

# Collaboration between NCPC and N.C. State Brings Training to Spanish-Speaking Employees



*Dr. Martin Liebstein, College of Veterinary Medicine at North Carolina State University*

Last year, Dr. Glen Almond, a professor of pig health, and Dr. Martin Liebstein, a lecturer on pig health and production, saw a need within the hog industry. With the assistance of the North Carolina Pork Council (NCPC) they pursued an opportunity to meet it.

Both Almond and Liebstein work within the College of Veterinary Medicine at North Carolina State University (N.C. State). As part of their teaching, Almond and Liebstein were taking students to hog farms for applied research studies.

During these visits, they recognized the number of Spanish-speaking workers on the farms. Often times there was a designated translator, but this was either the Spanish-speaking worker who knew English the “best” or a farm manager who had a limited handle on Spanish.

They recognized that in order to facilitate valuable industry training – even if it was basic information – it would be helpful if someone could truly speak Spanish to the workers and not have to be concerned that anything would be lost in translation. Over the last five to seven

The course being taught exclusively in Spanish creates a better atmosphere for the attendees by making the participants feel more comfortable.



*Coharie employees proudly display their certificates of completion*

years, the Spanish-speaking workforce in North Carolina’s hog industry has dramatically increased, however these employees were not included in the educational process.

Almond approached NCPC’s board of directors in the spring of 2008 to request financial support for a program in which Liebstein, who is from Argentina, would provide instruction to Spanish-speaking workers. The board agreed that there was a need and wholeheartedly supported the program. This began the collaboration between NCPC and N.C. State to bring training to the employees from Mexico and Central America that were working in North Carolina.

“We saw the need, had the right person, and Martin was more than qualified,” said Almond.

Liebstein is a doctor of veterinary medicine who had previously worked

as a swine practitioner/manager in a 1,200 farrow-to-finish farm, and as a customer service support staff member of a pharmaceutical/AI supply company. His background and experience were invaluable, and the fact that Spanish was his first language made him the obvious choice to lead the training programs.

One of the keys to getting the program off the ground was the help from the staff and administration at Sampson Community College (SCC). SCC President Dr. William Aiken and Dr. Steve Matthis, chair of the agricultural/industrial programs division, provided free space at the college for the classes to be held. Matthis also played an integral part in making the initial contact with local companies about the Spanish-only course Liebstein would be leading.

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The course consists of eight classes lasting three hours each. There is also the option of two additional classes for new topics that are not covered in the basic course. The course covers topics including: biosecurity; animal behavior and management; euthanasia on the farm; injections; breeding and gestation management; artificial insemination and heat detection; farrowing room management; piglet assistance and piglet processing; nursery floor management and finishing floor management. Special classes have also covered exudative epidermitis (greasy pigs), salt poisoning (water deprivation) and breeds commonly used in swine production.

"It is always extremely beneficial to provide our Spanish-speaking employees with educational opportunities in their native language," said Anne Faircloth, NCPC board member and vice-president of Coharie Farms, one of the participating companies. "Unfortunately there haven't been any opportunities like this in North Carolina, so Martin provides us with a unique benefit."

Liebstein believes the course being taught exclusively in Spanish creates a better atmosphere for the attendees by making the participants feel more comfortable. "They don't view me as an instructor but just another guy working with pigs," he said.

"Students enjoy the opportunity to have discussions in Spanish and are very interactive with Martin," said Almond. "They really want to learn, and there is a genuine desire to understand what they are doing."

Liebstein has been pleased with the response he has received from the farm employees he has worked with. In addition to the information they have gained, this educational opportunity has also made the employees feel they are valuable to their employers.

"They didn't have this opportunity in Mexico or Central America," said Liebstein. "The fact that their employers are paying attention to them beyond providing them a job lets them know their importance and the importance of their position."

Liebstein, on his own, designed a certificate personalized for each employee who completes the course. There is an obvious sense of pride and accomplishment for the employees when they are presented with their certificate.

As part of his work with the College of Veterinary Medicine at N.C. State, Liebstein will continue to teach the course for 2009-2010, and his position will be funded solely by N.C. State. The future of the program will be dependent upon the interest shown by the state's producers. Liebstein respects that each company and individual producer prefers that the information provided in the course does not create conflicts with internal standard operating procedures.

If you would like to contact Liebstein for more information on this program, you can reach him at 919-513-6037 or by e-mail at martin\_liebstein@ncsu.edu.



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