now – and that’s only going to get worse. So we really want to get students curious about agriculture so they know it’s more than just farming. If they’re not from a farm, that doesn’t mean that they can’t be involved in our industry.”

In order for these goals to come to fruition, the national coalition formalized last year, stemming from ongoing input of seven provincial groups: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

On a national level, Agriculture in the Classroom Canada manages several initiatives, including Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week, delivered this year from Feb. 28 to March 5 in schools across the country.

Also in 2016, the Canadian group is managing the educational components for the International Year of Pulses. As well, they’ve developed a resource called All About Food, which features a book and interactive website geared for Grade 9 to 12 students. The website includes links to resources about livestock, pork processing and hog production, among many other topics.

Each provincial group functions independently while also falling under

the national umbrella. Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario run the program as non-profits, while the remaining provinces operate under government or farm organizations.

In Manitoba, teachers can bring agriculture to their students through about a dozen flagship opportunities.

...it's critical that we are able to engage students when they are young so that they don't form these beliefs that are based on misconceptions and myths and propaganda. ~ Sara Shymko, Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

“That could involve them going on a field trip or us coming into their classroom. We have everything from school tours that we offer at Manitoba Ag Days to specific events,” says Ross, who is also the executive director of Agriculture in the Classroom Manitoba. “There is always something going on.”

The 15-member Manitoba board represents a cross-section of the agriculture industry, including input from the hog sector.



Photo: Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

For board member Laurel Lyons, special events co-ordinator for Manitoba Pork, the best part is watching the children's excitement blossom.

In particular, an event called the Amazing Agriculture Adventure generates enthusiasm in the kids. It happens twice per year, with a two-day event in Brandon as well as a three-day event in Winnipeg held at the Farm and Food Discovery Centre. In small groups, students visit different agricultural stations, including two areas that focus on the hog industry.

Through this experience, the students see different stages of hog production starting at the breeding barn, followed by the sow barn, the farrowing barn and the nursery barn.

"Kids love it, especially when there's fresh piglets. That's totally exciting because they're just so tiny. You really get to see the size of the animal in comparison to the sow," Lyons says. "It's a good experience for the students and it's a bit of a surprise for them as well."



Photo: Manitoba Pork

Then the lesson comes full circle when students enjoy Manitoba pork on a bun for lunch.

"It allows them to grasp the concept of where their food comes from," Lyons says. "It doesn't just show up. There is this

whole chain of events that is happening before it actually gets to you."

Another popular program is the Made in Manitoba Breakfast, which includes tasty pork products.

"The Manitoba Breakfast co-ordinator

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

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Here's how to contact provincial Agriculture in the Classroom organizations:

Alberta: Alberta Agriculture in the Classroom Program, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry at 403-340-5339 or www.agric.gov.ab.ca/ageducation

Saskatchewan: Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan at 306-933-5520, programs@aitc.sk.ca or www.aitc.sk.ca

Manitoba: Agriculture in the Classroom Manitoba at 1-866-487-4029, info@aitc.mb.ca or www.aitc.mb.ca

Ontario: Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. at 905-878-1510 or info@oafe.org or www.oafe.org

Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia Agricultural Awareness, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture at 902-893-6598 or www.novascotia.ca/agri/programs-and-services/educational-resources/ag-awareness/

Prince Edward Island: PEI Agriculture Sector Council at 902-892-1091 or info@peiagsc.ca or www.peiagsc.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador: Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture at 709-747-8311 or christa@nfa.ca or www.aitcnl.ca



Photo: Manitoba Pork

talks about each product and relates it back to the farm where it's produced," Lyons says. "She tailors her presentation to the age group, but there's a tie-in for pork because they can talk about pigs while they're having a true pork breakfast sausage."

In Saskatchewan, the Agriculture in the Classroom program also offers memorable and mouth-watering lessons to students.

Executive director Sara Shymko says they like to focus on outreach activities across the province, including a hands-on initiative called Food Farms. Offered in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, this program allows

students to learn where their food comes from. Through a hands-on approach, students help to grow ingredients and prepare meals such as burgers and fries, pita and hummus, and pizzas.

"In the spring, the Grade 3 students come out to a farm and plant the ingredients for a pizza or a different theme. When they're in Grade 4, they come back in the fall and they harvest," she says, noting the connection to the hog industry through popular pizza ingredients like pepperoni and bacon.

"It allows students to find a way to connect agriculture to the food they're eating, especially at the elementary

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level. They see that there's a lot that goes into it with a lot of farmers involved."

For high school students, the focus shifts towards food security, careers in agriculture and connections to science.

"At that age, we're moving beyond the production level because students can grasp more information. We can get into some of the hot topics around agriculture, all designed for students to explore them in a way that's science-based, but also inquiry-based," Shymko says.

"Students are exploring areas that they're interested in and it's not just about presenting facts to them. It's really hands-on and experiential."

Since youth are often exposed to an endless barrage of agriculture myths and misconceptions, it's important to convey accurate information to them.

"There's a huge disconnect with what actually happens on the farm and in the ag industry. Farmers are really at risk of losing their social licence to operate efficiently and effectively because there is such a disconnect – and people just don't understand what's going on at a farm. For example, they hear antibiotics must be a bad thing without ever meeting a farmer or learning anything about it," Shymko says.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



Photo: Manitoba Pork



Photo: Manitoba Pork

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OAFE Teacher Ambassadors learning about swine handling systems at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show. Photo credit OAFE

“In the grand scheme of things, for there to be favourable agricultural policies and general societal acceptance of modern agriculture practices, it’s critical that we are able to engage students when they are young so that they don’t form these beliefs that are based on misconceptions and myths and propaganda.”

At the same time, it’s not enough to merely present the facts to the students.

“The correct information is important, but if it’s just information, it gets lost. They don’t listen. But if you engage the students and they have fun and they make that connection, then all of a sudden it starts to shift their values and their perceptions and their image of agriculture. That is what’s really critical,” Shymko says.

“When we take kids to a farm, they’re amazed. The teachers are amazed, too, by the passion of the farmers and the high technology that’s used. And when students have a really positive experience with agriculture, they’re more likely to second-guess what they see in social media or what somebody tells them.”

Our goal is to have all of Canada coast to coast around the table for Ag in the Classroom Canada. ~ Johanne Ross

In another way to create connections, Agriculture in the Classroom in Manitoba and Saskatchewan is also piloting a program led by Farm Credit Canada to link high school students with the ag industry. Students engage in extensive first-hand research and develop a marketing strategy to convince other youth to consider a career in agriculture. If this pilot phase is successful, there might be opportunities to roll out the program across the country.

“We’re always looking at what’s new and what’s different. We’re looking at how to meet the needs of education and how to meet the needs of agriculture and be the bridge between those two so we can foster greater overall understanding of agriculture,” Shymko says.

“We want to encourage young people to consider careers in agriculture and ensure that the accurate information about agriculture is out there.”

Marking a milestone this year, Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. is celebrating its 25th anniversary. The non-profit organization receives funding from the provincial government

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

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Photo: Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

as well as grants, sponsorships and memberships to offer topic-based resources to Grade 7 to 12 students.

As project and partner strategist, Becky Parker sees the benefits first-hand.

“There’s an anomaly in Ontario where we have more graduates from bachelor of education programs than we have jobs in classrooms. So we have created a teacher ambassador program where

we have a job opportunity for these underemployed, newly graduated teachers,” Parker says.

“We train them on agriculture and food information and then we have funding to send them into classrooms. It’s free for classroom educators and we’re able to pay a stipend to our teacher ambassadors. It’s great.”

To supplement the in-class lessons, teacher ambassadors leave resources for the classroom teachers to use, including infographics about livestock and animal health.

The Ontario organization is currently in the process of developing further training and e-learning modules for this program.

“We believe that there’s great potential to use these learning modules with teacher candidates in bachelor of education programs and faculties of education. There’s also the potential for agribusinesses to use these to train some

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Photo: Manitoba Pork

employees who might not be familiar with agriculture,” Parker says.

“It’s a few years out before it’s fully developed, but we’re looking for sponsors for each of those modules so we can make sure that we have the best content possible.”

Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. also has a website (www.growingcareers.ca) with information about careers in agriculture. This website feature about 75 video profiles of people who work



Photo: Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

in the agriculture sector, including representatives from a feed mill that produces hog feed.

“We’re looking to build that resource and have some more video profiles available,” Parker says.

“We’re always looking for partners who are interested in having a video profile to talk about their career and why they love working in agriculture.”

Whether it’s at the provincial level or the national level, ample opportunities

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40



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Photo: Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan

Increasing meat enjoyment and education in Alberta youth

Submitted by the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency

Alberta is home to a landscape prime for producing healthy, delicious and sought-after foods, including high quality meat, dairy and poultry products. However, not all Albertans are aware of the vast health benefits these foods provide. Preliminary data from a University of Alberta research team led by Dr. Sangita Sharma show many youth in Edmonton are not meeting their nutrient requirements and that promoting meat and dairy as part of a balanced diet may address this issue.

To help increase education about benefits of eating meat within this vulnerable group, Dr. Sharma, from the University of Alberta Department Of Medicine, is leading the Indigenous and Global Health Research Group (IGHRG). Through its “WHY ACT NOW” (WAN) project, the IGHARG looks at nutrition status and seeks opportunities for improving health and wellness within Edmonton’s multiethnic youth population.

