

## **"At Best, A Redundant and Non-`*Enviropig*`"**

**By Terran Giacomini**

At the University of Guelph in Ontario, on 7 October 2010, a group of students and I hosted a debate on the University's genetically engineered (GE) animal project, the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup>. The *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> is a pig that has been genetically engineered to produce up to 30 percent less phosphorus in its excrement.

We organized the debate because we wanted to provide an opportunity for students to raise questions about this internationally controversial project that the University has been developing for the past ten years. In February 2010 the federal agency, Environment Canada, approved *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> for confined reproduction (strictly segregated from other animals). Health Canada is currently assessing *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> for human health safety to allow or disallow the genetically engineered pig into the food system, and, unless beaten by GE salmon, this *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> originating from the University of Guelph and owned by the University of Guelph, will be the first genetically engineered animal allowed into the food system anywhere in the world.

The University of Guelph was represented by Dr. Rich Moccia, a fisheries and aquatic scientist, and Dr. Cecil Foresberg, a co-creator of the genetically altered pig. Questions from the fifty or so students in attendance reflected a deep concern about human and environmental health and safety. Dr. Moccia defended the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> as just another 'tool in the tool box' but maintained that it offers an important contribution to the problem of excess phosphorus on hog farms that destroys aquatic ecosystems. More correctly, he should have presented that this problem exists when hog farms become the massive 'factory farms' that have raised so many health issues in the USA and Canada, in particular. The other two panellists were not convinced. Sharratt and farmer Sean McGivern from the National Farmers' Union both agreed that the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> is misnamed. They argue that the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> is not 'enviro' at all and could actually be a disaster for hog farmers who are already in crisis in Canada.

Both McGivern and Sharratt pointed out that the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> is a false solution to a false problem. According to them, the real problem is not phosphorus pollution. The real problem is the intensive livestock operations that break the nutrient cycle on farms by over producing manure which the surrounding lands cannot use productively. These factory farms also destroy biodiversity by promoting monoculture in feed crops and in the animal's gene pool. This means that a pig altered to reduce phosphorus will only allow a polluting and harmful system to continue polluting and harming into the future. McGivern offered a list of the many real solutions that already exist to reduce phosphorus which include raising pigs on a diet and on a scale that supports their natural system.

Dr. Moccia, in his closing statement emphasized the importance of genetic engineering as impacting "the fate of the world". If the University of Guelph were as serious about the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> project as they say they are they would heed the calls of public interest groups like CBAN and the NFU and join them in advocating for regulatory reform and halting the *Enviropig*<sup>TM</sup> project immediately before they unabashedly decide "the fate of the world".