Regulatory and Other Challenges to Pork Production (Session 2B)

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Bill Ehm, as chair of the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission, oversees environmental rules that are enforced by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Also a poultry producer, he works for Crestland Coop. He compared the pork industry to the poultry industry, which had left the state but now is returning with a different look. The pork industry may be going through similar changes.

Livestock manure should be the responsibility of the company that owns the hogs, as well as individual growers. The future of the pork industry impacts independent producers in several ways:
1. Independent producers will need stricter nutrient management plans. More specifically, they may need to manage manure by its phosphorus content, rather than just nitrogen. If this occurs, producers will be spending more time and money to apply manure, especially in areas where the soil already is high in phosphorus.
2. Independent producers also must deal with the environmental impacts of manure from natural causes. One example would be when a heavy rain causes runoff from an outside feedlot, or causes a manure storage facility to overflow.
3. Independent producers must consider all areas where the industry is changing—economics, marketing, as well as environmental considerations. He said the commission is making changes as they fit into the system, but they do not promote sociological change or economic development. Decisions are based on sound science and what is good for the environment.

Dave Pyburn said one of the biggest issues facing the pork industry today is food safety. What makes it difficult is that the industry must deal with more than just reality, but consumer perceptions about food safety. Already, all meat processing plants with more than 10 employees must have a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety system. Plants must address hazards in microbial, physical, and chemical forms.

Pork producers can follow good production practices by using the Pork Quality Assurance program (PQA). This program addresses anti-microbial residues and physical hazards, and brings more efficient management to the farm. The NPPC is urging all packers to require PQA Level III product so that food safety problems can be addressed before they occur.

Other food safety programs in the future may be similar to ISO 9000. One program under consideration would assure trichina-free pork. Pyburn said trichina has
been virtually eliminated, although consumer perception is that it still exists. In 1998, there were 24 reported cases of trichina in humans. In most years over half of the cases are related to something other than pork. A 1995 report shows that only 0.013 percent of swine had trichina.

One on-farm audit looked at production practices to determine where trichina and other potential food safety issues could be controlled. One site had a hoop structure to study rodent control. It was determined that even if the structure was infested with rodents, they could be controlled. Inspection by a herd veterinarian must verify the infestation was under control, and the information could be passed on another agency for certification.

The ultimate benefit is for the consumer. Pyburn said food safety must be looked at as a continuum, from the producer to the end user. Programs like PQA and on-farm trichina certification programs would allow independent producers to be competitive with integrated producer systems.

Economist Helen Jensen presented information about two types of regulations, and the potential for new regulations.

1. HACCP regulations at packing plants
This has been successful. Almost 9 percent of the carcasses at the plants were testing positive for the presence of salmonella bacteria before implementation of HACCP. With 83 percent of the plants meeting HACCP requirements, only 6.2 percent of the carcasses were positive.

What is the cost for HACCP? On average, associated costs for increased levels of food safety rose by 1 to 2 percent. The percentage of total plant operation costs was lower for larger plants, and higher for smaller plants.

2. Antibiotic regulations
Antibiotics have two purposes—subtherapeutic for growth enhancement, and therapeutic for control of diseases. New proposals from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulate antibiotic use in two ways. First, any new antibiotic cannot develop resistance. This would be determined by developing a baseline, and antibiotics could be ranked according to how they develop resistance and their risk of use.

Second, antibiotics used in animals should not impact human health. Sweden has a voluntary ban on low-dose use of antibiotics. Denmark has followed suit with a voluntary ban on growth enhancements in 1997, and in September of 1998 introduced a ban on all growth enhancements. The question is how this ban affects pork exports.

Discussion in the United States about similar regulations has been underway for some time, but we’re not sure of the consumer response. Research has looked at the use of antibiotics in large vs. small operations. A group will be going to Sweden and Denmark to determine what effects, if any, the ban has had on health and economics.

3. Future regulations
These will be based on science and may be linked to the ability to trace antibiotic use in animals, as well as animal welfare considerations.

QUESTIONS:
Why don’t municipalities have to follow same regulations required of livestock?
producers for the disposal of waste products? Municipalities have a license for discharge.

What is the driving force behind regulation of antibiotics? The biggest concerns are for their effects on human health and development of antibiotic resistance.