

CASE STUDY

Applicant: Ontario Pork Industry Council

Project Title: Implementing a PRRS Communications Strategy

Organization:

The Ontario Pork Industry Council (OPIC) is a not-for-profit volunteer driven organization that represents the pork industry from producers to processors. The goal of OPIC is to improve the viability and sustainability of Ontario's pork supply chain. The branch of OPIC that deals with swine health issues, the Ontario Swine Health Advisory Board (OSHAB), was primarily responsible for initiating and guiding the implementation of a Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) communications strategy.

Project:

PRRS, a virus-based disease, affects pregnant sows (causing abortions, stillbirths and mummified piglets) and the respiratory systems of nursing and weaned pigs, often resulting in death or chronically poor performance. This disease is the cause of an estimated \$130 million financial loss annually in Canada. As such, it has become a focal point for swine researchers, veterinarians, and all members of the pork value chain.

In February of 2006, OSHAB approached the Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) to obtain funding to initiate a three year program that would communicate effective control practices and implement protocols that would eventually lead to the control and/or elimination of PRRS in Ontario. The project had four main goals:

- to undertake a needs assessment and support research applications
- to gather and test reasonable practices and develop protocols
- to educate the industry
- to create a list of effective control strategies and establish success criteria for the PRRS communication model

The project was designed to bring together industry partners to share information about PRRS and its transmission, and to work to educate the pork industry on ways to reduce PRRS transmission risk. These partners included all sectors of the Ontario swine industry including producers, feed, animal health, genetics, transport and processors. Information was shared with the industry via a mix of communication methods including workshops, website, informational flyers and posters, media articles, and presentations. As of March 31, 2009, about 6,000 people in the pork industry had been reached by these methods.

A benchmarking study undertaken by OSHAB indicated that the use of these various methods of communications had been successful. In September 2006, the study found that about 40% of farmers were unsure if their herds were PRRS positive or negative. A similar study taken at the end of the project, in March 2009, showed that this number had dropped to 10%.

In addition to communications, preventative methods were also explored. A risk assessment tool was implemented to help farmers and veterinarians identify their internal and external PRRS risk factors, and a centralized database of PRRS strains was developed.



FUNDING AGRI-IDEAS. 

A study and promotion of the use of the 'Danish Entry Method' (a method of minimizing transmission risk by using a single controlled entrance to the barn) also yielded positive results, with the number of farms implementing this method rising from 59% in 2008 to 70% in 2009.

Overall, the project was a success. Awareness of techniques for reducing PRRS transmission increased and changes have been made throughout the pork industry to reflect OSHAB best practices. Further, OSHAB has positioned itself as a valued resource regarding swine health issues and will continue to work on advancing swine health and industry productivity.

The Role of the Agricultural Adaptation Council:

According to Lori Moser, Project Manager, the PRRS project could not have happened without the AAC as the funds necessary for a project of this scope were not readily available in the swine industry. Originally, the OPIC had gone to a Project Managing Consultant who assisted them in getting industry support for the project and gathering initial funds (most projects require some initial funds in order to qualify for funding) and it was her that originally suggested going to the AAC.

The AAC was very helpful in assisting with budget and amendments as the scope of the project changed slightly over the three years as money was reallocated to initiatives that proved to be more successful than others, such as methods of communication.

This project was funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Adaptation Programming and administered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council.

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