

South West Healthy Livestock Initiative 2009- Pig Meeting

Date: 30-01-09

Location: NFU, Taunton

Present:

Lester
Richard Knox
Adrian Shoot
Andy Mitcham
Andrew
Tom Browne
Helen Thoday
Nick Bell

Nick: Clarification and discussion about where the money will be going

My concern is that the money will just go to advisors rather than actually reaching farmers. The money shouldn't just go on consultant fees.

General discussion on problems where money could be spent...

Nick: We will return to this discussion later

Agenda point 1

Give an example of a health and welfare issue on your farm and how you overcame that problem and where did you go for advice- who was most influential and who came up with practical solutions?

Problem 1: A number of issues e.g. disease, poor growth rate etc.

Problem solving: Decided to de-stock and re-stock to get a better price for pigs. It increased our health status. Moving to a new site is also important. I was able to re-stock whilst running down the other farm. It increased productivity but you may have seen that on a new site anyway.

Where did I go for advice?

- Vet- based in Wiltshire large vet group (The George Veterinary group)
- Winpig (Agrisoft) – looking at my own costings using computerised accounts to closely monitor parameters e.g. feed conversion. Useful to start the year with a budget and keep looking at it
- Sat down with the breeding company (PIC)
- Also spoke to feed rep

- During ordinary (quarterly) vet visits the feed rep, breeding company and vet all came
- BPEX introduced courses so we started training staff in a more professional way

Problem 2:

- Lack of control and performance in weaning environment
- Disease, bad biosecurity

Problem solving:

- Changed weaning accommodation to an all in all out system so that we can keep pigs in the same social groups through to the nursery. It also means we can clean each room out properly between batches. It gives us increased control over the environment of weaned pigs.
- Started breeding our own replacement gilts after foot and mouth and decided not to buy anymore. We locked in any diseases we had and tightened our biosecurity. I am not a fan of lorry drivers as they increase the risk of disease transmission. We have an on-going argument/education with feed companies, I don't know what the answer is.

Where did I go for advice?

- Jonathan Heyton
- Gordon Forbes (managing director of Finrone Ltd - pig housing company). They formed ideas to see how the unit could progress in the future
- I travelled around the UK looking at various other buildings e.g. ARM buildings (manufactured buildings available in kit-form)
- Went to Hermitage Seaborough Ltd for breeding information. They helped me to set up a criss-cross breeding programme (PIC may have given the same information). Breeding companies are top notch for advice, they have a lot of years of knowledge. Pig breeding information is much more technical than dairy for example

My future plans...

I would like to de-stock and re-stock. Commercial companies used to help with plans for that but that has all gone now. Used to get information from marketing companies but not anymore. Vets don't understand breed information and about the inputs to a system, only about outputs and productivity.

If we are talking about increased performance on my farm then it has definitely increased by bringing the pigs indoors from outdoors. I have my pigs outdoors for 15 years but I was fed up with the weather etc. I was also losing a lot of pigs to foxes. There have been improvements in fencing now though. You can make your farrowing area secure. You can get this information from fencing companies.

Nick: Would you talk to other pig farmers?

Can be risky talking to other farmers.

Problem 3:

- Lack of information on productivity of pigs etc.
- High piglet mortality due to Postweaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome (PMWS)

Problem solving:

- Started using Agrisoft (pig monitoring program) to monitor costs and pig outputs
- Started using the circovaccine to help prevent Porcine circovirus and PMWS. I don't like to solve problems by just chucking vaccines at them, although this is usually the vet's suggestion.
- This decreased piglet mortality

Disease is a problem on the farm. Blue ear tests came back positive. I'd love to be able to just breed on one unit to decrease disease spread. I am an advocate of slats, if you get the basics right with pigs it can make a lot of difference. If you invest in your farm e.g. buildings then you get the best out of it. In house training also benefits the farm. It's good to spend time with individual workers and let them know some of the costs involved in the business. They are the key to driving the business forward.

Where do I go for advice?

