

Contact: Cindy Cunningham  
National Pork Board  
[ccunningham@pork.org](mailto:ccunningham@pork.org)  
(515) 223-2600



## The Science of Gene Editing Takes Center Stage at Pork Industry Forum

Annual meeting's opening session features noted author Michael Specter, panel of experts

**Kansas City – Feb. 28, 2018** – Science, technology and global health author and journalist Michael Specter opened the annual pork industry forum today, offering his insights on gene editing to the more than 350 pig farmers and pork industry professionals on-site in Kansas City.

Specter, who writes for *The New Yorker* and is currently working on a book about the breakthrough technology of gene editing, served as keynote speaker. He then led a conversation with a renowned panel of pork industry experts who each shared their perspective on the role of this emerging technology.

“Gene editing is a potentially revolutionary tool that will improve the lives of humans in clear and tangible ways,” Specter said. “And we may well see the first widely accepted benefits in animals and plants. There is a clear opportunity for the agriculture industry to lead the way.”

In its simplest definition, gene editing technology allows for precise changes to be made to the DNA of living cells, which holds the potential to eradicate diseases, transform agriculture and enable massive leaps forward in environmental and life science. Specter and the panel's presentation in Kansas City offered a single forum for those with a stake in pork production to share ideas on its application to the global pork industry. The panel of experts, facilitated by Specter, included:

- Charlie Arnot, CEO of Look East and an industry leader on food and agriculture issues, offered insight into consumer social acceptance of gene editing.
- Dan Kovich, a veterinarian and director of science and technology with the National Pork Producers Council, discussed the current regulatory environment for this emerging technology.
- Kevin Wells is on the animal science faculty at the University of Missouri's college of agriculture, food and natural resources. With a Ph.D. in genetics, Wells highlighted the scientific benefits associated with gene editing.
- Bradley Wolter, is president of The Maschhoffs LLC, and a pork producer in Illinois. Wolter, who has a doctorate in swine growth and development, reviewed gene editing's potential on-farm application.

“We have to start now by generating social acceptance of gene editing,” Arnot said. “That means overcoming the public’s scientific illiteracy by opening a dialogue to build both acceptance and support. This will allow us to move forward as a society.”

“Acceptance of gene editing faces its distinct challenges – and largest among them is public perception,” Wells said. “What is so unique to gene editing is that there is no biological reason to regulate the technology. However, that could well be the first step in growing consumer acceptance.”

Wolter, of The Maschhoffs, sees concrete on-farm application of gene editing despite being so early in its development and acceptance.

“It will have a positive impact on livestock production, making pigs resistant to diseases and improving food safety, animal welfare and environmental impact,” Wolter said. “However, you cannot invest in a technology without clearly understanding the regulatory environment.”

“A one-size-fits-all regulatory approach will not work for many emerging technologies, but especially for gene editing,” the National Pork Producers Council’s Kovich said. “A path forward exists, allowing for regulatory scrutiny, but trade-offs may be required. We need to establish a risk-based regulatory framework.”

Toward that end, gene editing technology will move forward in an environment that acknowledges public interest while simultaneously encouraging investment for its expansion. Wells noted that China already is looking to the future of gene editing by investing approximately \$15 billion in animal sciences.

*The National Pork Board has responsibility for Checkoff-funded research, promotion and consumer information projects and for communicating with pork producers and the public. Through a legislative national Pork Checkoff, pork producers invest \$0.40 for each \$100 value of hogs sold. Importers of pork products contribute a like amount, based on a formula. The Pork Checkoff funds national and state programs in advertising, consumer information, retail and foodservice marketing, export market promotion, production improvement, science and technology, swine health, pork safety and sustainability and environmental management. For information on Checkoff-funded programs, pork producers can call the Pork Checkoff Service Center at (800) 456-7675 or check the Internet at [www.pork.org](http://www.pork.org).*