

# PRESENTATION TO THE CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION

## HOG INDUSTRY REVIEW

MARCH 5, 2007

This presentation will focus on the production systems for raising pigs in the hog industry. The production systems are the root of all other issues in the hog industry. Everything stems from the way in which the pigs are raised, how they are fed, what type of manure collection system is in place, whether they are raised on straw; whether sub-therapeutic antibiotics are used, etc. I will not be discussing animal welfare, per se, as I understand that it is the view of this Clean Environment Commission that animal welfare is not within the scope of these meetings. However the animals and the manner in which they are housed, fed and raised, is at the centre of all issues related to this Hog Industry Review.

Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, agriculture has been based on an industrial model. In animal agriculture the industrialization has resulted in intensive livestock operations for the raising of animals used for meat. In the simplest of terms, it means raising thousands of animals in very confined, unnatural conditions and relying on the use of very small doses of antibiotics to make it work. The production systems, that have been developed, have essentially ignored the species-specific needs of the animals. They have provided for the very basic need for food and shelter but have not taken into account the species-specific or instinctual needs of the animals. The measures taken to mitigate this situation are now proving to be costly in terms of environmental and human health concerns. For a number of reasons, we are now learning that trying to raise large numbers of animals in the cheapest way has other hidden costs. Ultimately the current industrial style of animal agriculture is not sustainable and will never be sustainable, until we put recognition of the animals' species-specific needs back into the equation.

What does this mean for the hog industry? The species-specific needs of pigs are largely around their desire to root to forage for food and to create nests for sleeping and birthing. Housing pigs in straw based systems is the easiest way to meet their need to root and to forage for food. Feeding the animals enough to meet their nutritional needs is only one aspect that needs to be considered. According to Dr. Peter Brooks, from the University of Plymouth, the feed requirements for pigs are much greater than just nutritional. They need to "feel

full” in order to be satisfied. This most easily comes from being able to root and chew on straw, which they can do in straw based housing.

There are several good reasons why Manitoba’s hog industry should move towards universal straw based housing for the pigs. Economically, the market demand for “humanely raised” pork has grown and has resulted in the recent announcements from Smithfield and Maple Leaf that they will be phasing out the use of gestation stalls within the next decade. The concept of raising pigs on straw is consistent with the idea of allowing animals to fulfill their natural instincts and therefore, is appealing to those who concern themselves with animal welfare.

Beyond economics though, there are positive environmental advantages to using straw based systems. According to Dr. Katherine Buckley, from the Agriculture research station in Brandon, the odour and air quality issues are positively impacted with straw, in that ammonia loss is reduced when the manure is mixed in with straw. The odours coming from the straw based systems are not nearly as noxious as the odours from the barns using the liquid slurry systems. As well there are advantages in using composted manure on soils that are highly erodible because the compost increases the water retention of the soil and reduces the erosion. The composting has to be conducted in an appropriate way but can offer beneficial fertilizer for a number of applications. With the heightened attention to climate change and the predictions about increased drought conditions on the prairies, the idea of composting manure helping water retention in soil, is certainly positive.

Further to the public’s heightened interest in climate change, is the recently publicized idea that animal agriculture is a much bigger contributor to greenhouse gas emissions than was ever realized. It is not too much of a stretch to imagine that there will be a greater surveillance of the greenhouse gas emissions from animal agriculture over the next 5 years and that will likely result in a reduction in the number of food animals raised. It would seem prudent to recognize the likeliness of that trend and to ensure that, in Manitoba, we have developed a hog industry that is well positioned for long term sustainability. That means making sure that the way we are raising the animals is less harmful to our natural environment at the same time as ensuring that the product is what the world market is looking for. We will probably have to decrease the number of pigs being raised in Manitoba in order to do it the right way but we will also expect to compensate farmers more per animal.

Maple Leaf, one of the largest hog producers in Canada, has announced that they are very significantly downsizing their sow herds. This should be an indicator to the rest of the industry of what is to come.

There is another recent development that should be a red flag to our hog industry and that is the attention focused on the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in

animal agriculture. In the USA there is a bill that has recently been introduced both to the Senate and to Congress that would combat the antibiotic resistance crisis by phasing out the non-therapeutic use in animal agriculture. This bill is supported by more than 350 groups including the American Medical Association, the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the American Academy of Pediatrics. A recent report co-authored by Dr. David Wallinga, from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, has demonstrated that the routine use of antibiotics in livestock production is contributing to the rise in antibiotic-resistant germs in human medicine.

To conclude I want to reiterate that we need to pay attention to all of the recent developments: the Maple Leaf and Smithfield's announcements about the phasing out of sow stalls; the news about the overall impact of greenhouse gas emissions from livestock production; the proposed legislation in the USA phasing out the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock production; and the dire straits of Lake Winnipeg. Its time for Manitoba to get serious about building a hog industry that is sustainable well into the future. We can't do that without paying attention to what the industry is built on – the animals. If we build the industry around the species –specific needs of the animals, putting respect for nature back into the equation, we will go a long way towards ensuring that our hog farmers will have a livelihood to count on.

Respectfully submitted by,

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