Recently, the IGHARG and a Community Advisory Board (Elders, teachers, and key government and community leaders) collected information on 557 Edmonton

exist for anyone to get involved from the agriculture industry – including the pork sector.

As the national chair, Ross envisions the program will eventually expand to include all provinces and territories across the country.

“Our goal is to have all of Canada coast to coast around the table for Ag in the Classroom Canada. Everyone is certainly interested in it and it’s on everyone’s plate as far as the

importance of communicating about our industry, about agriculture and about where your food comes from,” Ross says.

“Even the provinces that don’t have a formalized provincial organization can still get resources from us and try to be involved wherever they can in schools.”

For more information on Agriculture in the Classroom Canada, visit www.aitc-canada.ca. ■

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youth. The research showed that about 50 per cent of the youth surveyed did not meet the recommended dietary intake values for various vitamins and minerals such as calcium, iron, B vitamins, as well as Canada’s Food Guide recommended meat consumption.

The nutrient inadequacies are a major health concern, as adequate levels are critical for normal growth and development and preventing various health conditions. Meat, milk and dairy contain high-quality protein and are some of the most important dietary sources of many vitamins and minerals. Together, with increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, these products can address the majority of these dietary inadequacies.

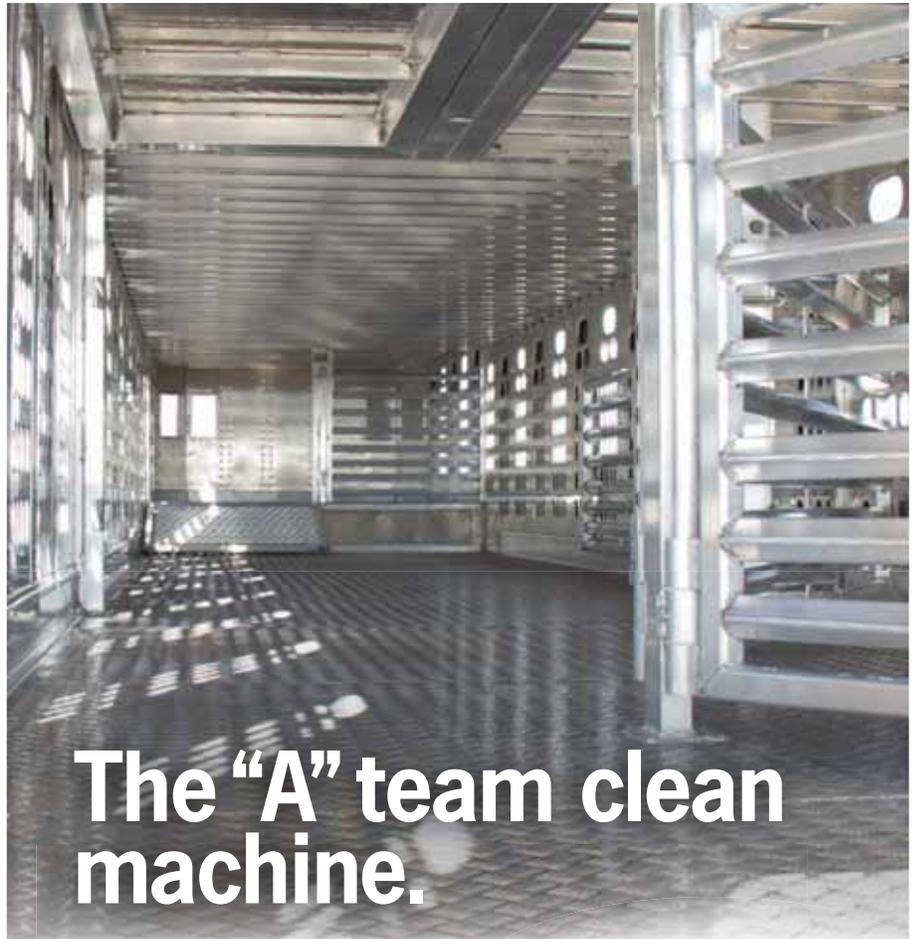
With support from the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA), the IGHRG is developing in-school intervention strategies focused on increasing awareness and knowledge of the benefits of meat, eggs and dairy as part of a balanced diet. Interventions include educational materials, cooking classes, taste tests and recipe contests. Targeting 11- to 18-year old students, participants can contribute ideas from their cultural backgrounds to help develop educational materials and recipes.

Budgetary constraints are also considered when creating these balanced meals. “This provides a unique opportunity to gather new and culturally distinct ways of cooking and eating meat, eggs and other livestock products,” says Dr. Sharma.

Dr. Sharma continues, “Nutritious meals can and should be affordable for all

families – and that may be more feasible using different proteins or non-traditional cuts of meat to stay within a budget.”

“This project is a great opportunity for the livestock and meat sectors to work with health and education professionals to promote the nutritional importance of meat, eggs and dairy as part of a balanced diet for our youth,” says Michelle Normand, ALMA’s Senior Manager, Industry and Market Development. ■



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Upcoming Events

Don't miss the 43rd Ontario Pork Congress Tradeshow!

Submitted by the Ontario Pork Congress

Gearing up for the 43rd year of its annual tradeshow, the Ontario Pork Congress (OPC) is taking place Wednesday, June 22 and Thursday, June 23. The OPC aims to celebrate local pork, the producers that grow it, and the consumers that enjoy it.

Coming back this year are key events such as the Hog Jog, Bacon Maker Classic Competition and Educational Centre, Taste the Best and of course, the two-day tradeshow.

The tradeshow portion of the show brings together all facets of the pork industry – builders, equipment, feed mills, animal health and welfare to name a few. This is definitely the place to be for pork producers in June!

Young and old alike enjoy the Bacon Maker Classic, the live hog show. This event is a fantastic opportunity to engage the industry's youth, and to enhance their stockmanship knowledge. The competition portion of the Classic examines performance (includes ADG/Back Fat & Loin Depth), conformation, judging and showmanship. The educational centre portion of the Classic takes attendees through an educational look at the entire production process.

The Hog Jog is a FitBit® lover's dream and a great way for Ontario pork producers to give back to local charities. This year's jog supports the Stratford/Perth Shelterlink, a charity that provides Perth County youth ages 16-24, who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, with shelter, food, advocacy services, and basic needs.

There are three different courses for an expected 500 eager participants; a family friendly 3.5 km course (4,600 steps), an ambitious 10 km course (13,000 steps) and 500 m Weaner Run

for children six years and under.

Everything is better with bacon. That's the theme for the fourth annual "Taste the Best" event on day one of the show. Taste the Best sponsor, Stubbe's Precast, will provide several local Stratford chefs mounds of bacon to be prepared in creative and delicious ways and then served with local beer samples from Black Swan Brewery.

"Bacon is taking the world by storm, we want to use the Taste the Best event to link the consumers love of bacon to the industry that makes it." says Blair Cressman, President of the Ontario Pork Congress. "It's also a chance for us to showcase local restaurants and encourage their use of quality local pork products."

New this year is a rib eating contest on day two. The contest will feature prominent members of the community and pork industry, chowing down on the best of Ontario's rib recipes as fast as possible. Jim Kelly, FM 96 Radio Host will be MC'ing this exciting new event.

Admission to the Pork Congress includes a meal ticket for the BBQ lunch, which is sponsored by Grand Valley Fortifiers and served by Perth County Pork Producers. On the menu: Smoked chops and back bacon burgers with all the fixings. ■

The 43rd annual Ontario Pork Congress will be held Wednesday, June 22 and Thursday, June 23, 2016 at the Stratford Rotary Complex in Stratford, Ontario. For more information on this year's Congress and a detailed listing of events, please visit: <http://www.porkcongress.on.ca/>.

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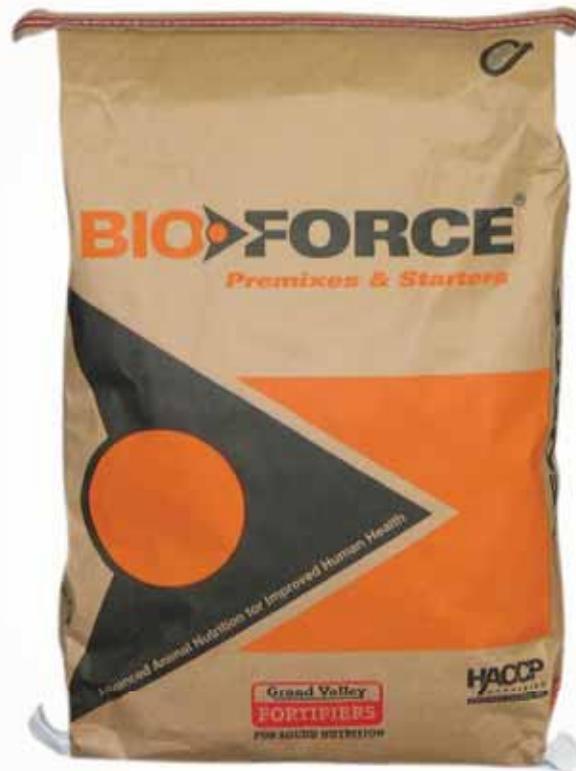
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Manitoba Swine Seminar celebrates 30 years

Story by Jennifer McFee Photos by 100 Acre Woods Photography



Dr. David Fraser of the University of British Columbia provided a presentation at the 2016 Manitoba Swine Seminar.

