

## COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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The Committee met on October 7, 2020 virtually, from 12:00 to 2:16 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). There were 255 members and guests present. During the welcome and overview, instructions for sign-in, and requests to join the committee were shared, the committee mission statement was reviewed.

### Presentations & Reports

#### Lessons Learned from Swine Market Disruptions in Minnesota

Mike Eisenmenger, Swine Veterinary Center

1. **Unable to see the future** - I have always respected people who have the ability to see the future based on the facts at hand. When I saw the empty streets in China, I did not foresee the globally connected world and how the virus would affect the U.S. Or understand the affects on packing plants, toilet paper and the stock market. Lesson learned.
2. **Just in time production** - most industries are rewarded on efficiency. The capital intense swine industry was no exception. This become very visible in most industries where just in time manufacturing and use was the norm.
  - a. Not utilizing space efficiently is a major cost. Leaving a typical swine growing facility empty for a day is \$400-\$500.
  - b. Sow farm space is >\$2,500 and WTF space is >\$300

- c. Seasonally space needs change. In summer space gets very tight due to a slow down in growth and space is at a premium. Most production systems carry just enough space to make it thorough summer months w/o a large drop in market weight. Production operations cannot afford to carry extra space to allow for market disruptions, growth slow downs or ease of operation.
  - d. Even if we thought that the packing plants could experience another incident where labor was impacted and caused a shutdown of plant, it would be difficult to make the decision to carry extra space to allow some wiggle room and flexibility to get through the situation. If company A was the only one that made this decision their cost per pig marketed would exceed the competition and therefore be priced out of the market.
  - e. Same logic exists in a foreign animal disease (FAD) event. We all know that if the U.S. got infected with African Swine Fever tomorrow, we would instantly need >20% less pigs. We all have the ability to see that fact but what do we do? Cut production 20% now? Who? Really no one. We wait for the crisis and react.
  - f. Supply chains were hit with the same dilemmas.
3. **Market channels** - market channels of many products, not just pork, are very specific and develop tight properties to narrow customers. For example, customer A wants a product packaged a specific way with a specific label. During COVID, many specific markets were eliminated, leading to product not needed. Manufacturers of product could not just switch gears rapidly to access a different market or change the supply channel.
  4. **Reducing pig numbers to plants** - once packing plants began to slow down or shut doors in the U.S., it was obvious quickly in a just in time manufacturing business, that pigs were going to have to be slowed in growth, depopulated, and stop filling the pipeline. Having the ability of producers to find alternate markets filled the need on a small number of pigs but was unable to reduce the quantity of hogs going to plants to meet the needs of large production companies. It was interesting to follow the geographic distribution of plant closings. Parts of the U.S. at times were relatively unaffected while other areas were in crisis. This inequity leads to confusion of what needed to be done. Often if you are not feeling the issue yourself it did not seem like there was a need for action. In addition, many producers were tied to an individual plant. When that plant was affected it may have been a small percent of the total industry packing capacity, but it was 100% of packing capacity for that individual producer. Decisions needed to be made quickly.
  5. **Weighing the balance of all the methods to reduce pigs to market** - many options were on the table to reduce the number of pigs going to a packing plant:
    - a. Growth slow down options - changing nutrition
    - b. Increase stocking densities in barns
    - c. Reducing number of pigs filling pipeline by altering culling at specific stages of production
    - d. Depopulation of pigs

The process of deciding which ones to implement and how was made by a select group of people with the best information at the time. The primary concern with slowing growth and decreasing stocking densities of barns was that it was kicking the can down the road. Eventually these pigs needed to go to market during a situation of total uncertainty. The packing plants were like the production companies and farms and were operating w/o excess capacity and in the mode of maximum efficiency and just in time production. If thousands of hogs were going to be delayed going to market the question was "when would the market fit them in to a system already at full capacity?" The other question was, "if and when the plants returned to operation, at what level would they return and what would the "new normal" level of operation be?"

