

PIPESTONE System



Phone: 800-658-2523 or 507-825-4211 Fax: 507-825-3140

www.PipestoneSystem.com

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INCREASING CONSUMER CONFIDENCE



BRIAN STEVENS

PQA Plus™ animal welfare training—along with documented evidence of that training for everyone who works with swine—will be the new normal for pork producers who sell to Hormel, Inc. Brian

Stevens, director of pork procurement for Hormel, believes requiring PQA Plus certification should give consumers confidence that the industry is treating animals the way it says it will.

“Since 1999 we’ve required certification at PQA level 3. Now the National Pork Board is using PQA Plus so we’re making that our standard, too,” Brian explains.

“In the past, we requested proof of certification from one representative of a pork production company and we kept that on file. Now, we want everybody who works with animals to have PQA Plus and TQA (Transporter Quality Assurance) certification for all employees who work with livestock. As has been our policy for the past couple of years, we’ll require TQA certification for drivers.”

In addition to PQA Plus and TQA certification

for individual workers, any pork production location that delivers to Hormel will need to achieve what is known as PQA Plus Site Status. (A PQA Plus site assessment leads to Site Status. The assessment measures performance against principles of good production with the goal of providing proper swine care to improve swine wellbeing.)

Hormel described its new recommendations in a news release December 22, 2008. “We have confidence the companies we work with will do what is right,” Brian states. “But suppose we see another disturbing video: we’ll expect the pig production company involved to do what is right. I’d assume the owner would terminate that employee. We all want bad apples dealt with.”

“If, on the other hand, we find out an owner is aware of poor treatment—or even involved in it—then I’d say we have the right to terminate the contract,” he continues.

Since employees will have to be trained under PQA Plus—and they’ll sign off that they’ve been trained—they’ll bear responsibility for their own actions.

“All the big pork production companies

now have documents stating their employees will not abuse livestock,” Brian adds. Above and beyond PQA Plus, Brian says, Hormel strongly encourages producers to scrutinize their own performance. “We expect producers to have a strong quality assurance program monitoring animals’ welfare and handling on their own farm. We’d suggest regular self-audits because you can’t measure results if you’re not consistently tracking. A PQA site assessment every three years shouldn’t be a producer’s only yardstick.”

Brian also suggests steps such as an animal-abuse reporting phone number in all buildings, developing on-farm standard-operating procedures, and developing a system for training new hires and re-training long-time employees.

“Finally, producers ought to institute a third-party audit of their own. They should request an expert visit from someone qualified to explain what other producers are doing and how to improve,” he adds.

It’s not as if Hormel intends to wield a big stick over pork producers, Brian says. “Our customers are demanding these standards. The on-farm culture needs to change because good animal welfare is the right thing to do.” ■



SWINE LINE

AVOIDING REACTION WITH AN ACTION PLAN

Jill Kerber's initial reaction may have been emotional but taking action was her second instinct. When a stealth video from inside a Bayard, IA, hog operation first hit public consciousness in September 2008, she began asking herself if she was doing everything she should to educate her employees at Hawkeye Sow Farms in the Pipestone System.

"I was in Washington D.C. on National Pork Producer business with leaders from our industry when the PETA video came out. It dominated talk at our lunch tables and during meetings," Jill explains. "I found myself feeling worried because Bayard is close to home—most of our employees are in Iowa and I have first-hand knowledge of the companies concerned. They manage the way we do and I was certain if they had known what was happening..."

In that thought, Jill hit on her own answer to questions swirling around her. She chose to take personal responsibility for what her staff understands about animal welfare.

"First came conversations with Dr. Gordon Spronk to review the policy we've had in place for pretty much our whole time in business. It covers all the Hawkeye sow centers that roll up into Pipestone System," Jill says. She and Gordon didn't find any reason to change the policy but they wondered whether the written doctrine had top-of-mind awareness with employees.

"It seemed there might be a gap between our employees' initial orientation and the rest of their time in our organization. Should we assume they remember our policy after 10 years on the job?"

IMPLEMENTING ONGOING TRAINING

Other key policies were already being addressed through

continuing education. Jill asked herself why animal welfare policies weren't getting as much attention as sexual harassment, bio-security, or workplace violence—topics reinforced with all employees annually.

She assembled a very brief PowerPoint—in English and Spanish—and developed a talk to cover the main points of the animal welfare policy in 15 or 20 minutes. Then, Jill made herself accountable for its delivery by personally taking the presentation on the road. "I want to make sure all the materials are at each site and I want each employee to know what to do if they see a problem. I want them to know who to come to if they have a concern."

