

*Promoting teamwork within the pork industry***H1N1 Proves the Value of Crisis Planning**

When news of the H1N1 outbreak hit in late April, the value of crisis management became clear to the Pork Checkoff, which continues to monitor the H1N1 situation closely.

“We have action plans and crisis plans that we’ve built in the pork industry during the last decade, and we were able to put those plans to work for producers,” says Cindy Cunningham, assistant vice president of communications for the Pork Checkoff, who stresses that H1N1 is not currently in the U.S. swine herd.

Pork producers were notified immediately last spring when it became clear that the H1N1 outbreak had become a significant situation. All pork producers whose e-mail addresses are in the Pork Checkoff’s database received an e-mail explaining the issue. The message noted what actions needed to be taken on the farm and detailed why enhanced biosecurity protocols should be implemented.

To address the H1N1 outbreak beyond the farm, the pork industry responded through a joint effort between the National Pork Board, the National Pork Producers Council, the U.S. Meat Export Federation and the American Association of Swine Veterinarians. The partners focused on four goals:

- Reassure U.S. consumers and America’s international trading partners that U.S. pork is safe.
- Protect the U.S. swine herd from becoming infected with H1N1.
- Monitor the coverage of H1N1 by the media, social media, government and industry, and supply these organizations with science-based, accurate information.
- Be prepared to protect and defend the U.S. pork industry against unwarranted attacks and allegations.

The pork industry worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization and top administrators in the federal government to encourage officials to refer to the disease as H1N1, not “swine flu.”

To convey the message to consumers that pork is safe, the Pork Checkoff also supported paid advertising in national publications like the Wall Street Journal and USA Today. While consumer polling revealed that consumer confidence dipped within a few days of the H1N1 outbreak, it quickly rebounded.

“This is tremendous, and it also shows how the relationships we have with our retail and foodservice partners really come to bear in a situation like this,” says Cunningham, who noted that the Pork Checkoff worked diligently with retail and foodservice outlets to help them understand that pork is safe. “We showed them how strong consumer confidence levels were, so they understood that consumers would continue to buy pork.”

For more information, contact Cindy Cunningham, CCunningham@pork.org, 515-223-2643.

Preparing for a Possible Round Two of H1N1

At this point, there is no H1N1 in the U.S. swine herd, and the pork industry wants to keep it that way. That doesn’t mean the Pork Checkoff has abandoned its crisis management plans, however.

“As we head into fall, we’re working diligently to ensure that if H1N1 does get into the swine herd, it doesn’t impact consumers’ consumption of pork,” says Cindy Cunningham, assistant vice president of communications for the Pork Checkoff.

The Pork Checkoff is maintaining its proactive stance to prepare for the possibility of H1N1 in the U.S. swine herd by:

- Making sure that retailers and consumers continue to understand that pork is safe. Research proves that even if a pig does contract H1N1, the disease does not carry over into the meat, Cunningham says.
- Working with the USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Centers for Disease Control so producers understand what to do on their operations if an H1N1 outbreak occurs. “Enhanced biosecurity protocols are so critical right now to keep our herds clean,” Cunningham says.

- Helping pork producers understand how their Checkoff played a role in the recovery from the H1N1 outbreak in the spring. “In any crisis situation, the key is to return to business as usual as quickly as possible,” Cunningham says. “We were committed to taking the necessary steps to address the H1N1 issue right from the start so producers could continue to sell their pigs and sell pork.”
- Scheduling Webinars with packers, retailers, foodservice, ag media and dieticians. This fall, a representative from the Centers for Disease Control, as well as a representative from the National Animal Disease Center, will be presenting. The Webinars will be recorded so producers can access them at a later date.
- Offering third party-spokesperson training in September in Des Moines.
- Scheduling desk side visits with national media for the week of Sept. 21.

Being able to communicate quickly with pork producers remains a key component of the H1N1 crisis management plan, Cunningham stresses.

“The one thing that would help us greatly is if pork producers would give us their e-mail addresses, which we would only use in a crisis situation like this. Then we can immediately reach them with the information they need.”

To share your e-mail address for this purpose, call the Pork Checkoff at 800-456-PORK (7675), or e-mail pork@pork.org.

For more information, contact Cindy Cunningham, CCunningham@pork.org, 515-223-2643.

PORK CHECKOFF IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Producer Leaders, National Pork Board Set to Tackle Tough Budget

The National Pork Board will meet in Des Moines on the afternoon of Sept. 9, the day before more than 50 producers from across the country arrive in Des Moines to begin work on budget recommendations for 2010.

Lower than anticipated pork prices for 2009 as well as projections that producers may not return to profitability until spring 2010 have reduced revenues from the Pork Checkoff and already have prompted board members to tighten spending for the remainder of 2009. The board earlier this summer authorized a 2010 spending limit of \$46.2 million, roughly 20 percent lower than authorized 2009 spending.

“This will be a budget that recognizes that pork producers are hurting and need whatever help they can get from the Pork Checkoff to market their product,” said Tim Bierman, a pork producer from Larrabee, Iowa, and president of the National Pork Board. “I hesitate to call this new budget a crisis budget, but that’s what it is,” he said.

“The producers who will be here Sept. 10 and 11 to produce a balanced budget for the board’s consideration in November have their work cut out for them,” Bierman said. “There are going to be some very difficult choices and decisions.”

Also on the board’s agenda the afternoon of Sept. 9 is a review of new consumer research on the effectiveness of the National Pork Board’s 22-year-old Other White Meat® brand.

Board members also are expected to get an update from its task force working on a new strategic plan for the National Pork Board. The producer-led task force has met twice and will meet again later this month before making its recommendation to the board in November. The task force also has participated in listening sessions in Nebraska, Indiana and North Carolina and has conducted an online survey available to all producers.

National Pork Board meetings are open to the public. Those wishing to attend are asked to contact Lorraine Garner at lgarner@pork.org or 515-223-2600.

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