

*Animal Care
at Work*



**Phasing out individual sow
gestation stalls:
major North American companies
anticipate changes**

the Canadian Experience

**Catherine Scovil (BA, MSc)
Canadian Pork Council**



The Canadian story

- **Following announcement by Smithfield Foods**
 - January 25, 2007
- **Maple Leaf Foods announcement**
 - January 31, 2007
 - Endorsed U.S. direction
 - Phase out of gestation stalls in all company-owned barns over next 10 years



and what this means.

- **Maple Leaf Foods – current status**
 - Slaughter: 7 million hogs per year
 - Sows: 125,000
- **Maple Leaf Foods - planned**
 - Significant re-structuring of Maple Leaf Foods planned
 - Slaughter: 4-5 million hogs per year
 - Sows: 50,000
- **Canadian figures**
 - Produce 31 million hogs
 - Slaughter: 22 million hogs (remaining exported)
 - Sows: 1.6 million
- **Maple Leaf as % of Canadian sow herd**
 - Current: 8% of sows
 - Planned: 3% of sows (if sow base remains constant)



It's a response to consumers and customers

- **Certainly political pressure**
 - Mainly in the U.S.
 - State actions
- **And activist pressures**
 - Many and varied
 - University of Guelph (Agricultural school)
- **But focused on consumers and customers**
 - “there are a growing number of consumers and customers who feel group housing is a more humane handling method” (Maple Leaf Foods)



and not a scientific response.

- **Clear statements on research**
 - “... to date, no conclusive evidence exists that one (group pens and stalls) leads to better herd health than the other, or is a superior production technique” (Maple Leaf Foods)
- **A question of:**
 - Freedom of movement versus
 - Freedom from aggression
 - (Dr. Harold Gonyou, University of Saskatchewan)
- **Ideal to have both**



And this presents some challenges.

- **Producers unsure**
 - How welfare can be improved in group housing systems versus current systems
 - How welfare can be maintained
- **Not a lot of experience in Canada**
 - Most familiar will stalls
- **Issues for Canadian settings**
 - Group size
 - Pen design
 - Management
 - New facilities versus existing facilities
 - Cost and competitiveness



Ideally, the industry will be able to decide

- **How best to meet changing customer demand**
 - Focus on one aspect of animal care such as sow housing
 - Focus on all aspects of animal care
- **Current approach – broader industry**
 - Animal Care Assessment
 - Voluntary
 - Verified
 - Assessment approach
 - Design - Animal - Process
 - Sets minimum requirements



in a voluntary and measured way.

- **Give producers the appropriate information**
- **Continue the work on sow housing alternatives**
- **Let producers and industry determine the best way forward**
 - Market signals (preferable to regulatory action)
 - Address changing consumer - customer demand
 - Maintain competitiveness