The Manitoba Swine Seminar marked a milestone in February when it celebrated 30 years since the annual event first launched.

With a record-breaking 485 attendees, the 2016 seminar successfully achieved its goal of sharing ideas and information for efficient pork production.

On Feb. 3 and 4, attendees gathered in Winnipeg to update their knowledge in current industry topics. A presentation of lifetime achievement awards honoured the contributions of the seminar's three founding organizers: Dr. Mike Sheridan, Clarence Froese and Dennis Hodgkinson.

Event co-chair Dr. Martin Nyachoti highlighted the distinctive quality of the annual gathering, which has continued to grow since it first began in 1986.

"What is unique about this swine seminar is it's primarily attended by people who actually work in the barns and, of course, the producers and the people who service the swine industry – representatives from feed companies, breeding companies, and so on. It's nice that way," said Nyachoti, a professor of animal science at the University of Manitoba and the director of the T.K. Cheung Centre for Animal Science Research.

During the two-day event, experts from across Canada and the United States shared their knowledge through presentations on topics ranging from humane transportation to PEDv survivability.

In addition to his role as the seminar's co-chair, Nyachoti delivered a presentation entitled "Feeding Piglets: Gut Health for Optimum Growth," with a focus on raising piglets without antibiotics.



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Dr. David Fraser, a University of British Columbia professor, wrapped up the conference with a 30-year overview of animal welfare. He examined ways that producers could reshape their occupation to be seen more as a trusted profession and less as a regulated industry.

After the seminar, Nyachoti also mused on the industry's evolution over the last three decades.

"It has changed substantially. There has been a tremendous amount of consolidation over the years of swine-producing units into large organizations – and the large ones are becoming larger," he said.

"Over the years, the issues have been around profitability and trade, but the industry is much more profitable now than it was few years back. And the fact that the mCOOL, or mandatory country of origin labeling, was struck down was good news that people talk



Lifetime achievement awards were presented to Dr. Mike Sheridan, Clarence Froese and Dennis Hodgkinson, who founded the conference 30 years ago. From left to right: Seminar co-chair Dr. Martin Nyachoti, Dr. Michael Sheridan, Clarence Froese and committee member Dr. Laurie Connor.

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Dr. Jennifer Brown of the Prairie Swine Centre in Saskatoon provided a presentation on pig welfare and the codes of practice.



Seminar co-chair Dr. Martin Nyachoti shared his knowledge about feeding piglets, focusing on gut health for optimum growth.



Andrew Dickson, general manager of Manitoba Pork Council, provided an update on the state of the industry.

about. Hopefully that will translate into some benefits for the swine industry because it was a major trade barrier between us and the United States.”

With an eye on the horizon, plans are already in the works for the 2017 Manitoba Swine Seminar, which is tentatively set for next February.

“Producers should make a point of coming. It’s a good event. It’s always geared towards the producer, so there’s a lot of good information there that people can actually take home



The first day of the conference wrapped up with a panel discussion on implementing the codes of practice. Left to right: Dr. Karine Talbot, Dr. Mark Wilson, Dr. Jennifer Brown and Dr. Max Popp.

and apply in their production systems,” Nyachoti said.

“The majority of the people are from Manitoba, but we have had guests coming from Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario to attend the seminar.”

For industry experts, the swine seminar provides an ideal venue to share their knowledge and ideas.

“We are always looking for speakers and we get them from across the country and across the world. We try to get the best person for the topic of the day,” Nyachoti said.

“If people have specific ideas of what they would like to see covered, they can always feel free to contact any of the committee members and convey that message. We can consider it this spring when we get together to start thinking about 2017.” ■



Dr. Ray Massey, an extension professor in the department of agricultural and applied economics at the University of Missouri, provided tips on how to extract more value from manure.

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CELEBRATING 19 YEARS

Feeding barley to starter pigs

Z. Nasir¹, L.F. Wang¹, M.G. Young², M.L. Swift^{1,3}, E. Beltranena^{1,4} and R.T. Zijlstra^{1,*}

¹Department of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB; ²Gowans Feed Consulting, Wainwright, AB; ³Hi-Pro Feeds, Okotoks, AB; ⁴Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Edmonton, AB, email address: ruurd.zijlstra@ualberta.ca

Take home message

Wheat and barley are feed grains used as energy source in swine diets. Inclusion of high quality (HQ) barley grain in starter pig diets is limited in commercial feed formulation due to its greater fibre content and lower net energy (NE) value than wheat. Low quality (LQ) barley is also available, but its feed value for young pigs is unknown. To explore, 224 starter pigs (weight: 8.65 ± 0.87 kg) were fed pelleted diets including HQ or LQ barley to replace 65 per cent wheat, for 3 weeks starting at 1 week post-weaning. Total tract digestibility of energy and diet predicted NE value were greater for the wheat diet than that for barley diets. For day 1–21, feed intake, weight gain and feed efficiency (gain:feed) of the wheat diet did not differ from the HQ barley diet, but was lower than those of LQ barley diets. Feed intake and weight gain did not differ between HQ barley and LQ barley diets. In conclusion, despite lower nutrient digestibility and energy value, LQ or HQ barley can fully replace wheat grain in diets for starter pigs and achieve equivalent or better growth performance provided diets are properly balanced for energy and amino acids.

Barley

Increased prices of feedstuffs reduce profit margins in pork production. In western Canada, Australia and northern Europe, wheat and barley are the main feed grains. Wheat grain has a greater net energy (NE) value than barley; however, the greater energy value of wheat than barley may not increase growth of pigs. Adverse agronomic conditions might turn an

expected high quality (HQ) barley grain into low quality (LQ) barley with greater fibre content and lower density. However, LQ barley might be acceptable for swine feeding if young pigs can increase intake of low energy, barley-based diets. Whether young pigs fed barley grain instead of wheat in diets formulated to equal or lower NE value can maintain growth performance requires investigation.

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The advertisement features a central oval image showing various pieces of green and yellow liquid manure handling equipment, including reels, 3-point implements, and trailers. To the right, there is a detailed view of a reel, 3-point implement, and trailer. Below that, a red truck is shown with a green liquid manure tank mounted on its back. The background of the central image is a field with a fence in the distance.

Nutrient profile of barley

The HQ and LQ barley grain contained 12.6 and 11.9 per cent crude protein (CP), similar to 12.3 per cent CP in wheat grain. The HQ barley had greater density (64.0 vs 54.4 kg/hL) and predicted NE value (2.34 vs 2.22 Mcal/kg) than LQ barley. The HQ and LQ barley samples contained 6.1 and 7.0 per cent ADF, respectively, double the 2.5 per cent ADF in the wheat sample. The HQ and LQ barley samples contained 0.55 and 0.54 per cent lysine (Lys), greater than 0.44 per cent Lys in wheat grain.

Weaned pig trial

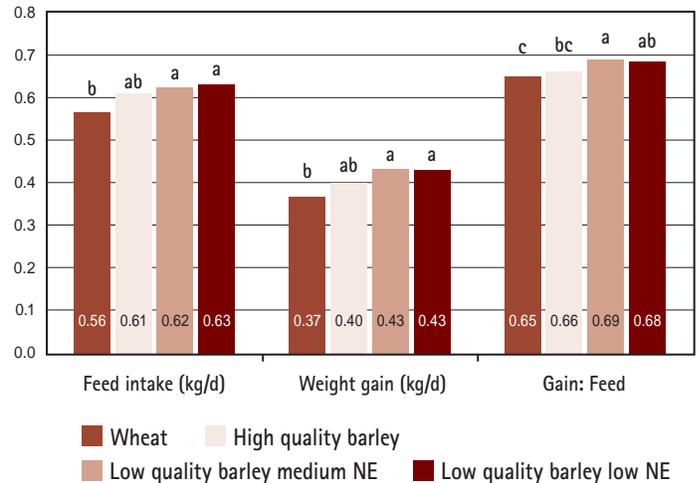
The trial was conducted at the Swine Research and Technology Centre, University of Alberta (Edmonton, AB, Canada). In total, 224 pigs (Duroc × Large White/Landrace F1; Hypor, Regina, SK, Canada) were weaned at 24 days of age. Pigs were selected based on weight gain immediately after weaning and body weight on day 5 after weaning (8.65 ± 0.87 kg). Pigs were divided within gender into heavy and light weight, randomly placing one heavy and one light barrow and gilt into one of 56 pens with four pigs each, for 14 pens per diet. Pigs were fed sequentially pre-starter and starter diets (Hi-Pro Feeds, Sherwood Park, AB, Canada) for two and five days, respectively, before feeding experimental diets.

Experimental diets contained 20 per cent soybean meal, five per cent soy protein concentrate, five per cent herring meal and one of three cereal grain samples: wheat, HQ barley or LQ barley. Four experimental diets were formulated to a specific NE value (Mcal/kg) adjusted by including canola oil (2.2 or 3.8 per cent) and for standardised ileal digestible (SID) Lys content (g/Mcal NE) using synthetic amino acids. The 4 diets were: 1) wheat-based (2.39, 4.48); 2) HQ barley-based (2.39, 4.44); 3) LQ barley-based, medium NE (2.33, 4.56); and 4) LQ barley-based, low NE (2.25, 4.69). Diets did not include antimicrobials or growth promoters. Diets were steam pelleted at 70°C.