As Brian Stevens of Hormel suggests (see page 1), all Hawkeye employees signed off on the update, which is now complete for 2008.

"I've enjoyed the communication that comes out of these sessions," Jill adds. "For one thing, employees tell me 'Yes, we know those things' and 'Of course we'd do that.' So I'm confident we've developed a culture of caring in which our employees understand these animals are assets."

Hawkeye employees now know what top management expects. And Jill is committed to repeating animal welfare education once a year because she believes in action over reaction. ■



Pipestone System owners have always taken a progressive approach to animal welfare.

WHO'LL BE AT THE WHEEL WHEN THE INDUSTRY APPROACHES THE INTERSECTION?



ANIMAL WELFARE Q & A
WITH KIRK FERRELL, VICE
PRESIDENT OF PUBLIC
POLICY OF THE NPPC



Persistent and consistent training makes our employees the industry standard.

Swine Line: From your vantage point in Washington D.C., has swine welfare become a more urgent topic?

Ferrell: I can tell you this: Times are changing. In this California Proposition 2 era, if suburban grocery shoppers see a PETA video, they'll want to influence animal practices.

Q. How do you foresee that situation unfolding?

A. For one thing, I know the discussion will summon up a lot of fear and emotion on both sides. Clearly, the PETA video from Iowa isn't defensible in a congressional hearing in Washington. And I don't expect it will be easy to defend blunt-force trauma to those not in the pork industry. We're coming to an intersection and there could be a head-on collision between industry practices and what society thinks should be happening. If someone runs that video and says, "Defend this," we can't. At that point we're cooked.

Q. So, what do you recommend producers do?

A. Get out ahead of this trend and stay

ahead. We need an evolutionary change in swine welfare practices in this country.

Q. What changes come to mind?

A. Producers need to ask themselves whether they'll insist on the status quo or whether they're going to evolve. Are we going to let someone who doesn't have our passion for raising pigs set animal welfare rules for us? I'm predicting a six-to-twelve-month window before the confrontation. Pork producers need to start thinking through their current practices, things they've done for a long time—needle-teeth and tail-clipping and blunt-force trauma euthanasia, for example. How should they approach those practices tomorrow?

Q. And what if producers decide changing practices is too difficult?

A. They won't be able to sidestep this issue. Whether we sell to U.S. consumers or market for export, animal welfare will still come into question. Honestly, I'm concerned there is more video coming from sleeper PETA employees out there somewhere. That will spur change whether we like it or not. I'd prefer pork producers initiate change themselves.

Q. What would you propose?

A. This industry has the tradition of being progressive and getting ahead of cultural and social changes. It's time to put together a stakeholder group and start looking for the best new technology in animal welfare. ■

I BELIEVE OUR HOUSE IS IN ORDER

BY LUKE MINION,
DVM

Pipestone System won't overreact to recent disclosures by some groups with an extreme view of our industry. If we started making all kinds of changes and proclamations it would imply we don't already have our house in order. I assure you, we've been careful housekeepers all along!

We are worthy of society's grandfathered grant to raise livestock the way we want, because we do the right thing for the animals. Of course, we'll follow new stipulations by the packers because compliance with PQA Plus,[™] for example, will help tell our story: We treat animals correctly and still get the job done.

There will be new policy statements for Pipestone System employees to sign. There will be a well-publicized and protected path a whistle blower can follow to identify someone who breaks faith with our policy.

Beyond those steps we should all take, I challenge our industry to find some better way to tell its story. We shouldn't assume educating the public is a hopeless cause. The story of the family farmer still resonates with urban dwellers—they want to like us.

It's up to us—not just me, but you, as well—to be the story-tellers and the change-makers leading our industry. We asked Kirk Ferrell of the NPPC to clearly map out the challenges (see his response on page 3).

Then we talked to Brian Stevens of Hormel. Last September's PETA video release was engineered to bring pressure to bear on our industry by targeting our first-line customer—the packer. On page 1, Brian explains an expanded strategy to verify the packer's integrity and our own.

After reading those two stories you'll want to know what you should do next. That's why we interviewed Jill Kerber, one of our owners in Pipestone System. (See page 2.) Jill believes employees will lead the world in the ethical animal treatment once they realize their employers are committed to that goal. ■



1300 South Highway 75
PO Box 188
Pipestone, MN 56164

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