



05-03-09

Canadian hog farm quarantined after testing positive for H1N1 virus

By Sara Wyant

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

Just as some of the public hysteria over the H1N1 flu is starting to subside, a new Canadian case involving a worker who had recently traveled to Mexico and may have spread his infection to a 2,200 head swine herd is sending new shock waves to the already troubled pork industry.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack confirmed the case in a statement issued late Saturday night.

"I received word this afternoon that Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) officials have tentatively confirmed that swine from a herd in Alberta, Canada, have tested positive for the H1N1 strain currently causing illness in humans. A Canadian carpenter who had been in Mexico, upon return, was exhibiting flu-like symptoms, did work on the Alberta farm, and subsequently the family and swine on the farm became ill," Vilsack explained.

Here is the rest of Vilsack's statement:

"First and foremost, this detection does not change the situation here in the United States:

- There have been no reports that the novel H1N1 strain currently causing illness in humans is in U.S. swine.
- This is not a foodborne illness. The American food supply is safe and pork and pork products are safe. As is the case with all meat and poultry, safe handling and cooking practices should be used to kill any germs or bacteria that could make you sick.
- As a precaution, people with flu-like symptoms should not interact with swine, and swine showing influenza symptoms should be kept away from the public and brought to the attention of the State Animal Health Authorities or USDA. Proper biosecurity measures - as in any influenza situation - will protect against the spread of virus.

Additional details about the Alberta situation are that no sick swine have left the farm, and the animals and premises have been quarantined. The swine and humans are recovering and appear

healthy. We are working closely with our CFIA counterparts to be kept abreast of the situation, and will await the final confirmatory test results, which could take anywhere from 5 days to 2 weeks. Canada has handled this situation appropriately and taken the necessary steps and precautions.

Here in the United States, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is actively working to develop an H1N1 vaccine for swine, just as the CDC is doing for humans. It is standard operating procedure at the USDA to send any unusual virus, such as the H1N1 virus, detected through our surveillance network to our labs in Ames, Iowa. Our scientists routinely diagnose animal diseases and develop vaccines to protect livestock and poultry in the United States.

Today's discovery will not impact our borders or trading with Canada. As prescribed by the World Organization for Animal Health guidelines, any trade restrictions must be based on science so at this time, we are awaiting confirmatory test results before considering any action."

A few hours earlier in the day, Vilsack had released a joint statement with his Canadian and Mexican counterparts, calling for a calm, science-based response to the flu outbreak and rejecting trade restrictions.

(To read that statement, go to: <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20090502H.pdf>)

Canadian officials also tried to reassure the public about the need to remain calm and to not make any connections with the virus and eating pork.

"It is important to remember there is no evidence the virus can be transmitted through eating pork," said provincial Agriculture Minister George Groeneveld in a news conference Saturday.

Shortly after the H1N1 virus, dubbed the "swine flu," was blamed for several deaths in Mexico, both the National Pork Board and the National Pork Producers Council warned that pigs and barn workers should be vaccinated for seasonal flus, and sick employees should stay away from barns because people and pigs can pass flu viruses to each other.

"We share the concern of the global health community regarding the spread of this disease," said Steve Weaver, a California pork producer and president of the National Pork Board. "To ensure the good health of our animals and for all those who provide care for the animals, we are urging pork producers to be vigilant in taking measures to prevent the spread of this disease."

In related news, U.S. health officials made the rounds on the Sunday news shows to let people know that this strain of flu might not be as dangerous as some have feared.

"The good news is when we look at this virus right now, we're not seeing some of the things in the virus that have been associated in the past with more severe flu," said Dr. Richard Besser, acting chief of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Meet the Press. "That's encouraging, but it doesn't mean we're out of the woods yet."