

PREPARING FOR A BORDER CLOSURE

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INTRODUCTION

In Canada, in 2007, we produced over 31 million hogs. Roughly two thirds (21.1 million) were processed domestically and the remaining third were exported live, mainly to the U.S. Due to our export dependency and perishable product, the Canadian pork industry is incredibly vulnerable to border closure.

MORE NUMBERS

To add scope to our discussion, we need to add numbers. In 2007, Canada exported 996,985 tonnes of pig meat or approximately 83,000 tonnes per month. Should the borders close and Canada be unable to sell on the global market, we as Canadian consumers would be incapable of eating our way through the excess. Due to the perishable nature of pork and limited long term storage options, we would have to dispose of enormous quantities of product.

Even if Canadians managed to double their consumption of pork and Canada had adequate freezer space, the crisis would be far from over since the real issue is animal welfare; the number of live pigs being exported is rising (Table 1). Current practices are very integrated, increasing numbers of very young pigs requiring specialized facilities are marketed in the U.S. (Table 2); should borders close, Canada simply does not have the space to house these animals and within four or five days, difficult decisions including aborting sows and euthanizing piglets will have to be made.

To put the animal crisis in perspective consider the export numbers: on a weekly basis, using data from the week of January 26th, 2008, live hog exports to the United States consisted of: 163,439 feeder pigs; 79,898 barrows and gilts; 9,758 boars and sows.

Table 1. Canada's live swine exports to all countries.

Year	Province		Total*
	Ontario	Manitoba	
2004	3,138,686	4,542,933	8,506,928
2005	2,144,553	5,014,265	8,214,803
2006	2,229,915	5,501,750	8,776,985
2007	2,111,456	6,146,465	10,031,894

*All provinces included

Table 2. Canada's live hog exports, by weight.

Weight	2004	2007
Less than 7 kg	3,087,670	3,808,035
> 7 kg < 23 kg	613,661	679,690
> 23 kg < 50 kg	1,922,163	2,242,054
Greater than 50 kg	2,655,627	3,174,415

ARE WE PREPARED FOR A BORDER CLOSURE?

The short but sobering answer is no. Our vulnerabilities are understood; but short of scaling the Canadian industry back to one that would strictly supply the domestic market, we currently have few tools in place to mitigate the impacts of a border closure.

The Canadian Pork Council (CPC) is working on many initiatives that address different parts of the issue. The CPC has been working through the development and implementation of a National Identification and Traceability program which could help minimize the impacts of a disease outbreak or a food safety crisis. The CPC also has a national emergency communications plan and participated actively in the Pork Value Chain Roundtable's market collapse working group; is a supporter, through the Canadian Animal Health Coalition, of the West Hawk Lake Zoning project; and is a participant in the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition's pandemic preparedness activities.

The industry has a lot at stake and needs to become fully engaged in order to find workable tools to help lessen the impact of a closed border. As is often said, it is not 'if' we will face a border closure, but rather 'when'.