



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **H1N1 and the Swine Industry**

The outbreak of swine flu, the H1N1 virus, in April negatively affected consumer confidence, both foreign and domestic markets, and the United States' pork industry.

Cindy Cunningham, the Assistant Vice President of Communications for the National Pork Board said, "The H1N1 outbreak has really been devastating to U.S. producers."

Initially the naming of the H1N1 virus associated pork and pork products with the virus, resulting in economic loss. This led consumers to the misconception that you could contract the virus by eating pork.

"The worst misconception was the misnaming of it, being called the swine flu in the very beginning," said Nikki Snider, the Coordinator of Communications for the Oklahoma Pork Council.

In the first two weeks when it was called, swine flu producers were losing \$15 per head, Snider said.

Cunningham said that after the initial outbreak in April, cash prices and futures prices fell sharply. This was a result of uncertainty in how consumers would react to the issue.

As a result of increased input costs for feed and fuel, the swine industry was in an economic slump for roughly 17 months, Snider said.

The coupling of the existing economic hardship and the swine flu made the existing challenge even greater for pork producers, Cunningham said.

“We have producers who are looking at approximately 60 percent of their equity being lost since September 2007,” Cunningham said.

Additionally, producers have put roughly 6 to 7 percent more pork on the domestic market, which also reduces prices. This is coupled with the greater than expected decrease in export sales.

“The sum of all the actual and projected revenue reductions from the period of April 24 to the end of 2009 stands at about \$2.185 billion that the U.S. pork industry will lose,” Cunningham said.

Several export markets, including China, closed their doors to U.S. pork initially after the outbreak.

Presently, China is still not open to trade. However, the National Pork Board is working with President Obama’s administration to reopen the boarder.

Other markets have reopened as a result of the pork industry’s efforts and their “Pork is Safe” campaign, Cunningham said.

Farmers are being more diligent than ever in checking the health of their animals daily, “because pigs and people can share any strain of flu,” Snider said.

Currently, swine flu is not in the U.S. swine herd. This means it is only transmitted human to human.

Therefore, producers monitor their animals daily for flu symptoms and are encouraged to test any animal exhibiting flu symptoms.

Additionally, producers are implementing strict sick day policies, Snider said. Employees with flu symptoms are encouraged to get tested immediately.

Snider said she suggests that producers visit with their friends and neighbors to reiterate the precautions they take to ensure safe products.

The pork industry is working diligently to distribute the facts about the safety of pork products.

Humans cannot contract the H1N1 virus from eating pork, for two reasons.

One, the animal would have recovered before it could be harvest. Secondly, the virus has not been found anywhere but the respiratory tract of the animal, which isn't consumed.

"H1N1 doesn't have anything to do with eating pork," Cunningham said.

In order to maintain a H1N1 free swine herd, a vaccine is being produced for the hogs. Cunningham said utilizing this risk management tool would be at the discretion of each producer.

Snider said swine industry economists are hopeful that by the end of 2010 the industry will be turned around.

"The goal of all of our producers in the end is to provide a safe, wholesome product for consumers, both here in the U.S. as well as internationally," Cunningham said.

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