Trial results

Pigs maintained good health status. For the entire trial (day 1–21), growth performance for the wheat diet did not differ

Figure 1. Growth performance of piglets fed wheat or barley diets



a, b, c bars of each category without common letter differ (P < 0.05)

from those for the HQ barley diet, but was lower than those for LQ barley diets (Figure 1). Feed intake and weight gain for the HQ barley diet did not differ from those for LQ barley diets. Feed efficiency of the HQ barley diet did not differ from that of LQ barley low NE diet, but was lower than that of LQ barley medium NE diet. However, growth performance did not differ between the 2 LQ barley diets. Final BW was 16.3, 17.1, 17.6 and 17.7 kg for pigs fed wheat diet, HQ barley diet, and LQ barley diets with medium or low NE value, respectively. Final BW for the wheat diet did not differ from that for the HQ barley diet, but was lower than that for LQ barley diets.

Energy digestibility was greater for the wheat diet than barley diets (80.2 vs. 74.0 to 77.3 per cent). Energy digestibility was lower for the HQ barley diet than LQ barley diets (74.0 vs. 75.5 to 77.3 per cent). Energy digestibility was lower for the LQ barley medium NE diet than the LQ barley low NE diet (75.5 vs. 77.3 per cent). The predicted NE value was greater for the wheat diet than barley diets (2.33 vs. 2.17–2.21 Mcal/kg). The predicted NE value was lower for the HQ barley diet than LQ barley diets.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50

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Cost vs. benefit

The following prices were assumed (\$ per MT): wheat, 240; high quality barley, 220; low quality barley, 160; soybean meal, 590; soy protein concentrate, 1,500; herring fish meal, 3,350; canola oil, 1,165; L-lysine-HCl, 2,020; L-threonine, 4,600; and DL-methionine, 8,000. Dietary inclusion of high quality barley to replace wheat increased feed cost by \$10.2 per MT, but reduced feed cost per kg of body weight gain by 0.46 cents. Inclusion of low quality barley in diets formulated with medium or low NE value reduced feed cost by \$27.7 and \$45.8 per MT, respectively; and reduced feed cost per kg of body weight gain by 9.72 and 11.33 cents, respectively.

Recommendation

Dietary inclusion of barley grain to replace 65 per cent wheat in swine diet reduced energy digestibility, but did not reduce growth performance of weaned pigs. Pigs fed low quality barley diet had greater feed intake, weight gain and feed efficiency than pigs fed the wheat grain diet. Barley grain may replace wheat grain not only in diets for growing-finishing pig but also for starter pigs provided the diets are balanced properly for energy and amino acids.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate research funding from the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund, Alberta Pork, Danisco Animal Nutrition and Canola Council of Canada that sponsored a multi-trial project. ■

PRRS eradication project provides benefits to Alberta's pork industry

Submitted by the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency

From rising production costs to animal care, there are constant challenges the pork industry has to overcome. This includes mitigating the presence of Porcine Respiratory and Reproductive Syndrome (PRRS), which can have devastating effects on production costs and animal health.

Over the last decade, there has been a strong push to eliminate PRRS in North America because the disease is costly, even in perceived mild viral strains. However, control and elimination is often difficult, especially in hog-dense areas, as proximity to neighbours increases the threat of reintroduction.



Dr. Frank Marshall

To break the disease cycle, the producer has to physically separate the animals from the infected barn. This requires considerable time and financial investment by each producer wanting to achieve PRRS-free status.

Dr. Frank Marshall recently led a project that worked with hog farms in three adjoining counties (Westlock, Barrhead and Sturgeon) to attain PRRS eradication without depopulating the sow herd, therefore demonstrating that eradication is possible regionally. The project also provides the framework towards potentially achieving provincial PRRS-free status. Although there is a lot of work in achieving and maintaining that status, there are premium market opportunities for PRRS-free pig production.

Among other reasons, that potential inspired the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA) to partner with Dr. Marshall to help ease the off-site costs associated with this project. For Dr. Susan Novak, ALMA's Executive Director of



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Strategic Initiatives, one of the project's biggest strengths is that it required full participation from the counties versus a voluntary procedure.

"Even if a producer is PRRS-free, they share weigh stations and highways with their neighbours, not to mention where their animals are slaughtered. If PRRS exists in the surrounding area, there is no guarantee that PRRS-free status can last," she said. "With a regional approach, there is a better chance of gaining and keeping PRRS-free status."

After a risk assessment and herd seroprofiling was conducted on each participating farm, Dr. Marshall's team found there were 13 PRRS-positive farms in these counties. From there, the team helped the producers implement the necessary strategies to improve overall herd health.

The team also considered other swine diseases, including monitoring the presence and effects of multiple strains of swine influenza to assist an ALMA-supported project led by Dr. Susan Detmer. They found that the PRRS eradication process helped to eliminate endemic swine influenza in affected herds. The Detmer project also demonstrates that western Canadian strains of swine influenza are unique to our region of North America. That discovery will help to streamline treatment, as the research team noted that autogenous vaccines provided better results than any available commercial vaccines.

"We are thrilled with our results and that our work can be used to further the research of others," said Dr. Marshall. "This project enhanced our knowledge of PRRS and other notable swine diseases and resulted in on-farm elimination. Thanks to their co-operation, the producers have a PRRS-free farm and they are starting to realize the benefits."

That sentiment is echoed by Dan Majeau, one of the producers involved with the project. During his time working with Dr. Marshall's team, Majeau's farm became PRRS-free and eliminated the presence of two other diseases.

"It is a big boost to our farm to have this kind of support, as operations are running smoother than before," he said. "This project provided us with economic promise and opens our farm to new market opportunities. We can't thank Dr. Marshall's team enough." ■

Research in pigs benefits human health

Submitted by Dan Columbus, Research Associate – Nutrition, Lee Whittington, President/CEO, Prairie Swine Centre

Awareness of the benefits of using large animal models in human nutrition and health related research has increased. In fact, it has been estimated that as little as 40 per cent of research results obtained from rodent models result in successful human clinical trials – the species are just too different for example in physiology and structure. It is becoming increasingly important that health science researchers identify more appropriate animal models; the pig is one of those more appropriate models. Due to physiological, anatomical, and developmental similarities to humans, researchers have been increasingly identifying the pig as a model of choice for research designed to benefit humans. One of the main benefits of research in pigs is that, unlike with the more traditional rodent models, utilizing a species of agricultural importance has the potential to apply the knowledge gained from the research to both human health sciences and agricultural industry applications.

Those research initiatives that simultaneously advance both agricultural and medical science are referred to as agrimedical research. The dual application of research in humans and agricultural species is not a new concept and research in both fields has historically been advanced through discoveries made in the other. For example, human nutritionists have gained valuable information on nutrient interactions, bioavailability and requirements through work carried out in animals. Research in neonatal pigs has increased our knowledge of interaction between nutrients and muscle growth and development, which

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could lead to nutritional interventions to improve growth and survival of both low-birth weight pigs and human infants.

Recent work performed at the Prairie Swine Centre in collaboration with researchers in the College of Kinesiology to examine the adequacy of dietary calcium recommendations in sows has furthered our understanding of bone development and remodeling which can be used to develop therapies to treat osteoporosis in humans. In the Colleges of Pharmacy and Nutrition, and Medicine, the piglet model has been used to examine the toxicity of intravenous solutions being provided to sick infants. Dr. Gordon Zello, Professor of Nutrition, points out that without animal model studies, advances in human health could not be achieved as there are additional ethical issues when conducting studies in vulnerable groups, such as the premature infant.

These are just a few examples of how agrimedical research can have a direct benefit to both the pork industry and health sciences.

The Prairie Swine Centre currently works with 14 different groups utilizing the pig as a model from dentistry reconstruction to vaccine development, and toxicology to specialized suture validation. There is a further benefit beyond the intended outcomes of improvement of quality of life in humans, and improved productivity and cost in pork production. That benefit is the improved communication and exposure to diversity of ideas and concepts through collaboration between human and animal scientists. This may someday be seen as a renaissance of bringing diverse sciences back together which have grown apart through technical specialization. It reminds us of a quote “The best way to predict the future is to design it.” (source: Buckminster Fuller, architect, author, designer and inventor). The future will be brighter when diverse talents are brought together to solve problems.

By necessity, agrimedical research requires a multidisciplinary collaborative approach. In order to foster collaborations between researchers at Prairie Swine Centre and the University of Saskatchewan Health Sciences, we recently held a symposium on the use of agrimedical models in research. This symposium,

organized in collaboration with the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, included presentations from both animal and health science researchers to highlight the importance of pigs for human health research and the benefits of agrimedical models. In response to the symposium, Dr. Kishor Wasan, professor and dean of the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, states “The Prairie Swine Centre provides expertise and relevant large animal models for our health science researchers and the ability to access unique facilities, expertise and of course the pigs. This collaboration helps our scientists move their research forward and makes it more cost competitive. In particular we see significant strength in collaborating with Prairie Swine Centre on disease and nutrition research.”