- I would like to get information on de-stocking and re-stocking. I would probably look to Europe e.g. Denmark. It needs to be unit specific information. Buildings need to be properly cleaned before re-stocking
- Vet

Problem 4:

- High piglet mortality

Problem solving:

The new circovaccine, which you inject into piglets has helped us to decrease mortality. We are hoping that the new vaccine will improve mortality through to finishers. The weaner buildings are better than the finisher buildings. We want to improve finisher housing.

PMWS was a big problem for us. We use an all in all out farrowing system and have started dipping on entry into the farrowing houses. Dipping has improved the problem.

Where did I go for advice?

- Evening discussion group meetings (most have phased out but BPEX run regular useful meetings now)
- Vet- I don't use a big pig vet practice but maybe I should. Vets only come for scheduled (quarterly) visits, it's too expensive to call the vet out for ill pigs

Discussion groups are useful but subjects can be too complex and deep. It's difficult to look at other people's farms as we have tight biosecurity. We don't walk on other farms like during dairy discussion groups.

We are also thinking about starting a criss-cross breeding programme and making up a group of GGPs (?) which wouldn't be as risky as a complete re-stock. At the moment we are just circulating problems within the herd as we are still using the same dam line. Pigs may still be susceptible to certain diseases.

Problem 5: Lack of knowledge of outdoor rearing pigs

Problem solving: I've only been keeping pigs outdoors for 18 months and I've found that there is a lack of information for people setting up outdoor pig units. I went with a local vet but now I'm wishing I hadn't, I should have gone with a specialist.

Who did I go to for advice?

- Nutritionist was a waste of time
- PIC didn't come and see the farm etc.
- Hermitage were more useful as they came and saw the set-up
- BPEX were very useful
- Riverford have been very useful. They are like dealing with another farmer. They set out costs and margins and it's fixed. I couldn't have done this with a supermarket

No one else seemed to know anything. I am trying to avoid antibiotics, vets and vaccines. When investing a lot of money you want to make sure you're getting good advice.

I wouldn't have set up a pig farm if I couldn't have set up an organic system. I have cereals on my land so it's good for keeping stock on it all year round.

Problem 6: Disease

Problem solving: Vaccinated to control diseases. Added to the amount of vaccines already being given to the pigs. Changed some of the vaccines currently being given. Started using PCV2 vaccine.

We also de-populated a unit (finishers) and then got another unit. We have had an increased growth rate on the new site but also increased mortality.

Where did I go for advice?

- Vet from farm animal practice in Exeter (the person I see most regularly - quarterly visits)
- Feed rep (sees a lot of places so can give advice by telling you what's working on other farms and by talking to other people)
- Other farmers

- BPEX- highly valued

It is difficult to get impartial advice now. The closest you get is the vet. There is often vet rivalry within certain territories and they are reluctant to share information with each other. You need different vets ideas though. I like the idea of two different vets on different units. It's often too much information but you could often do with getting a second opinion.

Rate the sources of ideas, information and advice for: value for money, quality of advice, quality of results and state what made you apply changes.

	Quality	Application	Value
Vets	★		★
BPEX	★		★
Costing Software (e.g. Agrisoft)		★	
Breeding companies	★★		
BPHS			
Reps/consultants (nutrition/feed/buildings e.g. Keith Anderson, Gordon Forbes)	★★		
Malcolm Black (ex. MLC consultant)			
Other farmers	★★★		★
Pig World			
Pig fair			
Europe (Ireland) study tours		★	
In house training			

Top ranked sources of advice:

1. Vet
2. BPEX
3. Costing software
4. BPHS
5. Other pig farmers
6. Building consultants

What is it about these sources of advice that makes them useful?

