



## Pork Industry Embraces New Technology for Humane Euthanasia

*Over the past year, with support from Growing Forward 2, a pilot project introduced Alberta producers and vets to a better way to cull sick or injured animals.*

It's unfortunate but true: in a modern livestock operation, death is a fact of life. At times, a portion of the animal population may be too sick, injured, or weak to survive. According to Javier Bahamon, Manager of Quality Assurance with Alberta Pork, this is a situation no one wants to see, but it is a possible scenario that can't be ignored.

"People do not understand the practice of euthanasia," says Bahamon, "It is a tough decision, but sometimes that decision has to be made. If we need to do it, how we do it is important. It should be done in the best way for the animal."

The conventional method of euthanizing a young pig is to apply blunt force to the head. Done right, this can work quickly and effectively. Even so, results are inconsistent and it's below the level of humane treatment many would like to see. What's more, many barn workers are understandably reluctant to do it.

"Thanks to strong producer demand for a better way, and close cooperation between Alberta Pork and *Growing Forward 2*, the industry has taken a major step forward in animal welfare," says Bahamon.

During 2014, the issue of humane euthanasia of pigs took on new urgency. At that time, Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea (also known as PED), was sweeping through the industry in the United States. Affecting mainly younger animals, PED killed or necessitated the culling of large numbers of piglets.

Isabelle Girard, a Provincial Livestock Welfare Specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry (AF), recalls that the threat of PED coming to Alberta had clear implications for the practice of euthanasia.

"If PED is on the farm, then you may have to euthanize many piglets," she says. "There was a need to look at the practice and find a better way."

### Research and Training Provide the Foundation

In 2014 and 2015, with support from *Growing Forward 2*, Alberta Pork researched new and more humane methods of euthanasia. Bahamon researched a device known as a Zephyr, a non-penetrating bolt stunner that applies 120 joules of charge to the brain or skull of the animal. Using this method, a piglet could be euthanized more humanely than the conventional method.

Funding from *Growing Forward 2* allowed Alberta Pork to purchase 50 of these units, with training kits, and initiate a pilot project to introduce the technology to the province's producers and swine veterinarians. Bahamon took Zephyrs to a group of producers he knew to be early



adopters of new ideas and respected by their peers. Once these operations had received training and began to use the device, word began to spread from producer to producer and Bahamon's phone started to ring.

"I got a lot of calls from people saying, 'I want it'," he says. "Others didn't want to wait, they went out and bought one and asked us to come train them."

Once a producer or veterinarian had received training through Alberta Pork, they could then train others on the proper use of this method. A follow-up survey by Alberta Pork confirmed that the Zephyr was quickly becoming standard practice in more and more operations.

"This more humane method of euthanasia is now well-accepted and is being used. You start to hear the feedback, so we know it is being implemented. Today, 30 percent of Alberta's sow herd is covered. Now we will push to move that even higher" says Bahamon.

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