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MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN PIG FARMERS LEADERS IN ANIMAL WELFARE

A voluntary initiative introduced by Australian pork producers to phase out the use of sow stalls on farm, has now been adopted and implemented by pig farmers who collectively account for almost 80 per cent of Australia's sows, Andrew Spencer, CEO of Australian Pork Limited (APL) revealed at an Agribusiness Australia breakfast in Adelaide this morning.

With four out of every five Australian sows now loose housed - as well as a 91 per cent probability they will not be housed in sow stalls at any point in time between five days after mating and one week before farrowing - it marks a significant milestone for the producer-owned organisation in its pursuit to implement ever-more transparent and constantly improving industry practices.

Mr Spencer said the successful uptake of the voluntary initiative - unique to Australia - will now be followed by a review of Australia's pig welfare standards and the mandatory phase out of all sow stalls on Australian pig farms.

"It has been extremely encouraging to see such a high level of compliance with our voluntary sow stall phase out initiative. Our producers have embraced the opportunity to shift their practices on farm forwards and adopt new and more transparent ways of working. We aimed to get the whole industry over the line on this one but being a voluntary initiative, I think the achievement is still one to be proud of.

"Interestingly, the proportion of sows housed in sow stalls at any point of time during pregnancy has also dropped to nine per cent and is continuing to fall. It's just another indication of how our industry is embracing animal welfare improvements across the board," Mr Spencer said.

APL's sow stall phase out initiative is part of a wider drive by the organisation to become more transparent regarding industry practises and has also included the development of a new website detailing how Australian pork ends up on your fork.

These initiatives further "raise the curtain" on the pork industry by clearly explaining to Australian consumers how their pork is produced, while simultaneously helping show improved animal welfare on farm.

This is particularly critical for the Australian pork industry at present as it is currently battling an influx of foreign pork imports, the vast majority of which, come with little animal welfare oversight or quality control guarantees.

Mr Spencer also outlined this morning how as a producer-owned Rural Research and Development Corporation (RDC), APL is urgently working with its producers, retailers, processors and wholesalers to ensure the market is as strong as it can be for domestic pork.

“APL’s purpose is to enhance the viability of pig producers. In times like these our producers look to us to take the lead in getting the industry back on track,” he said.

“The sow stall phase out is one of those initiatives to improve viability, helping consumers purchase high welfare, quality pork and helping producers compete with overseas imports.”

Mr Spencer also spoke on the wider attempts to promote Australian pork:

“We have invested an extra \$1 million in advertising this year to drive Australian fresh pork sales and launched advertisements promoting Australian ribs. We are also collaborating with restaurant chains to negotiate supply arrangements that benefit the sector such as the agreement with Hog’s Breath Café, who exclusively offer Australian pork on their menu,”

“It’s clear that if you want the freshest pork of the highest quality, consumers need Australian pork. We’re going to ensure they get more Australian pork on their forks and ask if ribs and bellies in their restaurant or pub menu are fresh, quality Australian pork.”

Mr Spencer said despite the challenges facing the Australian pork industry, pork remains the second most consumed meat in Australia and initiatives like the sow stall phase out will help keep consumers buying pork.

“The path to growth is rarely smooth and APL will work to cultivate global export markets and support continued cost reduction and productivity through effective research and development so the industry can prosper into the future.”

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