



François Guimont, president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, delivered a speech entitled "Meat Inspection in Canada: A Tradition of Excellence," during last month's CMC Conference.

The Winds of Change

Meat producers face a changing environment with optimism

BY CAROLYN COOPER

With a cloud of uncertainty still hanging over the Canadian meat industry, one thing is sure to be a constant – change. That fact was front and centre last month as members of the Canadian Meat Council (CMC) met in rainy Vancouver for the 87th Annual CMC Conference.

Speaking during the opening moments of the conference, 2006 CMC president Conrad Huber, executive vice-president of Piller Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd., discussed how changes to the retail, regulatory and consumer environment are impacting pork and beef producers. "It's been an honour to serve as president for 2006. A year in which our industry faced many challenges," said Huber, pointing to the higher Canadian dollar, BSE and Avian Influenza scares as well as heightened food safety concerns and the resulting changes in processing methods. Also having an impact are concerns such as labour recruitment and retention, and the collapse of the Doha round of World Trade Organization talks last summer.

But, said Huber, the industry has many strengths that make for a more optimistic 2007. "As well as a stronger relationship with the American Meat Institute (AMI), we've passed a bylaw that allows us to include chicken pro-



ducers and processors in the CMC. We look forward to broadening our mandate to include all meats, and not just red meat." Lobbying the government will naturally be a key part of that strategy for 2007, and said Huber, "It's time to move forward with one

strong meat inspection process that would contribute to a safer product for the consumer and eliminate confusion by foreign consumers."

As Doug Brown, director of Human Resources with Freybe Meats and chair of the Annual Conference Committee, explained, this year the CMC decided not to feature one central conference theme. Instead, he said, "The reality in our industry today is that no company has the luxury of focusing all of its interests on one single issue. In recognition of this multiplicity of issues we've assembled a wide range of speakers and topics." High-profile speakers included François Guimont, president of the Canadian Food

Inspection Agency, who discussed meat inspection in Canada; the Honourable Chuck Strahl, minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, speaking about the relationship between Canada's red meat industry and the federal government; and Patrick Boyle, president and CEO of the AMI, presenting "A View from Washington."

PLANNING FOR 2008?

The 88th CMC Conference takes place in Niagara Falls, Ont., May 6 to 11, 2008, at the Sheraton Fallsview Niagara Falls.

For more information see the CMC website www.cmc-cvc.com

The new food guide, *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, was discussed during Mary Ann Binnie's speech on consumer challenges and opportunities for the pork sector. Binnie, manager of Canada Pork, noted that both the *World Cancer Research Fund Report of 1997* (a new version is due out this year) and the new food guide recommend a decrease in daily meat consumption, and an increase in consumption of protein alternatives. Despite these challenges, Binnie emphasized that the meat industry has many positive attributes that can be turned into opportunities, including the fact that meat is a nutrient-rich food with few calories, and so is still an important contributor to satiety and weight management. Binnie also spoke about research into developing meats as functional foods (such as omega-3 rich pork), alternatives to nitrates in processed meats, and a decrease in salt in value-added products. She stressed that the industry must get the message out to consumers that meat is still a healthy protein source.

Reiterating that fact was Glenn Brand, CEO of the Beef Information Centre, who noted that trends in consumer preferences towards natural, organic and lean products are ideally suited to the beef sector. "Opportunities for the beef industry include educating foodservice operators on safe food handling and taste, and consumers and the medical profession on health and nutrition issues. We're also working with the Heart and Stroke Foundation and their Health Check program to communicate that beef is a healthy product."

President's Award

Dr. Merv Baker, director of the Food of Animal Origin division of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, was honoured with the CMC's President's Award during the conference gala reception and dinner on Feb. 8. The award recognizes Dr. Baker's outstanding service to the CMC, and his tireless work during the BSE crisis.

(Left) 2006 CMC president Conrad Huber and Dr. Merv Baker, recipient of the 2006 President's Award.



New CMC President

During the conference's annual gala dinner event it was announced that Brian Nilsson, co-CEO and co-owner of Alberta's XL Foods Inc., will take over as CMC president for 2007.

Speaking about the various issues the Canadian meat industry will face in the coming year, Nilsson pointed to such challenges as the resumption of exports of cattle over 30 months to the U.S., the threat of avian influenza, and the uncertainty surrounding the Canadian pork industry. However, said Nilsson, "The strength of our organization is its membership. Our companies and our industry have evolved over the years, and so the CMC will too." Keeping that in mind, Nilsson said he will "strive to get the initiatives through that the CMC has started in the past year."

TECHNICAL SYMPOSIUM

The Canadian Meat Science Association (CMSA) and the Canadian Meat Council (CMC) held their joint Technical Symposium on Feb. 7, directly preceding the CMC annual conference.

Themed "Focusing on the Consumer: What Science Can Do for You," the one-day symposium featured a number of informative speakers discussing consumer demand and trends, and their relation to meat research. According to 2006 CMSA president Scott McQuay of Viscofan Canada Inc., the program was a result of comments from attendees of last year's Technical Symposium, demonstrating the priority this subject now has for the meat industry.

Starting the morning was keynote speaker Prof. Ellen Goddard, co-operative chair and chair of the department of Rural Economy at the University of Alberta. In her speech, "Economics and Adding Value to Meat," Goddard discussed her studies on the interrelatedness of meat production and consumer demand, something that is constantly changing and increasingly hard to predict, as issues such as nutrition, health, environment, technology, production methods and even labelling regulations all affect potential consumer behaviour. "None of this is constant either," she said, noting that while some factors are measurable, others are more subjective. "Willingness to pay is also influenced by things such as country of origin labelling, traceability, food safety and perceived tenderness. External factors also affect the success of meat product development. So the ability to combine sensory, stated and revealed preference data provides the best assessment of consumer preferences."

Safety issues continue to be a priority for processors, producers and distributors, as consumers become increasingly informed and demanding about food safety. Interestingly though, Goddard's studies revealed that Canadian consumers put more trust into our meat inspection system and have more faith in all levels of our meat food chain than foreign consumers do of their own meat industries, something that also affects our willingness to purchase.

Other speakers built upon the same theme, including Dr. Priya Mir, acting program director, Sustainable Production Systems, Lethbridge Research Centre, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, who spoke about consumer demand for value-added products. "There is lots of research to support beef as a natural functional food," she said, noting that studies involving the addition of oil or oil seed to cattle diet show that it's possible to boost conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) content (CLA is a fat which research shows can slow the process of cancer and heart disease, while helping reduce body fat and increase lean muscle mass), while improving cattle health, digestion and *E. coli* shedding.

Rounding off the day was Dr. Randy Huffman, vice-president of Scientific Affairs for the American Meat Institute (AMI) Foundation. In speaking about consumer expectations of meat producers, Huffman introduced the AMI's new consumer study, *The Power of Meat*, which outlines current and future consumer trends. One important finding, he said, is that "convenience, safety and quality are no longer trends; they're now barriers to market entry for manufacturers."