

Ideas for questionnaire on knowledge transfer in chicken farming/industry

NB opened the discussion and introduced the agenda and relationship between

- Information, advice, training
- Health and welfare
- Increase profitability

Representatives in the industry introduced themselves, of which

- 4 broiler (contracted processor) – one joined later
- 1 layer

The discussion opened with a question put to the group about the view expressed by the majority of free range growers that there is an uncertainty over the phasing out of cages...

- If new enriched cages are implemented = huge cost involved
- However weather/climate is such that resource of fields/grass limited
- Basically - can we produce enough eggs if all 'free range'?

'No one likes change if it's forced upon them'

- general feeling within group that they are not in control of the direction of their business
- in the past they have had avenues of discussion and choice in resources, but now dictated to by other market forces 1) 3rd world grain production which is tailored for us means the market for food and public perception of industry dictates the price a bird can fetch (rather than how much it costs to produce) 2) In the past farmers genetically modified their own standards, but now the speed at which genetic development is progressing means birds are no longer appropriate for our nutrition/resources/system etc For example, we go off weight of bird, as apposed to American system (measured in days). You get to know that certain birds are susceptible to certain diseases. For example, Ros birds are always more likely to get enteritis

'The system/machine to produce rolls on, of which we are not in control'

NB asks group to come up with 1 health and/or welfare issue they have had and where they would go/went for advice

HEALTH +/OR WELFARE ISSUE	ADVICE
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Poor litter = poor feed/diet levels ----->	Worked through problem self (trial + error, and experience)
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Poor/wet litter = coxi ----->	Vet
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Wet litter (reasons multi layered) ----->	Vet
- winter problem ----->	Feed companies (poor food?)
- change birds more rapidly now ----->	Processor
problems/ventilation	
- different birds being fed differently at different times of year	

Litter in Free Range system

- weather (cold/dry) = air damp causing sweat = poor litter
(same with tracks/straw yard bedding with cows)

Inside free range sheds you have pop holes for the chickens, so the fans are redundant = regulations don't work

- governed by EU regulations for free range
 - the regulations are fast flowing but they don't apply to different circumstances/systems across Europe
- For example, Nitrogen control

Biggest problem in free range system for us is the disturbance (and sometimes death) caused to the birds by hot air balloons and low flying jets

- gas going over birds and shadows caused by aircraft = spread flock through electric fence
- freight also kills birds, and can lead too feather peaking, cannibalism and shock
- There are inter/intra flock differences so these factors are less in some groups, but generally speaking this can be a serious problem
- Wrote to get route/flight path changed and complaint taken seriously = no longer under flight path

Problems with changing systems over night

- Birds in cages didn't need so many antibiotics
- Then new diseases emerge
- ED's for example
- All now vaccinated

Conflict between EU regulations and cost to implement in UK

- EU salmonella directive disclaimer
- Vaccination against salmonella under UK law was enough
- Now Red tape from EU dictates legislation which is not cheap to implement - 3 months for 2 flocks
- Red tape creates £ by creating jobs but not making change for the better in the farming industry!

Inconsistency with suggestions made by inspections due to regionalisation

- causes problems and friction between producers etc
- Inspectors and vets to a certain extent are bound by a rule book, without flexibility for individual cases
- Illustrated in Health and Safety laws - who is liable/accountable/in charge/control?

The group asks the producer with both standard broiler and freedom foods chicken whether there is a difference in litter between the 2 systems

- less of a problem in Freedom Food system
- What you put in is what you get out
- Sensitive to dietary change
- Change in diet = gut tract + water intake change = litre of water per kilo of output

How these problems are solved is dictated by £, as well as the farmers

- personal experience
- continuity of ideas/attitudes through the farming generations
- little value put on and not driven by training these days - more driven by experience and farming generations

'Farmers don't see problem or solution, as too close to it all the time'

- We need positive criticism - driven by an honest and direct approach

DEFRA - general feeling within the group that they don't know what DEFRA is

- nice website but no personal point of contact
- no face at the end of the phone to speak too

Only Face/personal contact group feel they have is NFU

- However, used to be used as a forum for discussion/communication and tool to work out ideas and solutions together, to finalise decisions and that control and direction for the future of their industry but this vehicle has dried up
- Sharing of information key, now squashed by competition and commercial corporation eg. performance related pay, contracts, but who is accountable??

