

National Newspaper Association Supports Calling Virus H1N1

U.S. pork producers picked up an important ally this week in their effort to properly name the H1N1 flu virus when the president of the National Newspaper Association urged community newspaper publishers and editors to use precise language in coverage of the flu pandemic.

Cheryl Kaechele, publisher of the Allegan County News in Allegan, Mich., told her members that confusion from newspaper headlines that refer to H1N1 as "swine flu" has "unfairly cast doubt upon the pork industry." The National Newspaper Association (NNA) is a not-for-profit trade association representing the owners, publishers and editors of America's 2,400 daily and weekly community newspapers.

Tim Bierman, an Iowa pork producer who is president of the National Pork Board, said he has sent a letter to Kaechele thanking her for her leadership on an issue that is vitally important to the nation's 70,000 pork producers. "Earlier, I had sent a letter to the top executives of 25 of the country's leading media asking them to do exactly what Cheryl Kaechele is advocating to her members. I told them that calling the virus anything other than H1N1 contributes to public confusion about the safety of eating pork. It is gratifying to see the leader on the largest association of newspapers supporting pork producers on this important issue."

Kaechele, in her letter to members, said NNA was asked on behalf of pork producing states to clarify for readers that exposure to hogs, pork products or other swine is not the precipitator of the virus. As newspapers that often cover farming communities, she said, NNA member publications should be aware of the nature of this confusion and accurately label stories about the virus.

Kaechele called members' attention to this statement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

"This virus was originally referred to as 'swine flu' because laboratory testing showed that many of the genes in this new virus were very similar to influenza viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But further study has shown that this new virus is very different from what normally circulates in North American pigs. It has two genes from flu viruses that normally circulate in pigs in Europe and Asia and bird (avian) genes and human genes. Scientists call this a 'quadruple reassortant' virus."