

Creating a Strong Infrastructure for Swine Producers

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Infrastructures are critical to our day to day existence. When they work well, they are often taken for granted. From road maintenance to internet access, from barn builders to barristers, we are fortunate to live where we have access to the skills and services we require to function at a very productive level..

The large number of swine producers in southern Ontario has caused a strong swine production infrastructure to develop here. Swine producers have access to all the services and technology that are needed to successfully produce pork for the international marketplace. It is this access to services and expertise in housing, nutrition, health, meat science, marketing and more that allows Ontario hog producers to compete at the international level. We should be careful not to take this well-functioning infrastructure for granted. If the infrastructure weakens, so too will our industry.

Expertise in the feeding of pigs, in the diagnosis and treatment of swine diseases, in optimising manure management, in designing and operating efficient swine production facilities, and in processing and marketing pig meat is readily available to us in Ontario. The foundation of this strong infrastructure arises from the commitment of swine producers to improving all facets of swine production. One of the ways they accomplish this is through their generous and consistent support of swine research. The Centralia Swine Research Update is just one small example of the Ontario swine research infrastructure at work.

The commitment of Ontario swine producers to funding research has long reaching consequences. The Prairie Swine Centre data base, new diagnostic tests at the Animal Health Laboratory in Guelph, developments in liquid feeding systems for swine, economic comparisons of hog production costs and profits in various regions of North America, the value of market hogs to the packer, and many other projects and services are funded in part or in whole by Ontario producers. And the advantages to investing in swine research multiply.

Providing funding for swine research draws scientists from many disciplines to work with pigs. All researchers need funding to support their projects. Immunologists, virologists, bacteriologists, engineers, epidemiologists, agricultural economists, meat scientists and others are most often discipline-specific but not necessarily species-specific. These scientists will follow the money in order to keep their research programs moving forward. Interesting problems in muscle physiology, genetics, disease resistance, bacterial and viral metabolism, manure distribution and breakdown in soil, can be studied in a wide variety of animal species. The consistent commitment of swine producers to fund swine research has convinced a large number of these basic scientists to focus their studies on swine.

Active research programs catch the attention of other funding agencies and allow scientists to build on the foundations they created with their initial funding from pork producers. This was well demonstrated recently at the University of Guelph. The University encouraged scientists to collaborate on large multidisciplinary projects in an effort to increase the returns on University research projects. Two of the top three rated research projects selected by the University of Guelph for additional funding were swine-oriented. The scientists capitalized on the large amount of research they had done over recent years funded by Ontario Pork. They used this research work as a foundation to create large multidisciplinary research trials built on the projects originally funded by Ontario pork producers.

Ontario pork producers provide more money for swine research than any other province in Canada and more than most states in the U.S. This allows Ontario swine farmers to direct research towards issues that are Ontario-centric. Whether problems arise with water quality issues, a new production disease, food safety, odour complaints, specific housing requirements, transportation, meat quality, or other topics, Ontario pork producers are not forced to extrapolate from related research in other countries or wait and hope that someone in some other pork producing area will investigate the matter. Ontario Pork approaches researchers within as well as outside Ontario to provide answers to specific problems that are impacting production efficiency in Ontario today.

As the seed money from Ontario pork producers generates ever larger swine research capabilities at the University, more and more talented graduate students are drawn to where the active research programs exist. These energetic young swine researchers bring more expertise to the province and many stay in Ontario and take jobs with nutrition companies, diagnostic laboratories, meat processors, veterinary clinics, government, and engineering firms to continue to provide their expertise to Ontario swine producers and thus continue to strengthen the infrastructure in Ontario.

Ensuring that a newborn pig has a good start on the sow goes a long way towards ensuring a strong profitable market hog. Similarly, providing a strong basis for swine research in Ontario ensures a strong and functional research infrastructure in Ontario. This infrastructure allows Ontario hog producers to continue to compete successfully in the international pork market.

Most of us are only a phone call away from the information or services we need to successfully raise pigs. Much of this expertise has been created and sustained by the smart investment of producer funds in research into swine production. It is one investment that has paid off and continues to provide value to each of us.