



Biosecurity Measures Keep Major Swine Disease at Bay

Despite widespread losses from Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea (PED) in the United States (US), no cases have been reported in Alberta. Here's how Alberta Pork and Growing Forward 2 achieved this biosecurity breakthrough.

Midway through 2013, Alberta pork producers began to receive news of huge outbreaks of PED in many part of the US. This disease was associated with high levels of mortality, particularly among young piglets. Given the close ties and constant commerce between the US and Canadian pork industries, the chances of PED staying in the south seemed remote.

"We were very concerned about PED and were waiting for it to spread," recalls Charlotte Shipp, Industry Programs Coordinator with Alberta Pork. "We believed it was just a matter of time, but we didn't know when and where it would strike."

Based on a number of projects already completed together, Alberta Pork and the *Growing Forward 2's* Biosecurity team had a productive working relationship in place. With no time to waste, *Growing Forward 2* provided the pork producer group with a Disease Preparedness Grant to help deal with the impact of a seemingly inevitable PED outbreak in Alberta.

Work On Many Fronts

As Hernan Ortegon, a veterinarian and Head of the *Growing Forward 2* Biosecurity Programs at Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, explains, the first priority was to educate producers and farm service providers on how to mitigate the risk of PED.

"We knew there needed to be a lot of engagement with producers," says Ortegon. "Working with Alberta Pork, we developed education and awareness strategies to spread the message."

Based on the US experience, the movement of pigs by truck was believed to be an important factor in how the PED virus moved from place to place. Biosecurity gaps were identified when Alberta Pork surveyed industry on several issues: how they handled the washing and disinfection of truck trailers, assembly yard procedures, and how they transported pigs in and out of their operation.

From this information, and consulting with Ortegon's team, the organization rolled out a series of new biosecurity protocols related to handling and transportation. These were communicated one on one with producers, and through a series of Town Hall meetings.

Among the key recommendations were to thoroughly wash, dry and disinfect trailers between uses and, if possible, have separate trailers for incoming and outgoing pigs. Barn configurations were also scrutinized, and biosecure Danish entry systems were advocated. "Our producers really stepped up," says Shipp. "They bought new equipment and implemented new protocols for washing, drying and disinfecting trailers." While *Growing Forward 2* cost-shared some of the expenses, producers themselves wrote most of the cheques.



Endemic in US, No Cases in Alberta

PED is now considered to be endemic in the US – an ongoing disease threat that can be managed, though it may never be eradicated there.

Thanks in part to biosecurity measures implemented since 2013, Alberta has not experienced a confirmed case of PED. The sole Canadian outbreaks, and just a handful at that, have occurred in Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec.

Back in 2013, if you'd told Alberta producers they wouldn't see a single reported case of PED, many would have thought such an outcome unlikely. To Hernan Ortegon, it demonstrates what can be achieved when all stakeholders co-operate and execute a sound strategy.

"It's a very successful story of working together at different levels: farmers, government and transport companies," says Ortegon. "Three or four years ago, biosecurity was a rare word to hear. Talking to producers today, they're very comfortable with it. By improving biosecurity around PED, they will also have greater protection against other diseases in the future."

Growing Forward 2 is a federal – provincial – territorial initiative.