

In-transit losses in pigs marketed in 2001 in Ontario

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Objective

To describe the in-transit losses experienced in market pigs in Ontario in 2001 and to identify the association between losses, distance, weather, and phase of marketing

Methods

Data is collected by Ontario Pork for groups of pigs marketed by Ontario pork producers. The information is based on booking numbers and includes the total number of pigs marketed, the date, producer, transporter and packer. We combined this information with weather data that was purchased from Environment Canada. Associations between in-transit losses, weather, distance traveled producer, transporter and packer were determined using mixed model analyses.

Results

In 2001, 4,760,213 finisher pigs were marketed and of those 7,969 pigs died during transport. This amounts to a loss of 0.17% or 17 pigs in every 10,000. The farm, transporter and packer involved with the pigs explained 55%, 19% and 25% of the variation in the losses. This variation indicated the large difference in losses between producers. Ten percent of producers lost at least 0.4% of their pigs. Although small farms had the highest losses, a few large farms had significantly higher losses than other farms of the same size. Ten percent of packers had losses of at least 0.21% whereas 25% of packers had losses of 0.02% or less. For 10% of the transporters, the loss levels were at least 0.23% but at least 25% of the transporters had no losses. Most of the losses occurred in the summer months. Once temperature reached 20°C the losses were 0.4%. Between 26 and 28 °C, the losses were 0.6%, and above 28 °C, they were 0.76%. The impact of temperature and humidity combined to increase these losses. The impact of an environmental temperature of 28°C and a humidity level of at least 60% was the same as a temperature of 36°C and a humidity level of less than 30%. At high humidity levels, losses occurred at lower environmental temperatures. Distance was not related to losses.

Take-home message

- The majority of Ontario's in-transit pig loss occurs in the summer
- Significant increases in losses occur at fairly low temperatures if the humidity levels are high
- There is a lot of variation in loss from farm to farm

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