Research is a significant investment for both industry and government, and therefore it is increasingly important that research demonstrate benefit to multiple clients, and through that way ensure funding agencies see benefit in continuing to grow their research commitment. Our mission speaks to our ability to take this trust and support and create value for our stakeholders.

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Sex sorting sperm gets sexy

By Geoff Geddes

In spite of its name, the process of sex sorting sperm in the pork industry was never a sexy topic. That may be changing with the recent acquisition of Fast Genetics – a global leader in the pig genetics business based in Saskatoon – by Sexing Technologies from HyLife. The move is adding new lustre to a technique long-established in other species, applying it to the pig industry and making sex sorting sperm, well, sexy.

In the beginning...

The discovery of sex predetermination in swine and other livestock is not a new one. In 1989, an effective method of separating X from Y-chromosome-bearing sperm was developed and reported by Dr. Larry Johnson and his team of scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Germplasm and Gamete Physiology Laboratory in Beltsville, Maryland.

The method uses the greater DNA content of the X-bearing sperm (3.6 per cent in the pig) to differentiate it from the Y-bearing sperm. This method is known as the Beltsville Sperm Sexing Technology and has been applied to most farm animals with a resultant shift in the sex ratio so that 90 per cent or more of the offspring are of the predetermined sex.

Go with the flow

According to Sexing Technologies, the process relies on the use of flow cytometric analysis and cell sorting. Each sperm is identified for the amount of DNA it contains as it passes a laser beam. The sperm are then directed to collecting tubes, one tube for X sperm and one for Y sperm. The sperm are differentiated according to how much light is detected from the fluorescent dye that is proportionally bound to the sperm's DNA.

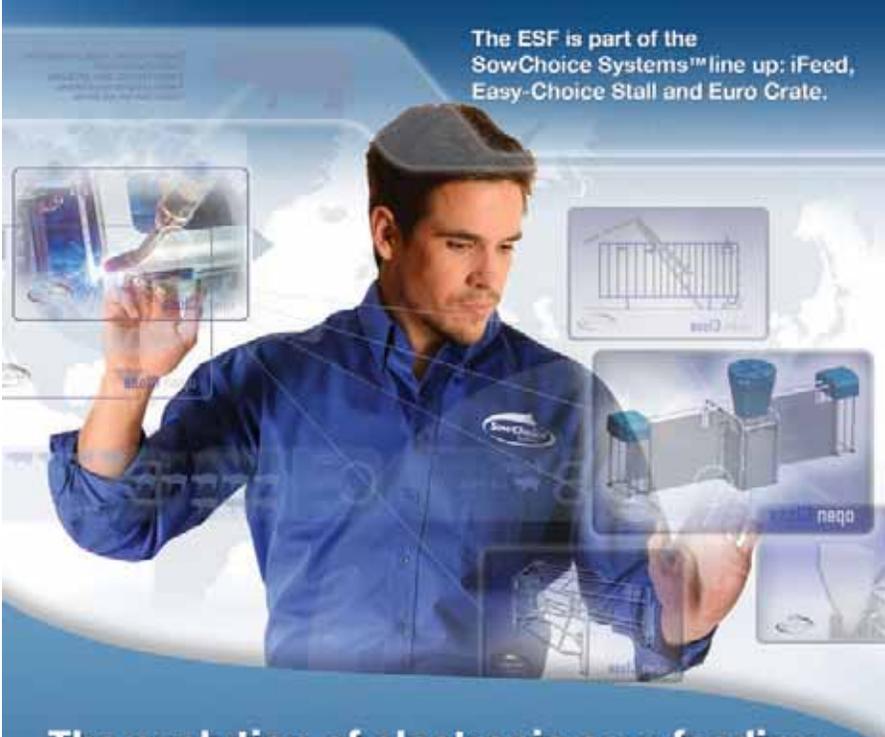
Consequently, X-bearing sperm with more total DNA glow brighter than the Y-bearing sperm when hit by the laser beam. It doesn't sound sexy, but the implications for agriculture were downright steamy.

As is often the case with science though, it was a long way from the lab to the real

world. Even as the process evolved, it wasn't commercially viable until Sexing Technologies took it over.

"Working with an engineering firm they owned, the company improved the process and enabled its application on a large scale in the cattle industry," said Grant Wilson, marketing manager for Fast Genetics.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54



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Wilson explained that Sexing Technologies then wanted to bring this same technology to the pig business.

“They went looking for a leading genetics company in the pork sector and found it in Fast Genetics.”

Sorting equipment is now in place at Fast Genetics and sows are being inseminated with sex-sorted sperm.

“Step two is to implement it at the multiplication level,” Wilson explained. “If you have a gilt multiplier and you’re making 50 per cent females with a by-product of barrows as the other 50 per cent, you can change that, for example, to all gilts and increase production efficiency.”

The final phase is the commercial stage, where Wilson said it’s easy to imagine the benefits of a single-gendered offspring.

Pick a sex, any sex

While the exact process used is proprietary and therefore confidential, Wilson is happy to share the benefits.

“Overall, it will allow us to create a better product and have faster genetic gain at the nucleus by skewing gender.”

For producers, the payoff is more than just the chance to use some really cool technology.

“There’s always an economic difference between raising males and females, but producers could further capitalize on it depending on their packing plant relationships.”

Q & A

Other industry players can also see the potential of the Sexing Technologies system.

“What’s exciting is that this technology is evolving as we speak,” said Andrew Beusekom, manager of Magnum Swine Genetics in Fort Macleod, Alberta. “The old method was very slow and speed was a major stumbling block.”

As an illustration, Beusekom pointed out that 10 years ago, everyone was at about three billion sperm cells per dose of semen with a sorting speed of 10 million per hour.

“That’s only one dose of semen, so if you have a farm with 1,000 sows requiring 200 doses, there’s a lot of waiting around.”

With Sexing Technologies, he sees a much faster approach with low dose, low concentration insemination.

Still, Beusekom said that while the new technology may hold some promising answers, it also raises questions.

“The main questions are around the cost and application. For example, proponents point to eliminating castration by producing only females, but we already have the ability to eliminate smell issues with intact males and we know the cost of that.”

Dare to dream

Grant Wilson is also intrigued by the prospects, and he can’t help getting caught up in the excitement.

“To be pioneering this technology in the pig business is really something. Our company is growing and hiring a lot of new people, and it’s amazing to be filling roles we never thought we’d have, hiring for positions we never dreamt of, that are specifically related to sorting sperm.”

Down the road, Wilson foresees customers being able to purchase gender-sorted semen so they can specify the gender of their herd’s offspring, but that would be the third phase. At this time, he’s pleased to see progress at the nucleus and multiplication levels.

“If we can implement this at the nucleus level, it will trickle all the way down and benefit everyone.”

In the pork industry, it doesn’t get much sexier than that. ■

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Portable assay could deliver faster PEDv detection

Submitted by the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency



Front, from left: Mr. Mathew Fisher, Drs. Stacy Radics and Aruna Ambagala.

Back, front left: Doctors Jessica Law, Chris Misutka and Kuldeep Chatta.

Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus (PEDv) is a highly contagious swine disease that causes devastating losses. When the outbreak in the United States occurred a few years ago, the Canadian industry came together to develop better mitigation strategies. While PEDv cases did arise in Eastern Canada, the effort paid off, as the spread eventually slowed down. However, improvements to PEDv detection and prevention methods are vital to continuing these efforts.

One of the known challenges is the lack of reliable on-farm detection methods. Currently, PEDv samples are sent to a lab for testing. This adds significant wait time to confirm the presence of on-farm PEDv.

In partnership with the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA), a research team led by Dr. Aruna Ambagala developed a rapid pen-side assay that can be performed on a user-friendly and field-deployable instrument to test fecal swabs, truck washes and environmental samples.

“In preventing outbreaks, timing is of the essence,” said Dr. Ambagala, a Research Scientist at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary. “Getting the necessary results in a shorter time frame can significantly prevent the spread of this disease and increase animal health on swine farms.”

Based on the results of this initiative, the new assay has an approximate run time of one hour, which allows infected farms to implement biosecurity controls more efficiently. The team also found that it is less expensive than sending the samples to the lab.

“The cost of each test was a very important factor in creating this assay. It has to be affordable or else industry may hesitate to adopt the technology,” said Dr. Ambagala.

The assay’s combined benefits of reduced costs, high sensitivity and specificity, with a smaller and portable design allows the tool to be used across the supply chain and anywhere in Alberta. By having the device at locations like border stations and slaughter houses, industry could monitor the disease closer than ever.

The team also considered other swine enteric viruses in their research including porcine deltacoronavirus (PDCoV) and transmissible gastroenteritis virus (TGEV). These viruses present similar clinical signs as PEDv and need to be distinguished from each other. Like PEDv, PDCoV and TGEV are currently detected and differentiated through laboratory diagnosis. By creating a rapid on-site assay for PDCoV and TGEV, this research also ensures that the right disease is diagnosed and the right measures are taken.

