



The Pig Issue

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Can we take this opportunity to wish all readers a Happy New Year and hope that 2004 is a peaceful and prosperous time for you all. It is traditionally a time for reflection but also time to look forward and plan for both our personal and our professional lives.



In reflection 2003 was certainly an improvement on the 2 grim years that preceded it. The price paid for pigmeat was at a higher level for most of 2003 than we had seen in 2001/2002 and helped to improve the returns at the farm gate.

Whilst health status in the UK herd is far from perfect, the mortalities and economic effects from wasting pigs as a result of PMWS/PDNS are generally on the decline. We still have no specific scientific reasoning to the way the disease manifests itself on farm but through bitter experience have learnt to manage the disease on farm. These improved management techniques have helped with the general disease status on many units and we as a vet/farmer team must strive to maintain and improve them further.

So what about 2004.....

Well we have seen the launch of the Pig Health and Welfare Strategy in late 2003 and the importance of this document is discussed later in the Newsletter. However anything that focuses a coordinated approach on health improvement has got to be positive. It is essential that all the desires of the strategy are achievable economically otherwise what are "tight margin" businesses already, will not adopt them.

As a part of health improvement we continue to see at practice and farm level our clients and vets working in partnership to establish batch farrowing systems, implementing full or partial depopulations, and other techniques. This proactive approach, whilst time consuming initially, reaps rewards once in full swing and once the farm mentality is in line with the new techniques adopted.

Health will continue to be our focus for 2004 and beyond, as improving health as we all know improves performance and ultimately returns. With your continued, and appreciated, support this is our aim.

We all face challenges within our own individual business lives, ours being the certain changes to the way medicines are dispensed, but a coordinated approach for an allied pig industry will be the winner.

Clients in the News Investing in the Future

At the recent Pig Health and Welfare Strategy launch meeting Mark Alton gave a presentation on a Medicated Partial Depopulation, outlining the reasons he undertook the programme, how he did it and the outcome. Mark farms 1500 acres near Wetherby, North Yorkshire with sheep and arable enterprises complimenting his 700 sow operation.

Mark outlined in clear, practical terms the way his business was structured and the logistics of carrying out a partial depop within the existing structure.

The health status on the units was EP positive, Glassers Disease positive, PRRS positive, PMWS/PDNS positive with incidences of meningitis. There were vaccination programmes in place for the EP, Glassers and PRRS with infeed medication being employed in the shape of Tylan, CTC, Potencil and Zinc Oxide.

Mark assessed the key performance factors on the farm. He realised that with a finished pig price at times barely over the £1/kg mark that a drastic improvement in health was required.

In consultation with his vet Guy Wade-West of Garth, Elanco Animal Health and drawing on the experience of his fellow producers the decision to go ahead was made.

It is vital to plan every aspect of the partial depopulation programme particularly to ensure:

- Pig numbers, gilts especially, are adequate
- Additional housing is available.
- Biosecurity is excellent pre and post programme.
- How it effects the business cash flow.
- And above all making sure every aspect of the agreed protocol is adhered to.

The protocol Mark Alton used is as follows:

- Herd closed 3 months prior to start.
- At start of medication no pigs on unit < 8 months of age.
- Medicate for 28 days. Wean off site for medication period and 2 weeks after.
- Gilts re-introduced from quarantine 3 months after end of medication.



The outcome of the programme at Mark Altons is as follows:-

	Pre programme	Post Programme
▪ Days to bacon (77kg dwt)	180	140
▪ Feeding herd mortality	20%	6%
▪ Cost of production	98/kg	80p/kg
▪ Pig sold/sow/year	18.5	23

And the medication inputs now consist of a combined EP/Glassers vaccine and infeed Zinc Oxide.

Mark continued with the costs involved and reckoned on the medication paying for itself within 3 months and the impact on overall cash flow was minimal.

Some of the key outcomes were, if planned well implementation is not difficult. A real lift in staff morale was noticed and this helps improve standards on a day to day basis. Plan your gilt replacement well in advance as the unit is effectively closed for 5 months.

