

News of the arts

Canada-Cuba swine project

When Cuba decided to establish a pork industry 20 years ago, the island turned to Canada for high-performance, disease-free breeding stock.

Now there are more than 30,000 sows on the island, all of Canadian origin. They are producing about 500,000 market hogs annually, reports Agriculture Canada.

Under a technical assistance program, Agriculture Canada is helping to further expand and improve the Cuban pork industry, by introducing modern breeding and management concepts.

The department is working through the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), which is an offshoot of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Hans Grieger, Agriculture Canada's chief of swine performance testing, is secretary of the Canadian-Cuban working group on swine improvement. He explains that in Cuba there are 18 feeding centers ranging in size from 3,000 to 45,000 feeder pigs.

The large-scale, state-run operations are well suited to the sophisticated breeding and management techniques being introduced by the Canadian team.

Many sows on the island now are bred artificially. Frozen semen from Canadian swine artificial insemination (A.I.) centers is being used, and arrangements are being made for fresh semen to be sent from Quebec to the Cuban breeding centers.

One of the critical aspects of artificial insemination is to breed the female during her ovulation. It requires considerable time and close observation for heat detection.

But a study now in progress will examine how the sows can be "batch bred". A technique used in East Germany will be tested on groups of 50 sows at a time. The sows' heat cycles are synchronized thus allowing the group to be bred simultaneously.

The team is also investigating new feeding techniques. The market pigs now produced on the island are all fed food wastes, which are cooked to kill bacteria.

"The Cubans have done a wonderful job of utilizing this garbage, but they will have to find a new source of feed for their industry to expand," Mr. Grieger says.

This autumn a feeding trial will be launched in Cuba. Two hundred sows will

be used. Half the group will continue on the rations now in use, while the second group will get balanced grain-based rations.

"We hope to show the Cubans that the balanced rations (18 per cent protein starter and 16 per cent protein finisher) will improve performance and reduce the relatively high post-weaning mortality rate." Mr. Grieger says.

Mechanized feed carts will also be tested, and could result in some Canadian sales.

New west coast terminal to speed grain exporting

The first new grain export terminal on the west coast in more than a decade is expected to open in Vancouver in October. It will increase Canada's grain exporting capacity at the west coast by 20 per cent and will be capable of handling grain as fast as existing facilities twice the size.

Two high-speed loaders, the first of their type in Canada, have been installed and are capable of moving 100,000 bushels an hour into waiting vessels. Swivelling over the deck and moving alongside the ship on tracks, the loaders can reach holds without having repeatedly to move the ship beneath a stationary grain spout.

The \$40-million terminal is being constructed by Pioneer Grain Company Limited of Winnipeg, Canada's largest privately-owned grain company.

Whales beached in suicide swim

A mother whale gave birth shortly before dying along with 135 other pothead whales who recently beached themselves on a Newfoundland shore.

A local resident who reported witnessing the birth was unsure whether the baby whale was one of about 60 successfully driven back to deep water by fishermen and fisheries officials in small boats.

The doomed whales began their suicide assault on the beach at Point au Gaul, 35 kilometres south of Grand Bank on the Burin Peninsula. They were discovered by fishermen who reported the beachings to government officials.

The fishermen also strung out their small boats in a line to successfully turn back another pod of about 100 whales

swimming for the same beach.

Hundreds of spectators from surrounding communities joined most of the 600 residents of Point Au Gaul on the beach. Some of the stranded whales were shot by fisheries personnel when it had become obvious they were doomed.

Fisheries department experts said they were unable to explain the beachings, although they suggested some may have been trapped by receding tides in an inlet near the small fishing village on the island's south shore.

The experts said they were particularly baffled since whales are rarely seen along that stretch of Newfoundland coastline.

The pothead whales, a type of pilot whale, ranged in size from less than two metres to about eight metres. Adults average about 7.5 metres, and weigh more than 1,000 kilograms.

What's up doc?



Harry J. Horne, Canadian Consul General in San Francisco, recently assisted in the official opening of Yukon Land, a new section of Marriott's Great America amusement park, in Santa Clara, California. Mr. Horne clowns with park mascot Bugs Bunny, who is dressed in frontier garb for the occasion.