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Maple Leaf Agri-Farms team wins 2022 BPS Aherne Innovation Prize

Banff, Alta. Jan. 13, 2022: Manitoba veterinarian, Jewel White and her teammates, Ronald Nayre and Jim Kehler of Maple Leaf Agri-Farms in Landmark, Man. have developed what they call “the Backspacer Device,” a simple device that significantly improves animal care and worker safety in pork barns during blood sampling.

Their invention won them the F. X. Aherne Prize for Innovative Pork production at the 2022 Banff Pork Seminar (BPS) in Banff, Alta. The award was presented on the conference floor Jan. 12 by Ben Willing, University of Alberta professor and chair of the BPS awards committee.

White says she saw several things that would improve blood collection with a new holding approach. The person collecting would not have to pull the animal forward, causing less stress on the worker. The animal could be restrained better in the stall and moved forward in the stall which improves animal care as well as worker safety and efficiency. Clearly, the device had to be easy to move and clean.

She worked with farm teammates, veterinary assistant Nayre and farm maintenance technician Kehler to design the final product. It is now used across Maple Leaf production barns.

“That is typical of our winners for the Aherne Prize,” says Willing. “Someone has an idea, often teammates get involved and the product ends up finding use across that operation and others in the industry. Those grassroots efforts typically draw widespread interest because they make a real difference in daily production work.”

The award is named after Frank Aherne, who was a professor at the University of Alberta and a major force for science-based progress in the Canadian pork industry.

The Banff Pork Seminar is coordinated by the Department of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science, University of Alberta, in cooperation with Alberta Pork, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and other pork industry representatives from across Canada.

More complete details and photos are available in the Inside BPS Special Report available by link from the 2022 Seminar website www.banffpork.ca.

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