Mark would ideally like to keep the unit closed on an ongoing basis if practically possible.

For further advice on medicated partial depopulation programmes please consult your vet.

British Pig Health and Welfare Strategy

The title of this initiative launched on 2nd December 2003 is self explanatory in that it “aims to achieve a demonstrable and sustainable improvement in pig health and resulting welfare that will contribute to the recovery of the British pig industry”.

The UK as an industry has adopted welfare measures that are among the most comprehensive in any pig producing nation. Pig welfare is clearly a priority and the effect that health status has on the welfare of the pig is the next issue to be tackled.

While total eradication of all major pig pathogens would be utopia for the industry that is unlikely to happen, as diseases are extremely smart at surviving in any population, be it man or beast. It is the way these diseases are managed and minimised that is key to this strategy.

There will be a cost element to the implementation of the strategy and a portion of that will be borne by the producer. Therefore any improvements, required or targeted have to be realistic, economic and achievable.

The priority areas are:-

1. Establish a national structure to provide the focus, drive and planning for a national pig health improvement programme.
2. Establish the present health, welfare and disease status of the British pig herd.
3. Enhance disease surveillance information available to pig producers.
4. Undertake intervention studies on disease control and eradication and support health improvement programmes with advice.
5. Develop nationally-recommended biosecurity protocols.
6. Develop national protocols for new disease prevention and eradication programmes.
7. Quantify risks and the consequences of emerging pig issues.
8. Enhance training in disease identification and treatment.
9. Increase the programme of targeted pig disease research.

We as vets have a key role to play in implementing the strategy and Garth Partnership will be releasing action plans, updated Veterinary Health Plans and further information to help our clients, as well as complying with request from the central bodies involved.

For a full version of the strategy document log on to: www.npa-uk.net and look under the Health and Welfare link.

Storage of Fallen Stock

Some farm assured inspectors are currently checking on the storage of fallen stock prior to disposal.

Current legislation says that the carcass shall not be exposed to birds/vermin and other farm animals. Also this legislation comes under the dog's act, as this should not be exposed to dogs. Hence there is a requirement on the farm that pigs prior to disposal should be stored in an animal proof container.

The Animal By-products Regulations 2003 (enforcing EU Regulation No. 1774/2002: INCINERATORS)

This European legislation actually became law on 1st July 2003 but a number of farms have been asking for some guidance in this area so here is the relevant information:

This legislation covers most aspects for safe use and disposal of animal by-products and runs alongside The TSE (England) Regulations 2003.

For incinerators dedicated to the disposal of animal by-products DEFRA need to approve all such sites, there are 3 types to consider:-

1. Low capacity incinerators, which incinerate specified risk material (SRM) and ruminant carcasses from which SRM has not been removed.
2. Low capacity incinerators, which do not incinerate SRM.
3. High capacity incinerators.

(Low capacity is defined as less than 50kg throughput of animal by-product/hour).

Although there has been publicity in the farming press it is important to be aware of the requirement for DEFRA approval of any on-farm incinerators.

Pig Business Club

The next meeting will be held on 21st January 2004 at 7pm in the Bishop Burton area. At the time of going to press the venue was unconfirmed due to refurbishment work at the Altisidora. Any clients wishing to join the group when all matters pig are discussed please contact Ian Carroll on 07711824659.

On a lighter note – a story from Down Under

Little Brucie was in his junior school class when the teacher asked the children what their fathers did for a living. All the typical answers came up; fireman, policeman, salesman, politician; Brucie was being uncharacteristically quiet and so the teacher asked him about his father.

“My father’s an exotic dancer in a gay club and takes off all his clothes in front of other men. Sometimes, if the offer’s really good, he’ll go out with a man, rent a cheap room and let them have their way”

The teacher hurriedly set the other children to work on some colouring and then took little Brucie aside to ask him, “Is that really true about your father?”

“No,” said Brucie, “My father plays rugby for Australia, but I was just too embarrassed to say”.