



BANFF PORK
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news release

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For Immediate Release:

Pork industry tackles new world in wake of H1N1

Banff, Alta., Jan. 20, 2010: If there was any lingering doubt of the huge economic and psychological blow dealt to the pork industry in the wake of H1N1 influenza, it was quickly erased for those attending the Banff Pork Seminar, a leading seminar for the pork industry held annually in Banff, Alberta.

Two speakers who presented on “What the next pandemic may bring” offered a sobering picture of both the market cost of H1N1 and the new era of pandemic concern it has further ushered in. The silver lining is market recovery in recent months and lessons learned that can help the industry prepare for future challenges.

Economist Ron Gietz of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development presented data and analysis that estimated the market cost of H1N1, illustrating dramatic losses on a number of fronts, from a major and immediate impact on the hog futures market to slashed exports and overall reduced prices.

Gietz pegged total H1N1-related economic damage at \$1.3 billion for the North American pork industry from May to October 2009. “Hog producers were the big losers, arguably to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars,” he says.

In the futures market, a key indicator is the lean hog futures trade, which showed plummeting values in the months immediately following the news of H1N1 in late April. “The loss in value was stark,” says Gietz. “Every contract until the fall closed out sharply lower than its trading value on April 24, when H1N1 first made news.”

Persistent media use of the term “swine flu,” which became a major focus of industry frustration and damage control efforts, likely dealt a crushing impact, observes Gietz. “It hardly seems likely that a relatively mild new flu strain with the name of H1N1 or perhaps Mexican flu would have had any lasting impact on world pork trade, or hog and pork markets, even if discovered in the occasional swine herd.”

Markets over the fall and winter for the most part have recovered from H1N1 related losses, he observes. While producers and their industry had little control over the H1N1 situation, lessons reinforced included the importance of ongoing risk assessment. “H1N1 has been another poster child for active, ongoing risk management. There no such thing as certainty in the markets and we need to be prepared for anything.”

...Banff Pork Seminar – Pork industry tackles – continued

Soren Alexandersen of the National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), offered a global picture of current and emerging zoonotic disease threats, further reinforcing the increased importance of preparedness and surveillance in this new age.

Zoonotic diseases are those involving microorganisms capable of causing disease in both humans and animals, and their importance is becoming increasingly critical on both a local and global scale, says Alexandersen. Of particular concern are those considered “transboundary” or able to spread across national and international boundaries.

The CFIA is among those monitoring all current and emerging threats, while aiming to ramp-up their pandemic readiness, he says. The future is likely to see additional novel and emerging pathogens at a rate of one to three pathogens per year of which most will have zoonotic potential.

“Based on what is known from the past, most of these novel pathogens will be viruses, most often RNA viruses, with an origin in wildlife and often driven by human activities including population growth,” says Alexandersen.

The most efficient way to counteract novel pathogens is to discover them early, says Alexandersen. Canada advocates being part of internationally coordinated efforts to do that under a “one-world, one-health” concept, he says. “We need to have excellent surveillance. We need to be as well prepared as possible.”

Of interest, the origins of the new pandemic H1N1 virus remain in question, he reported. H1N1 contains genes of several known viruses of swine, avian and human origin. “It is important to note the ancestor to this virus may have been present 10 to 15 years ago, based on evolutionary estimates, and that it, as far as known, was not detected in pigs or any other species during this period. It is still unclear where, how and in which species this novel virus evolved before being recognized in April 2009.”

Held since 1972 in Banff, Alberta, the Banff Pork Seminar is coordinated by the Department of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science, University of Alberta, in cooperation with Alberta Pork, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and other pork industry representatives from across Canada.

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