



ONTARIO PORK

Traceability: Information transfer from farm to plant in real time December 8, 2010

A small mobile tracking device has potential to deliver big advantages for Ontario's pork industry. A pilot project is underway by Ontario Pork to determine the feasibility of transmitting hog movement information electronically in real time. "We are looking at ways of making it more efficient to capture and transfer information to all players in the chain," says Tim Metzger, national program coordinator for Ontario Pork.

Metzger is working with two transport companies and one processing plant to test the concept of moving information instantly. Transporters involved in the study are equipped with the handheld devices that collect information at loading. When a truck is full and ready to go, load information is transmitted to the dispatch and processing facility. As such, processors are aware of the number of pigs on the truck, what farm they are coming from and when they were loaded.

One benefit of real-time hog tracking is accuracy. "Transporters usually book loads of pigs with an estimated number per load, but the actual number of pigs delivered may vary depending on how many pigs the producer feels are ready to market on shipping day," explains Metzger. "With this new program, once load information is sent by the driver, the plant knows exactly how many pigs to expect."

Real-time tracking will be especially helpful in emergency situations – for instance, in the event of the temporary closure of a processing facility (due to a breakdown, etc.). In this situation, it is important to prevent hogs from being loaded. Once they are placed on a truck, hogs are usually not allowed back inside the barn for biosecurity reasons. Transferring load information in real time makes it possible to alert transporters not to load a truck, avoiding the difficult task of finding a holding spot for the hogs. Or in the case of a truck that is already loaded and en route to a closed facility, drivers can be contacted and appropriately redirected.

The added benefit of an electronic system is animal tracking, which complements the Canadian Swine Traceability System (PigTrace Canada) – a national program intended to enhance trace-back and trace-forward investigations during an animal disease outbreak affecting swine. Quick identification of animals and farms will improve the industry's chances of returning to trade as soon as possible.

This project was funded in part through Growing Forward, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The Agricultural Adaptation Council assists in the delivery of several Growing Forward programs in Ontario.