

The Week H1N1 Stole the Farm

By Chris Chinn

Call it H1N1, please. The last week of April 2009 will be a week hog farmers will never forget. The week changed our lives and not in a positive way.

The last week of April is when the H1N1 flu outbreak became news. Most media outlets tagged an inappropriate name to the flu virus. The unintended consequence of calling H1N1 the informal name “swine flu,” has been devastating to all farms that raise hogs, including my family farm.

Because of the unfortunate name choice, exports of U.S. pork have dropped, eliminating a key market rally that is typically seen each summer. This summer’s rally was especially crucial; hog farmers have lost money since September 2007. In fact, hog farmers have lost more than half of their accumulated equity since September 2007. Hog farmers desperately needed a summer rally to return profit to our farms. The other name for H1N1 stole this from us.

Call it H1N1, please. There are many important facts about H1N1 that help set the record straight—a matter especially important now that H1N1 is once again rearing its ugly head and the unfortunate moniker is creeping back into the news media.

The H1N1 flu virus is not in pork. H1N1 influenza is not a food-borne illness. The safety of pork and pork products has been affirmed by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health, the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has said that U.S. pork is safe to eat. His statement is supported by recent research conducted by the National Animal Disease Center and international researchers.

Influenza is a respiratory disease and the virus is not found in the blood or meat of healthy pigs or in pigs that have recovered from the illness. Of course, sick pigs are never allowed to enter the food supply. Hog farmers have protocols established for caring for animals that develop illness. Ill pigs are not sent to market. Just like humans, pigs can get ill, but like humans, they recover.

Call it H1N1, please. My family consumes the same food as other Americans. I want to ensure my family has a safe food supply that is raised in the United States. The best way to help ensure the safety and security of our domestic food supply is to support the U.S. hog industry. Buy and enjoy U.S. pork and encourage your lawmakers to support trade agreements to open export markets. U.S. pork is safe and nutritious, and hog farming contributes needed jobs in the United States.

So, do your country and U.S. hog farmers a favor—call it H1N1, please.

Remind the news outlets you rely on for timely and accurate information—it’s H1N1. Together, we will beat this bug, and with your support, U.S. hog farmers will survive until our markets turn around. Eat pork, and call it H1N1, please.