

# A Look Back at the Banff Pork Seminar

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January 2006 marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Banff Pork Seminar. With expected attendance of more than 750 delegates, and with speakers from across Canada, the USA and abroad, it continues to live up to its reputation as the premier educational event for the Canadian hog industry. It has grown a long way since its inception in 1972.

Alberta hog producers organized the first industry seminar in an era when:

- No one spoke for the commercial hog producer; the pure breed associations and packers ruled the day
- Crossbreeding was derided as *mongrelization* – and forbidden by law!
- The PEI hog, known in the West as the “gutless wonder”, was the peak of genetic perfection
- The carcass ideal was defined by the “*Wiltshire side*”
- Hair colour was a key criterion of carcass merit
- Atrophic rhinitis was the newest (and yet to be named) affliction of hogs
- Meat meal was the primary product recommended as a protein supplement in pig diets
- Milt Bell and John Bowland were pioneering research with rape meal – Canola didn’t exist!
- Four firms dominated Canada’s hog industry – Canada Packers, Swift Canadian, Burns and Gainers.

There were two associations for Alberta swine breeders when I came to Lacombe in 1947, one centered in Edmonton for central and northern breeders and one centered in Calgary for the southern breeders. Additional organizations that followed after 1952 included the Record of Performance (ROP) Association, the Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) Association, and the Western Hog Growers Association (WHGA). The number of organizations specifically for pig producers continued to increase until June 1975 when Art Redden of the Alberta Department of Agriculture, persuaded seven separate groups representing the purebred breeders to amalgamate in a single organization. Subsequently in 1975 the Alberta Pork Congress was

organized. My records do not show a founding year but I served as a member of the steering committee in 1976. The Alberta Pork Congress has carved its own reputation as an outstanding trade show and a source of quality information for the hog industry.

Only one organization, the WHGA founded by Jack Perkins of Wainwright and Sten Berg of Ardrossan, was designed specifically for commercial hog producers. From its inception, their annual meetings took the form of educational workshops dealing with practical issues pertinent to commercial pig production -- management, housing, equipment, nutrition, breeding. Crossbreeding was the hot issue in 1966 when I was invited to address the annual meeting in Red Deer. I was invited back to each the following five annual meetings to discuss performance testing for traits of economic merit, operation of closed herd breeding programs, selection of replacement stock and carcass grading issues. Consolidated proceedings of these workshop meetings were not produced, there was no registration fee and the WHGA did not have funds for such publication. This is unfortunate for those workshop meetings were in fact the precursor of the present day Banff Pork Seminar.

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Formation of the WHGA gave commercial hog producers their first real voice; a voice that was heard through workshops held in conjunction with annual meetings. Then came revision of National hog carcass grading standards, inauguration of the Alberta Hog Producers Marketing Board (AHPMB), the birth of hog breeding companies and the educational workshops initiated by the WHGA, which morphed in the Banff Pork Seminar. Within two years of its inception, this Seminar had evolved into an international event and it has never looked back.

The Alberta Hog Producers Marketing Board (AHPMB) was organized in 1969 following a 1968 plebiscite in which 87% of the registered producers of the province voted to establish a single-desk hog marketing agency. Shortly thereafter the AHPMB teamed up with the WHGA to sponsor the Alberta Pork Seminar.

The first Seminar (1972), held in Olds, featured speakers from the University of Alberta, the Government of Alberta, AHPMB, the Alberta Grain Commission, the Alberta Institute of Pedology, Canada Dept of Agriculture and invited speakers from Univ. Illinois, Univ. Minnesota and the North Scotland College of Agriculture. The 1972 proceedings of the Alberta Pork Seminar (an 8.5" x 11" mimeo publication) were compiled by Wayne Lamble, Agricultural Supervisor, Dept. of Extension, University of Alberta.

The 1974 Seminar was the first to be held in Banff. The feature speaker that year was from Dublin, Ireland, representing the Irish Hog Commission. Other speakers included representatives of the AHPMB, Alberta Dept. Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Iowa State College, and an Ontario hog producer.

The 1975 seminar proceedings, also compiled by Wayne Lambie, featured the Alberta Food Industry, retailers and, processors with all the speakers from Alberta. In 1976 the theme was breeding, genetics and disease control with Howard Fredeen chairing the breeding session and Maurice Bichard from England as the feature speaker. Canadian speakers (Sten Berg, Howard Fredeen and Stan Price) were stage front in 1978 to deal with the topics of the Canadian hog carcass grading system and the competitive position of the Canadian Hog Industry. International speakers returned the following year -- University of Aberdeen (housing), Dr Glodek from Germany in 1980 (production efficiency), and Dr OGrady from Ireland in 1982 (swine nutrition). Top international speakers have been an important component of every seminar since that date.

The present form of the proceedings a book measuring 6"x9" titled *Advances in Pork Production* was adopted in 1990. The proceedings that year were identified as Volume 1, Banff Pork Seminar and were produced by the Department of Animal Science, University of Alberta.

The program organizers throughout the years deserve our thanks and congratulations for maintaining the high quality and relevance to the industry.