Several points seemed clear at the time:

- Careful evaluation was needed on crowding the systems and the welfare and production considerations of this decision
- Careful evaluation of effects of decisions on producers/employees' long-term thought process and pigs care standards
- Try to keep ramifications of depopulation/increased culling away from producers and employees if possible. Keep them focused on daily pig chores and pig production. Their job is saving pigs.
- Lack of ready to use industry knowledge to put into action quickly

6. **Knowledge acquisition** - immediately attempted to gain as much information as possible on depopulation and slow down growth strategies. Little was known on ventilation shut down (VSD), large scale use of CO<sub>2</sub>, or reduction of growth rate strategies. Veterinarians began to do trials and gained information. The good news was the sharing of information among veterinary colleagues in similar situations was occurring freely.
  - We are today in a much better spot in understanding how to handle a FAD event involving the logistics of depopulation and composting. I recall prior to COVID in meetings on what to do if we had to depopulate sites and still feeling like we just did not know for sure what to do or what would happen. COVID and market interruptions really helped understand what exactly to do in a FAD event. Further work will be around the ability to transport pigs to a depopulation location versus need to stay on a site due to biosecurity during a FAD event.
7. **Animal welfare** - comforting to know that animal welfare was always in the forefront of all decisions. Often, a more difficult path was chosen that involved more cost and more complexity, but that decision was made in the best interest of the animal.
8. **Very small group of people that truly understand the current industry** - it became evident quickly that current understanding of the swine industry as it stood today was lacking. This included: size/scale, transportation, geography, flow options, space options, packing plant options. All too often "solutions" offered were unable to meet current size and scale of modern production.

The misunderstanding of industry and options available to fix the imbalance of supply with processing was not only the general public at large (much work to do here) but also elected officials as well as swine industry personnel and leaders.

At times during the crisis, I was overwhelmingly frustrated. Yet, working with similarly affected people, and sharing knowledge and experiences gained during COVID, led to positive outcomes and friends for life.

### **COVID-19 Mitigation Steps Taken at Processing Facilities**

KatieRose McCullough, North American Meat Institute

On March 13, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a national emergency. Very quickly the meat and poultry industry arrived at the forefront of much of the discussion regarding worker safety. Early on in the pandemic, the industry implemented important protocols and procedures to protect its workforce from the threats posed by the pandemic. Meat and poultry plants across the nation implemented strict worker safety controls to assist in controlling the potential spread of the virus inside establishments. KatieRose McCullough will discuss the timeline of events that occurred early in the pandemic and what controls industry implemented to protect the workforce.

### **COVID-19: Lessons Learned from a New York Animal Health Official's Perspective**

David Smith, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

The current COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for individuals, animal agriculture, veterinary medicine, public health officials, and animal health officials.

The New York metropolitan area was the epicenter of the early pandemic in the U.S., affecting both citizens and their animals. As New York's state veterinarian, David Smith witnessed and confronted many of the challenges faced by New York. His presentation will attempt to cover the frustrations, successes, and lessons learned from this ongoing incident.

### **Southern Agriculture and Animal Disaster Response Alliance (SAADRA)**

Kathryn MacDonald, Clemson University

A short review highlighting activity of the Southern Agriculture and Animal Disaster Response Alliance's (SAADRA) from the last year including achievements and upcoming events.

### **Multi-States Partnership for Security in Agriculture (MSP)**

Lucia Hunt, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

A short review highlighting activity of the Multi-States Partnership for Security in Agriculture (MSP) from the last year including achievements and upcoming events.

**New England States Animal Agricultural Security Alliance (NESAASA)**

Kristin Haas, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

A short review highlighting activity of the New England States Animal Agricultural Security Alliance (NESAASA) from the last year including achievements and upcoming events.

**Committee Business:**

The status (and responses) of each of the 2019 resolutions was briefly discussed.

One resolution titled National Veterinary Stockpile Resources for Mass Depopulation of Animals Laboratories was submitted, amended and passed by committee members.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:16 p.m.