

BREAKING DOWN TRADE BARRIERS WITH SCIENCE



Photo: Bob Elbert

Laurie Hueneke Martens with the National Pork Producers Council works with trade liaisons from across the globe to open markets for U.S. pork.

By Melea Reicks Licht

Laurie Hueneke Martens has many tools in her arsenal, but her weapon of choice is science.

As director of international trade policy, sanitary and technical issues for the National Pork Producers Council, Martens' '01 animal science and international agriculture mission is to knock down barriers to trade.

When the H1N1 flu virus hit hard last winter, it was Martens who sat down with foreign trade liaisons and negotiated reopening trade with countries that had banned U.S. pork.

In the middle of tough, emotionally-charged negotiations, Martens says she tries to keep each discussion in perspective.

"I don't take discussions personally," she says. "I want to win the war, not the battle, so I always take a strategic approach on how to address each issue, each person. I don't just bring them a problem. I offer a solution."

She says the "sanitary and technical" in her title refers to trade barriers such as antibiotics, feed ingredients and, in

the future, traceability criteria.

"Our trading partners historically use tariffs more often as a barrier to trade, but now they are using criteria based on unscientific information," Martens says. "I work with our trade partners to inform them of the science behind these issues and negotiate trade agreements that increase market access without compromising the competitiveness of the industry."

Martens is based in Washington, D.C., but travels extensively talking with producers, processors and packers at trade industry meetings. She frequently meets with delegates representing trade partners from around the globe and representatives from federal agencies, the Administration and Congress to lobby for legislation and regulation for the pork industry.

A farm girl from eastern Iowa, Martens has the training and experience to back up her negotiations.

She spent three months working on a hog farm in Thailand as an undergraduate, interned for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and as a vet assistant at the

American Farm School in Greece. In addition to her ISU degrees, she has a master's in international agriculture trade and development from Oklahoma State.

Martens worked for a time with her parents' niche meat marketing business and, just prior to her current position, for a medical device company in Minnesota where she established international trade protocols for pig valves used in human hearts.

She credits her mentors, education and experiences afforded her by Iowa State University for helping her do what she set out to do—mesh science and policy for the benefit of American producers.

"The pork industry is a forward-thinking industry. They consider trade a two-way street. This will only be more important as incomes around the world continue to rise bringing meat consumption to entirely new markets," she says.

Martens returns to Iowa State each year to recruit interns for her office to help a new generation gain experience in the expanding global marketplace. 📖

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