

Livestock sector looking for greater tech investment; The future of the livestock farm is in big data, analytics, robotics, gene editing and blockchain

Ontario Farmer

Tue Aug 13 2019

Page: A22

Section: News

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Source: Ontario Farmer

Chicago -Of the \$17 billion spent per year on ag tech investment only a small portion goes to animal agriculture, "so we need more," says Sarah Crawford, head of animal welfare, at the national Pork Board.

Speaking here at the Ag Tech Nexus Conference, Crawford noted there is no geographic agriculture Silicon Valley, inventing agriculture technology. "It's a global network, it's a sensibility, we are all Silicon Valley."

"We're in the fourth Industrial Revolution," said Crawford. The future on the livestock farm is and will encompass big data, predictable analytics, robotics, computer chips, AI, gene editing and blockchain, she said.

The gene editing field has the potential to reduce diseases and antibiotic use, improve animal welfare and meat quality and reduce farmers' environmental impact, predicted Crawford. "That's sustainable to me."

Being able to monitor individual and group actions within the barn, such as a cough developing, "aids the farmer, but doesn't replace him," she said.

Water recycling technology can take manure, separate the solids, along with making fertilizer and the water drinkable, said Crawford.

There are also automated dosing devices for pigs that tracks when they need it, either individually or on a herd basis, she said.

The industry needs to dovetail blockchain into its distribution system, said Crawford. Using the example of IBM Food Trust using blockchain to fill consumer specific orders.

On the consumer side, “six out of 10 millennials are using their smart phone or tablet in the kitchen” to make eating decisions, said Crawford.

She noted that these informed consumers "will pay 13 per cent more for a sustainable product."

Trends are also showing that, "companies no longer need to own the capital, to own the idea or platform," she said. Using Uber and AirB&B as two examples.