



Joint Statement from Tri-National Agricultural Accord H1N1 – What’s in a name? Yes, words do matter!

At the 19th Annual Tri-National Agricultural Accord, the delegates agreed unanimously to the following statement:

The media practice of identifying new or existing diseases of public health concern with technically incorrect names has resulted in confusion among consumers, market and trade disruptions and significant losses to the agricultural industry. The most recent example of this is the H1N1 Influenza Pandemic in humans that has been incorrectly labeled as “Swine Flu”. This has contributed to the collapse of the pork industry. As we prepare for the distribution upon availability of the H1N1 vaccine in advance of an expected resurgence of the virus, academics, public health officials and the media need to refrain from the continued mischaracterization of the disease. Agricultural officials from the three North American countries urge these professionals to use non-inflammatory scientific terminology in naming diseases to reduce unnecessary negative consequences and trade disruptions now and in the future.

Officials from the International Society for Infectious Diseases have stated “...since we know nothing of how this particular virus has gotten into the human population but there apparently is no history of swine exposure, it probably makes more sense epidemiologically to refer to this simply as an H1N1 influenza virus.”

Health officials have repeatedly documented and affirmed that pork is safe to eat; there is no threat to people from consuming properly handled and cooked pork. Yet the continued use of the incorrect term for the H1N1 virus by many academics, public health websites and the media professionals contributes to a distorted perception of pork as a source of the disease and perpetuates an unwarranted and avoidable economic calamity for many pork producers, processors and distributors.

The delegates of the 19th Annual Tri-National Agricultural Accord respectfully request an immediate call to action to the academic, public health and media professionals to stop the unjustified historic practice of colloquially naming a disease after geographic locations or animals without regard to the consequences of this action. The world has changed dramatically since this practice began. Stigmas are impossible to overcome, are often unwarranted and serve no purpose.

Honourable Rosann Wowchuk, Canada Delegation

Secretary Joel Ávila Aguilar, Mexico Delegation

Commissioner Gene Hugoson, United States Delegation