

New hand at the helm of Prairie Swine Centre

By Sheri Monk

Prairie Swine Centre is a research gem in the diverse sea of agriculture of Canada's Great Plains. Known for its unique relationship with producers and its practical approach to academic research, Prairie Swine Centre has been an integral part of the swine industry for 25 years. It was announced late last year that CEO Lee Whittington was retiring, and the search for a new leader concluded with the appointment of Dr. Murray Pettitt.



Although the position is new to Pettitt, he is no stranger to the Centre, having worked there for 10 years, up until 2009.

"I was very familiar with the Swine Centre and the work it does and their mandate. I have always believed in the Centre and I quite enjoyed my time there back in the day," Pettitt said.

While all research is important, Prairie Swine Centre specializes in the kind of research that is relevant to producers at the time it is conducted, so that the results can be utilized or taken into consideration immediately.

"I'm a researcher who likes practical research," he said. "When I was working at the Swine Centre I was certainly involved in that kind of stuff, on campus at the U of S I was also doing those kinds of research projects, so coming back to the swine centre was very attractive. I truly believe in what it does and its mandate and the fact that it's actually providing value to its producers and other members of the pork value chain."

Pettitt says he feels he is at the right stage in his training and career to tackle the challenging role of CEO.

"The outgoing CEO, Lee Whittington, and I have spent some time together this month and I am just learning the ropes. I've been able to meet everybody and renew friendships and working relationships. Saskatoon is a small town and swine research is even smaller, so many of these folks I have seen around for the last nine years anyway, even though I haven't been working at the centre," he said.

Of course, that doesn't mean the new gig isn't a lot of work, and anyone familiar with the new job jitters can probably relate to how the first few weeks on the job feels.

"So it's been good. Right now I'm in information gathering mode, and I am trying to learn everything I can about the business and how it works. The Swine Centre today isn't exactly the way it was when I left it nine years ago – neither is the industry – so I am coming up to speed to understand the various research projects going on."

Aside from research, the Centre also markets animals, so that's something Pettitt must get a handle on as well.

"I am getting caught up with the production side of things too because part of the income for the Swine Centre is the sale of market animals. I'm just trying to soak it all up," he said.

Pettitt is married, with two cats and an interesting hobby – rocketry.

How does he feel about his future with Prairie Swine Centre?

"It's nice to be home," he said. ■

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