

Quality Assurance Programs Alive A

ANDY ANDREWS

Lancaster Farming Staff

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — To improve the industry, several pork processors are making great strides toward carrying out their own quality assurance programs on a variety of levels.

Two pork packing representatives spoke Tuesday morning at the 42nd annual meeting and Pork Production Forum of the LanChester Pork Council at Yoder's Restaurant, New Holland. About 85 producers and agri-industry representatives attended.

About two years ago, Gary Neuman, manager of the kill floor and chair of the Pork Quality Committee at Leidy's, Inc., Souderton, traveled to Kansas City, Mo. to attend the first annual Stocking Conference, sponsored by the American Meat Institute. There, Neuman met and spoke with Dr. Temple Grandin, an animal behavior specialist and assistant professor of animal science at Colorado State University.

Grandin has designed many different types of animal holding and management facilities

throughout the country.

Neuman, who has worked for Leidy's for about 23 years in many departments, devised a 20-page "processors' list," that not only provided information on identifying stressed hogs, but other factors to ensure proper hog handling procedures to ensure meat quality.

Neuman believes that handling the hogs until they are processed is more critical than genetics.

"Handling is more a factor in meat quality more so now than genetics," he told those attending the forum.

If you don't beat the hogs, or use shockers, and handle hogs in proper groups, meat quality improves.

Simply using slappers and the "voice" works "very good for us," said Neuman.

Neuman's experience is that a stressed hog results in a meat condition called PSE, an acronym meaning "pale, soft, and exudative," or "wet pork." With PSE, there's "a lot of lost money there," Neuman said.

Summertime is especially critical to controlling hog stress.

When the animal is stressed, what happens is a high level of lactic acid appears in the muscle, creating the condition called "wet pork." As a result, the animal cannot hold water and any flavorings that can accompany it. Pork chops are pale with no marbling and tough to chew.

With sausage, no seasoning ingredients can bind with the meat. It doesn't have flavor. In the case, the meat leaks. The meat itself is very pale, with no color.

The combination of heat and humidity, with summertime temperatures at 85-90 degrees at 90-100 percent humidity, and improper handling can make a deadly combination. If a hog is panting and foaming at the mouth, then PSE pork can result.

All employees are trained in the 20-page list. Shocker use is limited, to prevent bruising.

Tom Leidy brought in a ham sample that showed mishandling. The product can't be used for ham — instead, the bruised item is made into a smoked product. PSE results in a loss of weight, with no water-holding capacity, with a pH below 5.7. (Ideally, a pH of 6.0-6.3 is acceptable, Neuman noted.)

Leidy said that cooling the new lean pork, to get the "body heat out of the pork" on the rail within two hours, is critical for processing.

Tom Moyer, supervisor of procurement operations, Hatfield Quality Meats, will soon be setting up a Truckers Quality Assurance (TQA) program.

The program will focus on the work of Temple Grandin on handling hogs properly.

A video was shown at the forum. The video was developed with the help of the National

Pork Producers Council in cooperation with the Animal Meat Institute, universities, and industry.

In the video, emphasis was placed on handling hogs in small groups, proper understanding of the animals' "flight zone," the importance of well-designed and clean facilities and equipment, and other factors.

Handling 6-8 hogs at a time and never running after and striking them helps ensure good quality meat.

Improper handling can result in dark, firm and dry (DFD) meat. Excessive darkness is undesirable, resulting in lower shelf life in the case.

Bruised meat is simply unacceptable, costing the industry millions of dollars. PSE costs the industry about \$30 million annually.

Three important procedures include resting the animals 2-3 hours before slaughter, providing the animals with fresh, clean water, and handling them calmly. If the weather is hot and humid, hogs should be sprayed with cool water.

Grandin, noted Moyer, often will go to a "pig's-eye view" to see what the pig is going through from the dock through the shoot

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Speakers at the LanChester Pork Council annual meeting in New Holland were, from left, Rob Meinen, Penn State senior extension associate; Gary Neuman, manager of the kill floor and chair of the Pork Quality Committee at Leidy's, Inc.; Tom Moyer, supervisor of procurement operations, Hatfield Quality Meats; and Bob Mikesell, Penn State extension.

