

Banff Pork Seminar: The Beginnings

Wayne Lamble

Professor Emeritus and former Director of Agricultural Programs, Faculty of Extension,
University of Alberta, 184 Willow Way NW, Edmonton, AB T5T 1C8

Email: wayne.lamble@shaw.ca

■ The Context

Since the establishment of the University of Alberta Department of Extension in 1912 (now the Faculty of Extension), it has worked with other academic units of the University, including the Faculty of Agriculture (now the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics), to find, create, test, develop, and use new approaches and technologies for linking the University with its various larger constituent communities. Given the nature and historical development of the Province of Alberta, agriculture and rural communities have been a dominant part of this work.

Early efforts tended to involve approaches focused primarily on disseminating existing information and knowledge. These approaches ranged from special public lectures, conferences, and field days to extension publications of various forms. Over the years the Faculty of Agriculture and Department of Extension had a particularly large list of extension bulletins, leaflets, and periodicals. One of the most popular was *Swine Production in Alberta* (Bulletin #22), which was first published in 1932 and went through at least 12 revisions by 1974, with at least 75,000 copies distributed. It was eventually replaced, in part, by the annual *Banff Pork Seminar Proceedings*.

By the 1960s the issues facing the pork industry were becoming increasing complex. They called for novel, inter-disciplinary, multi-agency approaches to problem solving and knowledge development. About the same time, the University was increasing its efforts to find ways to be more continuously, actively, and productively involved with its larger communities. This strategy of building sustained mutually beneficial relationships with a university's various larger communities has become known as university-community engagement.

■ The Model

One of the popular approaches to evolve from this effort was the annual, three to five-day, intensive, residential conference, seminar, symposium, or short-course. In the agricultural and rural community context, such events were developed in the areas of beef cattle, pork, sheep, and dairy production, as well as in leadership and policy development.

The *Banff Pork Seminar* was developed on this model. A broad-based advisory and planning committee structure was created with representatives from various pork industry stakeholders – producers, suppliers, processors, regulators, researchers, and educators from private and public sectors. During the annual planning cycle for the Seminar, advisory and planning committees monitor the important trends and issues affecting the pork sector, identify relevant authorities and experts working on these issues, and design a Seminar program to advance participant understanding, practices, and policies related to the issues.

To a large extent the program enables dissemination, sharing, interpretation, and integration of existing knowledge among participants. However, the discussion and consideration also often leads to the identification of incomplete information and the need for further knowledge. Consequently, the work of the advisory and planning committees, as well as the Seminar itself also helps shape the research agenda for the sector.

The Seminar was initially intended for a small number of the more innovative and progressive participants in and across the industry. Consequently, it targeted and attracted between 60 and 100 participants to each of the early Seminars – mainly from across Alberta. This relatively small number and blend of participants facilitated extensive discussion of the issues in plenary sessions without much use of breakout sessions. Eventually, the format was adapted to accommodate demand for many more participants. In recent years as many as 855 people have participated from across North America and other parts of the world!

Realizing that the Seminar was the place and time to capture some of the most relevant contemporary information for the pork industry, the Seminar Proceedings were published as a record of the event and as a way to disseminate the information more broadly throughout the industry.

Publishing the papers of invited resource people increased the attractiveness of participating in the Seminar for some of the contributors – and may have

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encouraged some to prepare a bit more for their contribution! The Proceedings became helpful to the agricultural media in providing further dissemination of the Seminar information. In particular, the *Alberta Hog Journal* became a major disseminator of Seminar information.

■ The Practice

Within this basic model, the first *Banff Pork Seminar* was organized for June 15-17, 1972 at Olds, Alberta, using the classroom and residential facilities of Olds College. It was referred to simply as the *Pork Seminar* and was jointly arranged by the University of Alberta Department of Extension and Faculty of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Western Hog Growers' Association, Alberta Hog Producers' Marketing Board, and Alberta Department of Agriculture. Program advisors and planners included:

- Western Hog Growers' Association (WHGA) represented by John Prentice (Advisory Chair), Fred Mueller (WHGA President), Doug Low (WHGA Secretary), and Ron Nelson.
- Alberta Hog Producers' Marketing Board (AHMB) represented by Bruce Jeffery (Manager) and Ed Schultz.
- Alberta Department of Agriculture represented by Art Reddon (Swine Specialist).
- University of Alberta represented by Roy Berg (Dept of Animal Science), Brian McQuitty (Dept of Agricultural Engineering), Alf Petersen (Dept of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology), and Wayne Lamble (Dept of Extension).

The stated purpose was to provide participants with an opportunity to acquire the latest information on new developments in pork production, processing, and marketing and to consider the application and implications of these developments on production decision-making at the producer level and on policy-making at the industry level. The program was designed for the benefit of people directly involved in pork production and concerned about maximizing production efficiency and overall development of the pork industry – including representatives from:

- Commercial hog operations
- Farm organizations
- Agribusiness supply and service organizations
- Research, education, and extension agencies.