Costing software

- Very useful for getting business figures e.g. Pigplan
- Getting everyone's figures together would be useful, through BPEX?
- Would be advantageous to be shown how to use the software
- Improves communication between the farm manager and owner
- Good discipline, you need to keep on top of it

Building Consultant

- Gordon Forbes has increased profitability in the pig industry in general
- Can bring about a massive change on farm through ready-made buildings
- Rather than getting a large permanent building. Less investment

Vets

- They know the physiology of animals so should hopefully be able to advise you what is best to do
- If you have a specialist pig vet he's probably seen the same problem on other farms he's seen that week
- They can do a quick post-mortem that doesn't cost as much if it's done on the vets quarterly inspection
- Vet is a measurable outcome that you build into your costings. They have to be best value for money
- Would be more useful if they would cost drugs separately from labour costs. This would make it easier to compare vets

Study tours

- Logistics of organising a study tour is difficult
- Would be valuable to see more farms but need someone to organise it

In-house training

- Used materials from BPEX
- Have learned a lot from my father
- Passing basics on through the generations

Feed reps

- Nutritionists are less and less useful as a source of advice
- They're there and give advice but you can take it or leave it
- It's not necessarily their knowledge of nutrition but their knowledge of others in the industry that is most useful

Other farmers

- Variable
- Impartial
- Useful in meetings but meetings are becoming less common (if BPEX didn't organise them they would not happen)
- Honest with people when you get to know them (trust)
- The meetings are often the wrong time of day (e.g. Cornwall)

Ex MLC consultant

- BPEX replaced
- Depends on the individual some are rubbish
- Useful to have a mentor in the industry
- Needs to keep visiting farms to keep knowledge

Breeding companies

- Could do more
- Useful if you are thinking of re-stocking
- Useful to give genetic information
- Genetics have moved on especially with the combination of Maxgro (new hybrid line which produces stockier, faster growing pigs) and vaccinations
- They do not give impartial advice, they are trying to sell a product. They do however, need to be at the top of their game to sell
- We need breeding companies to bring the whole of the pig industry in the south west together. Would be good not to have PIC next to Hermitage. Not very good biosecurity
- There should be a legal limit on where you can set up a breeding company. You shouldn't be allowed to set up a new site in the middle of pre-existing sites
- If Hermitage and PIC had to list the health status of all their farms then it would help everyone's biosecurity.

Nick: Where could the money be spent?

Helen:

- BPHS disease list, which are still a problem etc which will continue in the future
- Regional eradication of disease e.g. PRRS (porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome), pleurisy, worms
- Where are the worms e.g. milk spot coming from? There is a chance that the whole population of the national pig herd could be immune

Priorities for the region:

Suggestion 1

- Less pigs being brought in to the region
- Trial the pneumonia vaccine
- Take medication out of feed to decrease the price of feed. Need to standardise and improve the need to medicate e.g. select dose in water

Suggestion 2

- Worms
- Increased knowledge in outdoor rearing through increased sharing of knowledge
- Sharing knowledge with up-country farmers
- Vets at the George practice always relate it back to an indoor system. They don't seem to have much knowledge of outdoor systems
- Bit more training and support is needed for outdoor rearing pigs

Suggestion 3

- Increased knowledge of different types of housing that is available
- Would ultimately decrease medication
- Pigs should be able to go from birth to slaughter without having lots of medication
- More information about what housing is best for welfare and management (although, it's about selling your pigs through whichever market you can)

Suggestion 4

- Would like to clean my health status up
- If you start giving too much vaccine per pig you don't have much money left to make a profit. If you can move away from medicating you could spend that money on husbandry
- Increased research into breeding to decrease the use of antibiotics
- This would increase the clean up

Suggestion 5

- Improved knowledge of buildings. New buildings will hopefully knock out the use of vaccines
- Improving health in the pig industry is about keeping them in a controlled environment
- I think we should be putting our efforts into buildings
- I could do with a separate loading area for my cull sows

Suggestion 6

- Increase the health of pigs to justify investments
- Regional disease eradication (vet advising) but with that would be a database which record herd health status
- Need to make other regions more strict on movement and to declare their health status. This should be a voluntary code of practice
- But at an individual farm level biosecurity needs to be tight enough that farms are kept disease free. This should be the responsibility of the farmer

- There should be a subsidised vaccination program
- One by one we can work to eradicate diseases but we need to start off small
- Would be useful to have a survey to find out where diseases are a problem

Post Mortems

- Not worth sending to Starcross. They always come back inconclusive
- Would be useful to have more pre-emptive information about health status e.g. blood testing every quarter
- Could be levy funded

