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News feature

A look inside Brazil's pork industry

If you want to understand what is happening in a country's agricultural industry, ask one of the leading players in that industry.

That request brought Cinara Batista from the Brazilian Association of Animal Protein (ABPA) to the 2016 Banff Pork Seminar to share her insights into Brazil, one of the largest exporting countries in the world. ABPA is the largest animal protein association in Brazil with 140 members throughout the value chain. Its goals include strengthening market access, improved government relations and international trade.

Brazil is well diversified when it comes to agricultural exports. It is a global leader and the largest producer and exporter of sugar, coffee and orange juice. As well as being the largest producer and the second largest exporter of soybeans, ethanol, beef and chicken meat, they are one of the leading producing and exporting countries of turkey, corn, pork and cotton.

The reason for Brazil's position as one of the world's leading food suppliers is attributed to its abundant land, sunshine and rainfall and year-round growing conditions. Batista says the country is using technology to make the most of these natural resources.

Growing production

From 1960 to 2013, grain production in Brazil increased almost 1,000 percent. The country has doubled the area used for grain production and increased production 10 fold during that time. In the same timeframe, meat production of beef, chicken and pork has risen by 1,363 percent.

Traceability is seen as a competitive requirement and is mandatory for the companies handling and processing food products. This is essential because of the direct link to risk management, consumer safety, quality control and the ability to recall, and as a means of communication between producers, consumers and inspection bodies.

The country's traceability system "must be able to connect all the links in the chain with the ability to trace back from consumer to farmer," says Batista.

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Management of disease outbreaks is of significant importance in Brazil. The country has a national swine health program to control, notify and action in cases related to pork production. Because of foot and mouth (FMD) issues in the last few decades in both swine and beef animals, Brazil has yet to regain access to some lost export markets. Because of this Brazil has adopted an extensive biosecurity program and places great importance on transparency and reliability within the system.

“Our integrated production system is a unique way of producing pork and chicken meat. The company supplies the producer with the animals, feed, veterinary support and everything else needed. The producer is responsible for delivering the animals for slaughter,” says Batista of this closed loop system. Its goals are to ensure better sanitary control, more income stability for the producer and income creation in rural areas.

The new measures appear to be working. In the last 15 years, Brazil has boosted its exports of pork by more than 600 percent and has increased pork production by 40 percent primarily in its southern states. This makes Brazil the fourth largest producer and exporter in the world exporting about 500k tonnes and making up about eight percent of global pork exports.

The Brazilian export market specializes in cuts versus fresh meat, and it represents 85 percent of all pork exports. Almost half of all Brazilian exports currently go to Russia. “On one hand this is positive – Russia is a good market that pays well. On the other hand it is a cause for concern as there is risk when so much relies on one market,” says Batista.

While the sow numbers have decreased in the last few years, the slaughter pigs per sow have increased as well as slaughter weights, thanks to strong genetics, better nutrition and animal welfare practices.

It is a country and an industry on the rise.