



Mitchell Veterinary Services

Pauly Veterinary Clinic

243 Ontario Road
P.O. Box 1224
Mitchell, Ontario N0K 1N0
Phone (519) 348-9711
Fax (519) 348-4432

62 Main St. S.
P.O. Box 359
Milverton, Ontario N0K 1M0
Phone (519) 595-8888
Fax (519) 595-8758

Swine Newsletter
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Report from the Banff Pork Seminar

(Summary of a few presentations I attended)

Animal Welfare in the Supply Chain

- Pork producers “have a social licence” or a privilege of operating with minimal formalized restrictions. If we lose this social licence, either through a single event or a series of events that reduce or eliminate public trust, then it is replaced with “social control” i.e. regulation, legislation, litigation or market action.
- Operating with a social license is flexible and low cost. Operating with a high degree of social control increases costs, reduces operational flexibility and increases bureaucratic compliance.
- The question becomes, what can be done to maintain public trust that grants the social licence and protects freedom to operate?

Will Consumers Really Pay for Happier Pigs?

- Science tells us if we can do something. Society tells us if we should do it.
- Glynn T. Tonsor speculates that, yes, in the long run, society will pay for improved welfare, and therefore, happier pigs.

Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL)

Dr. Howard Hill speculated that there should be some sort of agreement by July. He thinks that when some American politicians finally understand what our counter sanctions will do to industries in their back yard (e.g. wine producers in California) they will support a movement to change COOL.

Russia

Due to Russia’s occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, many countries like Canada imposed economic sanctions on Russia. Russia retaliated by putting counter bans on a lot of products from us. Canadian Pork exports were particularly affected. But now their meat shelves are bare and they are trying to import from other sources which just creates a big meat shuffle. However this is costly for meat exporters, and hence, is bad for pork producers.

Antibiotics as Growth Promoter vs. Therapeutic Agent in Modern Pig Production

No one argues that a sick animal in need of antibiotic treatment should be treated and that proper withdrawal times observed before sending that animal to market. But the damage to society in the form of antimicrobial resistance is a huge concern. Agriculture's use of mass amounts of antibiotics for prevention or as growth promotants is under fire.

We may think that antibiotic use for disease control and prevention is good stewardship, but it is difficult to explain to stakeholders outside of the livestock and veterinary industries. Antibiotics used as growth promoters as opposed to therapeutic treatments has lost public support and raises questions about responsible stewardship of antibiotics in agriculture.

PED: A year later. What have we learned?

- PED has become endemic in the USA. About 70% of their sow herds have had PED.
- Canada has contained PED to less than 1% of our herds over the past year.
- PED is not a trade stopping disease but the fact that three new strains of corona virus got a toe hold here in the last year, and so far we have not been able to eliminate them, is a message that we are in lots of trouble if a trade barrier disease like foot and mouth or hog cholera ever makes their way here.
- There is a clear message here that we really aren't ready enough.
- Canada's goal right now is to contain the spread of PED, as best possible, this winter. Then with the arrival of warmer summer temperatures try to eliminate it again.
- Our close proximity to the USA will always provide a threat.
- More truck wash stations are needed.
- Producer diligence/biosecurity has come a long way but there are still weak links.

Odds & Ends

There were presentations about domestic supply and export markets, staff training, genetics, optimizing breed herd efficiency, emerging production systems, feed costs/income, Canadian Code of Practice (more social control!), etc. Basically, something for everyone!

I attend this seminar every year and I am always pleased to see a few of my clients there too. Banff is one of Canada's premier tourist towns. There is lots to see and do even in the winter. Next year it will be held on January 12th – 14th and will be at the famous Banff Springs Hotel. Why not plan a winter vacation?

Yours truly,

Reg
RR/cp