“The less time it takes to diagnose the presence of PEDv, the more likely that an outbreak can be avoided,” said Dr. Susan Novak, ALMA’s Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives. “Disease outbreaks can have a devastating impact on animal health, farm profitability and operator stress. If we can avoid these challenges, then there is less risk to the province’s hog industry.” ■

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Managing sows in groups from weaning

In North America stall housing predominates, however some individuals and larger production companies have been incorporating loose housing in both new builds and renovations. In response to this, our research program looks at both traditional stall and loose housing management systems. Scientific research has demonstrated that sows housed in groups can perform as well as those in stalls. This combined with increasing consumer and retailer pressure to limit use of confinement systems has led to the banning of gestation stalls in many parts of the world.

In those countries where group housing is required, it is generally stipulated that sows must be placed into groups by five weeks gestation. Housing sows in breeding stalls until confirmation of pregnancy at around 28 days post breeding is permitted, as this facilitates individual feeding and avoids mixing aggression during critical periods of the oestrous cycle and embryo implantation. However, pressure continues for the total elimination of close confinement: keeping sows loose at all times during gestation, and potentially even during farrowing. Already, a number of EU members require reduced stall use, with the Netherlands requiring sows to be out of stalls after four days post-insemination. Grouping sows post-insemination is known to work well, providing that mixing occurs rapidly thereafter and the period of social stress does not overlap with embryo implantation.

Producing totally stall-free pork requires a different approach to sow management around breeding, and has some potential benefits as well as some risks. Mixing sows at weaning will give animals time to establish their social group before they cycle, and thus avoid any effects of mixing stress on sow conception rate. In terms of the effect of early mixing on

estrus, it has been suggested that early mixing may disrupt the onset of estrus in sows. However, there is research to suggest that if the mixing stress is acute it can stimulate a quicker return to estrus in sows. Through allowing sows to display estrus behaviour, there is also the potential to have a greater synchronization of estrus within the breeding group. These management options need to be investigated to determine what is best for the sow, her welfare and productivity, and in turn whether there are any other advantages to be gained.

Is grouping sows at weaning viable?

The study, performed in collaboration with Dr. Yuzhi Li from the University of Minnesota, United States, compared the effects of mixing sows at weaning, with mixing at five weeks gestation. Measures were collected to evaluate effects of the treatments on sow aggression, welfare and productivity. Three treatments were evaluated:

1. **Early Mixing (EM):** Sows mixed into groups directly at weaning;
2. **Late Mixing (LM):** Sows stall housed at weaning, and mixed at five weeks gestation;
3. **Pre-socialisation (PS):** Sows mixed for two days after weaning, then stall housed for breeding and up to five weeks gestation, after which sows were remixed into the same groups.

The PS provided an intermediate treatment to examine the interaction between mixing at critical time points in combination with housing sows in stalls during the implantation period and further determine if there would be any benefits, such as reduced aggression in the second mixing, if the social group has

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already been formed at weaning. For all treatments, sows (14 per pen, 2.2 m²/sow) were housed in fully slatted group pens, with partially slatted free access stalls. The stalls were used to house sows during feeding, heat checks and breeding. When the treatment required that sows be loose in a group, the sows were fed each morning in the free access stalls, after which they were locked out of the stalls for up to 22 hours per day in the communal loafing area. When treatments required that sows be kept in stalls, the sows were locked into the free-access stalls.

Sow aggression, welfare and reproductive performance (wean-to-service interval, conception rate, and farrowing performance) were measured. Additionally, estrus behaviour was measured in the EM groups to determine levels of the behaviour and effects on sow injury or production.

Results: Each system can work

Aggressive interactions on the two days following mixing were no different across treatments, and overall levels of aggression were low. Similarly, no differences were found in sow cortisol levels or lameness. Skin injury scores were lower in PS sows compared to EM and LM sows after the first mixing. However, injury scores on all sows were very low. These data indicate that sow welfare was not significantly affected by the different mixing treatments.

Oestrus behaviour, including mounting, attempted mounts and flank nosing, was observed in EM groups on days three and four after weaning. The average percentage of sows per pen involved in oestrus behaviour rose from 30 per cent on day three to 48 per cent on day four.

Sows in the EM treatment had the highest conception rate (98%), and LM the lowest (87%), with the PS treatment in between (Table 1). It is not clear why the LM treatment, which is the standard practice for managing sows and typical in this herd, had the lowest conception in this trial. It may reflect sub-optimal stimulation of estrus in stalls when compared to the EM and PS

groups, which received mixing stress immediately at weaning. There is evidence that correct timing of stress post-weaning can bring on estrus, and thus these treatments may have stimulated follicular growth and enhanced estrus expression.

Overall measures of production were not statistically significant between treatments. However, the EM treatment had a significant reduction in the number of stillborn piglets. The reduction in stillborns appears to indicate a beneficial effect of allowing sows free movement during the early stages of pregnancy. This may be an effect of improved sow fitness, or could be related to embryo placement along the uterine horns, and subsequent placental attachment. Related studies in human health have shown that maternal physical activity can influence placental development and viability.

What can be concluded?

Under good conditions of management, where sows are housed in static groups and individually fed, grouping sows at weaning does not negatively impact sow performance or welfare. Moreover, there may be production advantages to mixing sows into groups at weaning, as indicated by the improved conception rates and reduced stillborns found in this trial. These effects should be explored further. The same results may not be true in a group feeding system in which sows have to cope with a greater levels of competition, such as in a heavily stocked ESF system, or competitive feeding system (e.g. floor feeding). While no effect on sow lameness was found in this trial, pens in which sows are mixed should have good quality flooring to reduce injury, and particularly if expression of estrus behaviour is anticipated. In conclusion, grouping sows at weaning is a viable option under the correct conditions of management. ■

This research was funded by the National Pork Board, supported by funding to the Prairie Swine Centre from the Saskatchewan Agricultural Development Fund, Sask Pork, Manitoba Pork, Alberta Pork and Ontario Pork.

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PigWatch: new technology for predicting the best time to inseminate sows

A system that studies the behaviour of individual sows in order to inform the breeder of the right time to inseminate... fact or fiction?

Submitted by Nathalie Plourde, Andréanne Caron, Christian Klopfenstein, Michel Morin, Quebec Centre for Swine Development (CDPQ), nplourde@cdpq.ca



Quebec company, Conception Ro-Main, and their Italian partner, LPS Electronics, took up this challenge with the development of the system they call PigWatch.

The aim was to design and develop a technology specifically for producers and adapted to on-farm conditions that would assist them in optimizing sow herd management as regards heat cycle detection and breeding procedures (inseminations).

A few years into the development process, Conception Ro-Main approached CDPQ to create a project that would scientifically

validate the accuracy of the PigWatch system for determining the best time to breed each sow.

Effective sow heat cycle detection - a vital factor for profitability

Sow heat cycle detection and effective targeting of the right time for insemination are indispensable for controlled breeding performance, the level of herd management with significant impact on profitability.

Variability in the length and intensity of the sow's heat cycle (estrus) makes it difficult to determine their ovulation period

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The PigWatch system – how does it work?



Above: Part of the PigWatch system mounted above a sow's stall. This portion contains the built-in motion sensors.

Right: Motion sensors installed in a protected box located above the sows allow constant monitoring (non-intrusive) of sow behaviour. Each sow's real-time activity is assessed 24/7 and the data sent to a computer system for analysis by a specialized algorithm. An insemination request is then sent to the user.



with any accuracy, and consequently, the ideal time to carry out insemination. Scientific studies have shown that this ideal time is about 24 hours before ovulation. Since ovulation occurs two-thirds of the way through the heat cycle (estrus), which lasts from 24 to 60 hours, inseminating sows at the ideal moment in their reproductive cycle is a challenge for the producer. This is why many producers inseminate sows two or three times during their heat cycle, resulting in an increased workload and higher expenses when purchasing semen doses. Other producers find it hard to pinpoint the ideal time, which results in reduced fertility and smaller litter sizes, and a subsequent decrease in revenue.

PigWatch – project objective

The PigWatch system has been developed to detect the ideal time to carry out the insemination of each sow. The algorithm that underlies the operation of the system is based on compilation and analysis of natural sow behaviour data from weaning until the end of the heat cycle. Since the decision to inseminate should coincide closely with the sow's ovulation, the aim of the project was to determine the connection between the prediction of the PigWatch system regarding the best time to inseminate and the actual ovulatory stage of each sow, as determined by the temporal variation of the hormones, progesterone and estradiol.

On-farm readings

There were 122 sows involved over the course of the project and all inseminations were done at the requests for insemination from PigWatch.



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For each sow the timing of the insemination request was compared to their presumed time of ovulation, as determined by hormonal profiling (temporal variation of the hormones, progesterone and estradiol). Since the PigWatch system uses sow behaviour data for its analysis, a blood sampling method was developed that would take enough samples to estimate the time of ovulation precisely, while causing minimal disruption to the sows.

