



BY GEOFF DALE

# NIAGARA PRODUCERS SIGN ON

## to PRRS control and elimination project

So far, 66 producers have signed agreements to take part in this two-year project, the first of four geographical areas selected for trials aimed at eliminating this costly viral disease

**A** two-year project aimed at the control and ultimate elimination of a devastating virus within the swine industry is moving ahead with an impressive percentage of producers showing support.

"In terms of producer support throughout the region, approximately 86 per cent have signed participation agreements," says Dr. Jane Carpenter, swine disease control project co-ordinator with the Ontario Swine Health Advisory Board (OSHAB).

The disease is Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS), a viral disease characterized by reproductive failure in breeding animals and re-

spiratory disease in pigs of any age.

The program — Niagara PRRS Area Regional Control & Elimination (ARC&E) Project — got underway with its first planning meeting Feb. 18, 2010, during a joint session between OSHAB and the Ontario Association of Swine Veterinarians.

PRRS is not only detrimental to the pigs themselves, but it can be costly

Tasked by the Canadian Swine Health Board to come up with the cost of the disease nationally, the George Morris Centre, an independent agri-food think tank, estimated an acute PRRS outbreak could cost approximately \$340 to \$460 per sow per year,

for an annual expense of \$130-million nationwide. A chronic infection came in at around \$250 per sow yearly.

From the project's initial meeting, four geographical areas were proposed for consideration for a PRRS area regional control and elimination trial based on criteria that include moderate pig density, motivated producers and service providers, physical borders, limited pig transportation through the control zone and other issues. The Niagara Peninsula was selected last June as the project region for phase 1. Two area producer meetings were subsequently held in August with 77 sites identified in the project area. At present, 66 signed producer participation agreements have been received.

Carpenter says the first site was sampled Sept. 14, 2010, and to date 50 of the 66 currently participating area sites have been tested. Thirty-one are PRRS (ELISA) negative with 19 PRRS (ELISA) positive. ELISA is an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay which can identify diseases animals have been exposed to.

The Animal Health Laboratory in Guelph, where the testing is being done is using the IDEXX Herd-Chek PRRSV X3 ELISA. It detects antibodies directed to the nucleocapsid of both North American and European genotypes of PRRS virus.

Project objectives are to:

- Develop a culture of openness, transparency, co-operation and collaboration;
- Lead a change in attitude: from independent to interdependent;
- Obtain greater than 90 per cent producer participation;
- Model biosecurity advancements and assess possible solutions to key disease transmission risks;
- Improve communications and share knowledge (biosecurity and disease control) with the whole industry;
- Maintain or improve the PRRS status of participating farms in the area (if positive with viral shedding, change to no viral shedding; maintain non-shedding or negative status);
- Maintain competitiveness with trading partners and avoid any possible future disease related trading barriers.

"It is very important that we develop an industry that is transparent and works together in a collaborative fashion," Carpenter adds. "In addition to controlling PRRS initially, we want to see its eventual elimination throughout the area. Local leadership and participation is vital."

"It's not just about PRRS. When PRRS is associated with some other diseases, it can be the case where one plus one doesn't equal two but rather one plus one equals three. We are doing an initial diagnostic survey at the beginning, ongoing monitoring and a final survey at the end of the two years." □

THE OMAFRA, OSHAB AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS, THE ANIMAL HEALTH STRATEGIC INITIATIVE (AHSI) AND ONTARIO PORK ARE FUNDING THE PROJECT.