The promotional brochure noted that program content would emphasize principles rather than specific practices. However, considerable time was allotted for discussion and question-and-answer periods where participants had the opportunity to present views relating to the solution of practical problems. With increased realization that the pork industry must vigorously increase its productivity in terms of quality and quantity to assure strong, profitable development of the industry, the program focused on the following major topics:

- Production management – including nutrition of the sow, contributions of swine breeding, farrowing and sow housing, and rearing and finishing facilities.
- Marketing aspects – including pork marketing in North America, national marketing legislation, rationalization of production flow, and feed grains development.
- Environmental quality and hog production – including an overview of environmental quality, pollution control regulations, hog waste management in cold climates, European development and experience, and recycling of hog wastes by land.
- Business management – including a special emphasis on new tax legislation.

To address these topics the brochure indicated that every effort had been made to assemble a staff of well-qualified people of varied experiences who were also able to relate their wisdom to others. These resource people included:

- Paul Babey, Chairman, National Farm Products Marketing Council, Ottawa.
- Seaton H. Baxter, Senior Investigator, Scottish Farm Buildings Investigation Unit, The North of Scotland College of Agriculture, Aberdeen.
- Sten Berg, Alberta Hog Producers' Marketing Board, Edmonton.
- John Channon, Chairman, Alberta Grains Commission, Edmonton.
- Murray H. Hawkins, Associate Professor of Marketing, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton.
- Eugene E. Kupchanko, Director, Pollution Control Division, Alberta Department of Environment, Edmonton.
- G. A. Lodge, Chief of Pig and Poultry Nutrition, Animal Research Institute, Canada Department of Agriculture, Ottawa.
- Arthur J. Muehling, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Agricultural Engineering, University of Illinois, Urbana.

- W. E. Rempel, Professor of Animal Breeding, Department of Animal Science, University of Minnesota, St. Paul.
- Jim A. Robertson, Professor of Soil Chemistry, Department of Soil Science, University of Alberta, and Alberta Institute of Pedology, Edmonton.
- Michele M. Veeman, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

In addition to the formally participating resource people, many of the most experienced and highly regarded hog production authorities participated in the seminar discussions. Furthermore, special lounges were reserved for informal discussions in the evenings where participants had an opportunity to meet the resource people and other participants individually.

Over 70 people participated in this first Seminar in 1972. The *Seminar Proceedings* were published and the Seminar was deemed a success. The planning cycle for the second, and what was known for several years as the annual *Alberta Pork Seminar* and would eventually become the annual *Banff Pork Seminar* began again. The major change adopted for the second Seminar and retained since then was to move its location to the community of Banff, in the Alberta Rocky Mountains, usually using the residential learning facilities of the Banff Conference Centre. This has proven to be a great location for attracting participants and getting them removed from their usual daily routines for the duration of the Seminar. Another change adopted for the second and the following Seminars was to schedule the event for mid-January each year.

While the first Seminar did not have an explicit program theme beyond the stated purpose and list of topics to be covered, some of the subsequent Seminars were organized around selected themes reflecting the major broad issues of the times – such as “Alberta Pork Industry 1975”, “The Pork Industry at the Crossroads” (1978), and “Production and Housing – A Second Look” (1979).

In 1990 the proceedings were formally published with ISBN and re-titled “*Advances in Pork Production*”. The change to a more formal book format and higher quality papers resulted in requests for *Advances in Pork Production* from libraries all over the world.

By 1992 the Seminar and its associated protocols had become sufficiently established that the Faculty of Extension transferred the administration of the Seminar to the Department of Animal Science. From the inception of the Seminar, representatives of the Department of Animal Science had been continuously and invaluable involved in the planning and implementation of

the Seminar – and committed to its continuation. For example, among others, Dr. Roy Berg was instrumental in the inception of the idea of the *Banff Pork Seminar*. Then for many years Dr. Frank Aherne provided vital, dedicated, and enthusiastic academic and practical leadership to the further development of the Seminar.

■ Some Conclusions

Reflecting on the evolution of the *Banff Pork Seminar* over the past 35 years leads to several observations and conclusions.

- The inception and nature of the Seminar marked, or at least reflected a rather fundamental shift toward a *more inclusive systems view of the industry* – from a focus primarily on swine production and hog producers to pork production and the pork industry – including the nature and importance of the various relationships among the elements in the system from hog production to pork consumption or “from gate to plate”.
- The Seminar became a major mechanism for promoting *university-community engagement* – specifically for enabling the University and the pork industry to become productively involved in the work of each other for mutual benefit.
- The Seminar became a mechanism for promoting a *community of practice and learning in the pork industry* – development of effective relationships among various elements of the pork industry.
- The Seminar became a mechanism for promoting *knowledge management in the pork industry* – for stimulating and facilitating the development of knowledge, technologies, practices, and policies in the pork industry – including the creation, integration, dissemination, and application of practical knowledge for addressing the problems and opportunities in the industry.
- An opportunity, and perhaps a challenge for the Seminar is to continue to find ways of *using emerging and converging information and communication technologies* to enhance or otherwise enable the functions and services of the Seminar – to take the Seminar to another level for advancing the pork industry.

The fact that the *Banff Pork Seminar* has been continuously successful for 35 years and continues to attract more people from more places is an indication that it has successfully adapted to the changing needs of the industry. The high level of support for and attendance at the Seminar shows that it still

serves a very valuable function and provides an important service in the continuing advancement of knowledge, practices, and policies in the pork industry throughout Alberta, and now well beyond!

Editor's Note: The program of the first Banff Pork Seminar is reproduced after this article. Interestingly, most of the topics are still on our minds today. ROB