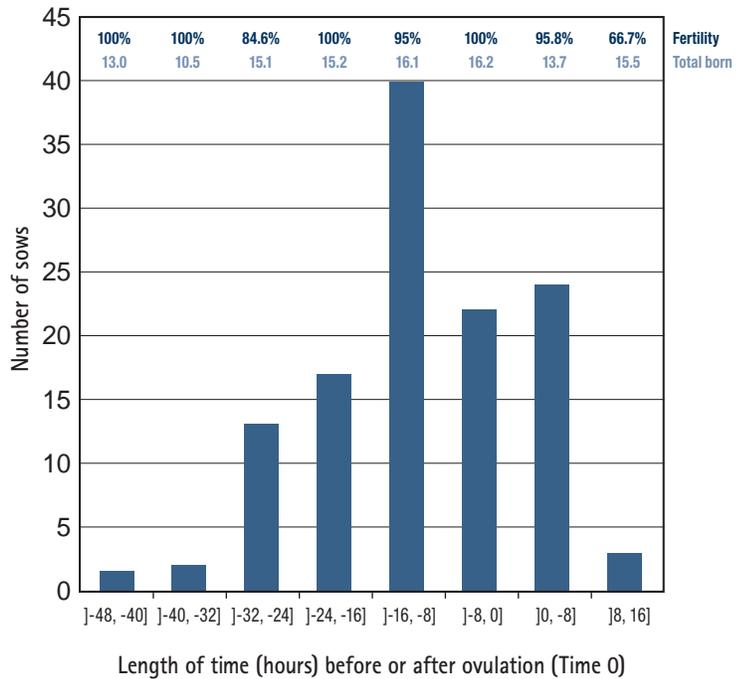
Pregnancy tests took place 35 days after breeding and the total number born (total piglets born) per sow per litter was recorded in order to validate the sows' performances.

Results

- 95 per cent of requests for insemination from the PigWatch system were issued in a time period 32 hours before, and 8 hours after, ovulation (Figure 1)
- average fertility rate for the 122 sows = 95.1 per cent
- average number of total piglets born per sow per litter = 15.26 piglets
- average number of semen doses used per sow = 1.16

Note: the number of inseminations per heat cycle is clearly less than that often seen in a breeding barn (1.16 doses vs. 2.2 - 2.4 doses).

Figure 1: Distribution of sows according to time elapsed (hours) between the time when PigWatch system requests insemination and the moment of ovulation (time 0) + average fertility rate (%) and average number of total piglets born to sows, distributed in each time period



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Figure 2: Colour-coded chart generated by the PigWatch system and displaying sow behaviour in the time period between weaning (Time 0) and the end of the heat cycle (green curve = indicates the level of the sow's activity, vertical yellow line = the start of the heat cycle, red line = heat confirmed, green zone = predicted probable moment of insemination, vertical green line = estimated ideal time for insemination, blue line = end of the heat cycle).



Conclusion

The project has shown that the PigWatch system makes it possible to predict the right time to inseminate sows. Using PigWatch also reduces the number of semen doses used per sow, while still maintaining good animal performances.

By making the work of breeding management in breeding barns easier, this technology also has potential for reducing employee workloads (e.g. less working time spent on insemination procedures). Finally, a reduction in the number of semen doses required annually for the herds could also

enable companies doing their own genetic selection to keep fewer active boars and favour those with better indexes. For detailed results from this project, please consult the final report at www.cdpq.ca. ■

FUNDING PARTNERS

Funding for the project was provided through the AgriInnovation Program of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, in partnership with Conception Ro-Main Inc.

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Western Hog JOURNAL

Sourcing labels can reduce cost

Large food processors that consume millions of thermal labels each month are turning to specialty converters that can deliver the lowest prices, as well as unique consignment and inventory management that can cut annual labeling budgets up to 40%

Submitted by Carlo Chatman, Power PR

Although many pork processors view labels as a commodity item, for large operations that consume millions of thermal labels per month, it is a prime operating expense with sourcing decisions made at the corporate level.

With so much at stake, processors find themselves in a constant quest to find reliable label companies capable of delivering a quality product, consistently, and at the lowest possible price. For many, this means partnering with specialty converters that can pass on savings due to bulk purchasing power of thermal media direct from its source, in addition to unique consignment and inventory management options.

Although this can be a tall order, sourcing a thermal label supplier that can deliver all of the above can reduce annual labeling budgets by as much as 40%.

“You can run through a couple million thermal labels faster than you think,” says Russell Gayer, manager of printing services for a major U.S. meat processor. In addition to managing the in-house print facility, Gayer has experience sourcing labels at the corporate level.

According to Gayer, Fortune 500 food processors can utilize hundreds of millions of labels per month. Even comparably smaller operations of \$200 million or more in annual revenue can have label budgets that exceed \$250,000 a year.

For pork, specifically, the information that appears on the label varies depending on whether or not it is a processed or prepared meat, or an unprocessed meat cut, and upon the type of package or container in which the product is packed and shipped.

However, most packages requires multiple labels including scale labels that list the price pound, net weight, total price, when the item was packed, the sell-by date, safe handling instructions and often a bar code. Labels are also used to provide nutritional information or to promote a product as “great for the grill” or “keep frozen.”

Labels are also widely used on shipping or institutional containers to impart information mandated by regulators including product type, handling statement, legend, establishment number, net

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weight, ingredients statement, signature line, nutrition facts, and safe handling instructions.

Far from “blanks,” these labels often come pre-printed from the converter with store name, logos or other branding, as well as fixed information and defined spaces or boxes where variable data will be printed later by the processor.

According to Gayer, the process of identifying a thermal label converter begins with an RFP to multiple suppliers, followed by careful vetting of each to determine the company’s stability and long-term viability.

“Obviously price is the ticket to the dance,” says Gayer. “However, we follow up with a lot of questions so we can learn about the company we are partnering with to determine if it can deliver the goods consistently.”

Gayer cites the example of OMNI Systems (omnisystem.com). In 2000, he contacted the company for a quote on scale labels in quantities that were in excess of thirty million per month.

Because OMNI Systems is one of the largest consumers of thermal media in the world, it had the purchasing power to procure quality raw materials at extremely low rates. In addition, the company operates in a lean, modern, 24/7 operating environment. The savings that result are passed on to the customer.

Price, though, is only one piece of the equation. Selecting an unreliable label company can lead to range of problems

including inconsistent or late deliveries, as well as raw material, adhesion, or other print-related issues.

“Any company can offer product at a good price, but in my opinion you measure a company by how they respond when something goes wrong,” says Gayer.

When dealing with millions of thermal labels in rolls of varying diameters, another major concern for processors is inventory management.

Once the label converter is approved at the corporate level, individual or regional processing plants can often access the information and order using a company’s ERP system.

However, leaving the task of inventory management to in-house staff can result in human error that can leave the processor high and dry.

For this reason, large thermal label converters often offer several Vendor Managed Inventory options to ensure that label stock is maintained to inventory minimums and replenished quickly from regional distribution centers.

This type of program requires the label converter to maintain its own sizable inventory at specific minimums agreed upon with the customer.

“From a corporate point of view, we realize that with the volume of tens of millions of scale labels there has to be significant inventory at the supplier as well,” says Gayer. “So we worked with our supplier to identify an appropriate min/max inventory for them to keep based on past order history and projections.”

For higher volumes, a few label converters are now going even further offering a consignment option that allows the processor to store thermal transfer or direct thermal labels at their facility at established minimums so stock is available at all times. The processor is not asked to pay for inventory until it has been pulled and reported.

If required, thermal label converters can also take control of the inventory process for the end user by tasking personnel to go to the processor’s site to complete inventory counts and ensure label supplies are maintained.

There are many advantages to this type of arrangement, including guaranteed product availability, less cash invested in

labels sitting on a shelf, and a significant cost savings by eliminating the need for overnight or expedite fees. This type of approach can save processors up to 40% on annual thermal label budgets.

“There are companies that find [the consignment approach] to be very useful,” says Gayer. “Obviously, the advantage is you don’t have to pay for the labels until the point of usage so I can see the financial advantages to doing business that way.” ■

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Policy and Politics

Manitoba under new leadership after 17-year NDP reign ended

By Myron Love

In the wake of an overwhelming Progressive Conservative victory in Manitoba's recent provincial election, the Manitoba hog processing industry is looking forward to better times ahead.

On Tuesday, April 19, new Premier Brian Pallister ended 17 years of NDP rule by leading his PCs to a new record, winning 40 seats out of a possible 57 in the Legislature. That represents 53 per cent of the vote. The defeated NDP retained 14 seats, and the Liberals won the remaining three.

The results may not have been as much a show of support for Pallister and his party, but rather a rejection of the NDP brand and, in particular, Greg Selinger, who had been premier since 2009.

The past 10 years under the former NDP government had been especially dark days for Manitoba hog producers. In 2006, the NDP government introduced a moratorium on new hog barn construction in much of the province. In 2011, the moratorium was put into effect province-wide.

"The government placed all the blame for an increase in phosphorus levels in Lake Winnipeg on the hog industry," says George Matheson, a Manitoba hog producer and recently re-elected as chair of the Manitoba Pork Council. "It gave all of us hog producers a black eye. It was the most severe such moratorium in Canada and it was an unfair thing to do to our industry. It was purely a political move to win votes in Winnipeg."

As a result, there has been a significant reduction in hog production, more than several hundred thousand pigs, over the past 10 years.

It has only been within the past year that the former NDP government began to relax the moratorium. The Pig Production Special Pilot Project Evaluation Protocol, which will allow construction to resume under several new conditions, was introduced about a year ago. One of the key conditions is a significant reduction in soil phosphorous limits where hog manure is spread. Previously, regulations allowed for 180 parts per million of phosphorous to build up in soil, while the new protocol will slash that to 60 ppm.

