

Trial assessment of the National Pork Board's Swine Welfare Assurance ProgramSM in two Alberta swine operations

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The Swine Welfare Assurance Program (SWAP) is a voluntary, educational program developed by the American National Pork Board (NPB) to assist producers in objectively evaluating the well-being of their pigs. Using the program handbook, a trained veterinarian evaluates protocols, farm records, pigs and facilities with the producer. A similar program is under development for pork producers in Canada, but is not yet complete. SWAP audits may become mandatory for American pork producers in the future. Canadian producers may need to meet these standards to continue exporting hogs to the USA at that time.

Two hog operations in Alberta were assessed using a trained SWAP facilitator, a welfare veterinarian, and a student. Strengths and limitations of the SWAP program were evaluated along with its suitability for Canadian producers. Approximately 40 measures were assessed, and both operations met or exceeded over 75% of the benchmarks. Three SWAP standards were not met by either operation. These three standards were 1) lack of a daily observation log, 2) proportion of pigs with wounds, and 3) lack of a written emergency action plan. For producer and veterinarian, SWAP successfully increased the knowledge of animal welfare and how to measure it. Program weaknesses include vague standards that use the words "should" and "may", omission of some potentially important standards (culling, photoperiod, stereotypical behaviours), and the length of time required to perform the assessment.

Implications:

A welfare assessment program such as the SWAP can be a useful tool to evaluate animal well-being and increase awareness about methods to improve pig welfare. Some of the lessons learned from SWAP may be useful in developing a Canadian swine welfare assurance program.