Also, any spreading of fertilizer will have to be incorporated into the soil within 48 hours or directly injected.

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Policy and Politics

And new barns would no longer require an anaerobic digester – an expensive and impractical requirement due to Manitoba’s winters. In its place, hog farmers will now be able to use a dual or multi-cell lagoon system that uses gravity to separate liquid from sludge similar to the ones used by many municipalities.

While producers west of the Red River will be able to expand and build new barns, producers east of the river will only be able to expand existing hog barns. In the RMs of Hanover and La Broquerie, where hog barns are some of the most densely populated in the province, no construction of any kind was allowed under the new rules.

The first new barns were expected to be built this spring.

As the PCs already held most of the seats in rural southern Manitoba, there was little or no discussion of agricultural issues during the election.

Claude Vielfaure, COO of HyLife Ltd., one of Manitoba’s two largest pork processors, is confident though that the PC’s strong rural base will ensure that the new government has a more positive attitude to the hog industry and a better understanding of what the industry contributes to the provincial economy.

He notes that Hylife’s operations, largely in southeastern

Manitoba, and the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon directly employ about 3,000 people between them.

In addition to having a large number of rural MLAs, the new PC Government has a number of people with business experience, notes Andrew Dickson, the Manitoba Pork Council’s general manager.

“There are still a number of issues on the table left over from our dealings with the previous government,” Dickson says. “We are cautiously optimistic that we will enjoy a more positive relationship with the new government and that we will soon be able to bring production back in line with the processing capacity that we have in the province.”

One of the promises that Brian Pallister did make during the campaign was a pledge to bring Manitoba into the New West Partnership Trade Agreement. The former NDP Government declined to join Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia in the new interprovincial barrier-free trade and investment market. Dickson believes that will also help boost Manitoba’s hog processing industry.

Like Dickson and Vielfaure, George Matheson describes himself as cautiously optimistic that better times are ahead for the industry. “Producers are looking forward to building new barns and getting going forward again,” he says. ■


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YOUR DAILY BACON

BY BUDDY SIMMONS

Not too long ago, I was reflecting back on the very first appearance of “Your Daily Bacon.” Long-time friend and Western Hog Journal’s illustrious editor Sheri Monk had approached me with an idea for a feature in the magazine, a look at the lighter side of the pork industry. “Might you”, she asked, “be able to come up with something that focuses on the ever-increasing popularity of bacon and the impact it has had on pop culture? I’m paraphrasing a little, it has been a while and she might just have easily have said, “You write goofy stuff, want to come up with something goofy for the magazine?” But I like my more eloquent description of what set “Your Daily Bacon” in motion, so we’ll go with my description of the conversation.

I just had to ask her precisely what she had in mind, of course, and she elaborated, “Internet memes would probably be good things to examine, and perhaps the myriad of bacon related products would be worthy of consideration.” Again I’m paraphrasing. It could have been, “You already waste a lot of time looking for silly things on the net, you may as well put that to good use, doofus.”

I agreed and Sheri set about choosing a name for the feature. “Goofy Bacon Stuff That I Found in the Internet” wasn’t really a

very good candidate, so she took an informal survey on Social media, and at the suggestion of a friend, selected “Your Daily Bacon,” exercising some poetic license given that Western Hog Journal is a quarterly publication, but still perfectly adequate.

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I would argue not quite as accurate as “Goofy Bacon Stuff That I Found on the Internet”, but I’m not one to rock the skillet and spill grease.

It was not a difficult task. I was aware of the emergence of bacon memes, but I really had not realized just how big a phenomena it had become. Not only did suitable material just randomly pop

up on social media ripe for harvest, actually searching for material uncovered a treasure-trove. Along with dabbling with a few recipes that were a little bit outside the norm and peering into the topics of pigs and pop-culture and history, I found a fertile field in which to sow words.

Of course, it isn’t always as easy as finding items them and bringing them to the pages of WHJ. Firstly, it has to be kept in mind that humour is subjective, and that means that what might make me chuckle could be met with stony stares (or outright looks of horror) from others. With that in mind, here is a newsflash: Not everything one finds on the Internet is exactly wholesome family fun. I know, shocking, but true. So it is necessary to decide whether or not something that could be amusing to some might be offensive to others. Trust me, I’ve found a few doozies that I really enjoyed, but were questionable in regard to good taste. And good taste is what bacon is all about, after all. Now and then I would have to defer to Sheri’s judgment on whether or not something crossed any lines - scantily clad ladies in bacon bikinis jumps immediately to mind - but usually the material I selected passed muster.

Getting to the point, I was concerned initially that there would become a



Um, this isn't quite high-fashion. But still appealing.



A bacon scarf? Talk about the perfect accessory!



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shortage of memes and products, but so far, the internet has not let me down. To show this, I am returning to the novelty offerings well again to let readers know that if they are stuck for gift ideas, or wish to further their bacon addiction, there are still options out there. I can’t say if or when the well will run dry, but the bottom of it isn’t visible yet. So sit back and enjoy and maybe break out your credit cards. Because we are about to watch the bacon go down the runway with Your Daily Bacon’s first (and likely last) Spring Bacon Fashion Show and you never know, that hard-to-buy-for uncle might need a new pair of slippers! ■



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Nothing is too silly for "Your Daily Bacon". But this comes close.

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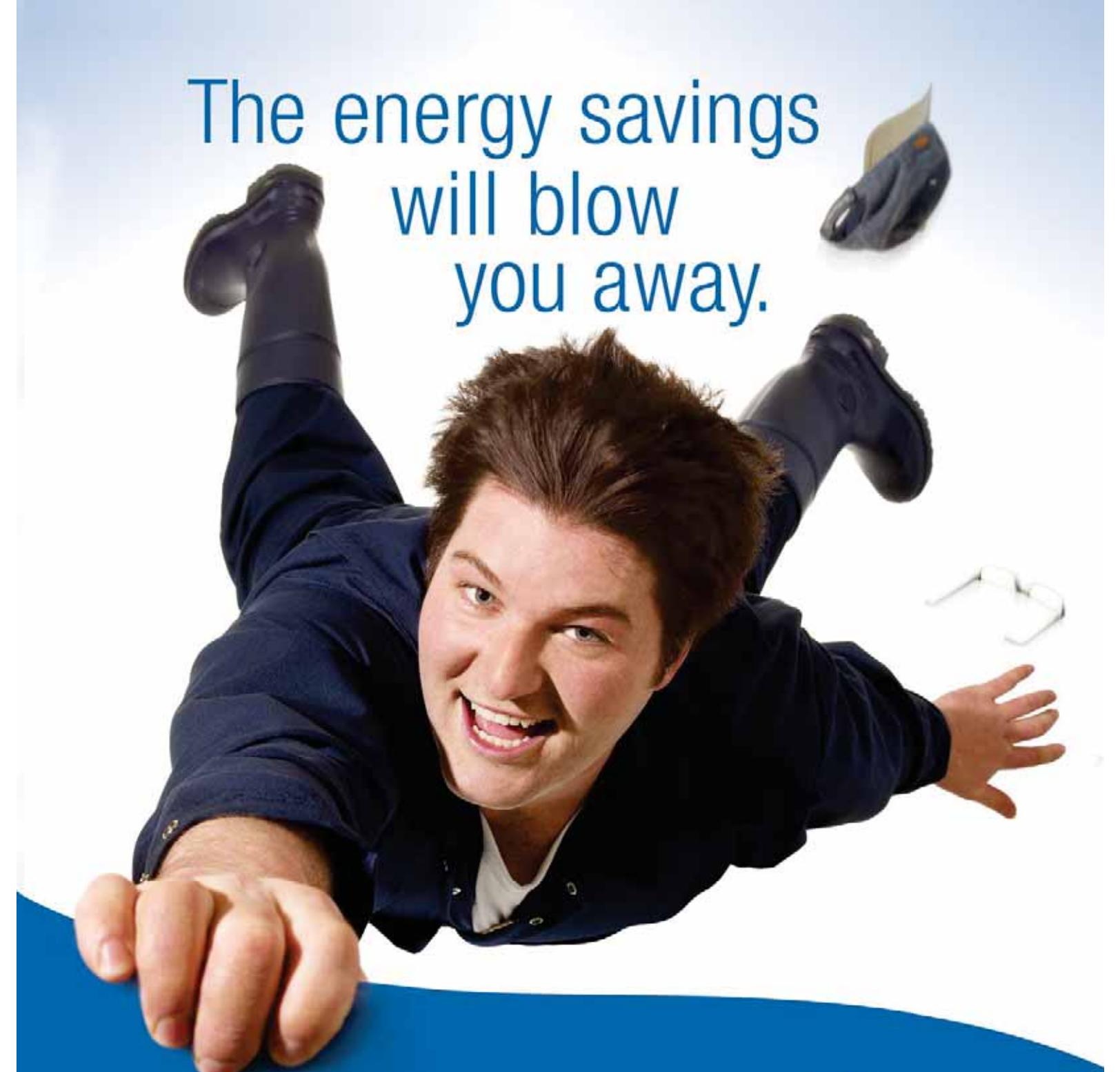
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