Farmers need to be open on problems they face, but the nature of the beast to drive for individuality/competition within market has gone too far
'Farming is not a contract, its a way of life'

This point no better made by last nights programme on War on Tesco

- made company talk
- supermarket accountability key
- the tesco vehicle for the first time had to listen to partners who shared consumers views and negotiate

SOLUTIONS WITHIN THE GROUP

NB asks the group where they go for answers, given all the points raised and discussed above

Group answers it depends what our question is

For example, for technical advice, the best thing would be to have a specialised poultry vet, but not everyone has this

Story to illustrate how there is no one technical answer these days

- VLA (Langford) restricted a member of the groups birds due to fear over spread of disease
- Sort specialist advice, and found that diagnosis was completely wrong
- This comes back to accountability, responsibility and ownership of ideas/knowledge
- But when your whole business is at stake, you need to chose your vet wisely

There are Vets and there are vets

- the group asks NB to explore this point further

There is now university initially and then company differences in attitudes towards training of vets
- ethos very important for relationship with farmer

The group asks whether this project could involve any training?

Would vets be able to organise and roll out training if the project could support it?

There are more than 2 ways to crack the whip

- official training +/- or experience/knowledge transfer through continuity through the generations
- lack of official training +/- or experience/knowledge transfer among farmers = specialisms: few people hold information

Catch 22

- If vet gives advice but farmer doesn't follow = FARMER ACCOUTABLE
- But if vet acts wrongly from farmers point of view = VET NOT ACCOUNTABLE

Veterinary advice to farmer should be lead by the figures and weigh up of risks of making/ not making action (from farmers point of view)

- Vets should therefore be able to justify their advice from a moral/welfare point of view (to both animal and farmer, i.e. using drugs when don't need too for £ gain), as well as an issue of profit

- the figures to weigh up the pros and cons in this situation should be fuelled by research

'Are we really being prescribed drugs because it benefits the chicken??'

Farmers want to know where the vets advice comes from

- Used to have time to wait for results from the lab and make a judgement based on the results with your vet

GIVING FARMER OWNERSHIP OVER THE DECISIONS MADE FOR HIS BUSINESS

- Now there is a lack of shared knowledge from the lab, but this should not be the case due to the importance of understanding microbiology and transfer of disease
- There is a tendency for vets and farmers to grab for the cheapest antibiotics as apposed to taking bird samples, following up a case
- Vets and farmers used to have more of a connection with the science then - sharing this information is key
- Too many times we hear *'just put some lincospectin in'* - but farmers don't always do this, they go more on their intuition. But really, these decisions should be made and informed by the quantitative answers produced by the science, weighed up with the £ and attitude/welfare of the farmer

Another vehicle for knowledge transfer could be ADAS

- Instead of random subscriptions, encourage regular meetings to hold sway and run with ideas

'The world has changed and certain things can't go back' (JS's quote to sum up last section)

There is a question of sustainability of the free range (layer) system

- this is due to performance, input and output as well as disease/environmental threats (climate change etc)
- Disease load has built up due to lack of field rotation
- 1st flock best grass, there in deteriorates
- Priorities between land use, mouths to feed versus mouths to house

'Organic' - everything used to be so without the label (40s/50s)

- If you feed free range birds an organic ration and environment to live in, the group wonder whether it is sustainable today?
- Broiler asks Free Range grower and layer *Would it work?*
- Replies, No, and maybe
- There may be a new issue arising of over populated areas if free range was the only system - will a bubble burst and disease transfer through flocks?

Training opportunities

- Productive poultry training used to do training but no more
- Farmers have asked Sun Valley to do training...
- 'Poultry Fed' that were for packers (British Council), used to have a room that held discussions but don't have anymore as producers have become so big
- Segregation between the packers and farmers now

Group asked who represents them?

- We have none
- There is no NFU Rep for poultry
- What do we get for our money?
- Companies now council, and this power is not for us
- We used to have a dedicated secretary for poultry, but we don't want one just for US otherwise the power and ideas become too diluted

A forum to share ideas between farmers would be supported among the group

- farmers don't get an opportunity to share their problems and need too
- to resurrect a website which worked for the farmers/growers and enabled them to discuss and share ideas/solutions
- the website should include some information but not be directed solely by that

A standard to set ourselves by

- performance related
- every 12 months crop growers have performance data to set targets by
- Based on EPF performance/ league table = output and pay
- We used to have this for each grower

The Freedom Food Grower includes that Freedom Food are introducing a league table when company changed

Vehicle to move farmer ideas on - 'SWCCA' [not sure what this is?!]

- Needs to be fuelled by much needed injection from younger generation to pull ideas together
- Foresight and confidence/passion of younger generation
- Power needs to come from number of heads not but farmers would pay a subscription
- Needs a board/chair (a poultry version of Dick Sibley?)
- Need to work together as an industry 'as a whole'

Otherwise..

- leave growers to their own devices
- keep industry segregation
- keep rigid protocols set by American system
- No farmer power or authority

If the industry goes the Free Range way, which is the vibe we are getting from producers and reps, it will need

- Improvements in breeding for durability and sustainability
- A different/stronger kind of bird to live in free range system
- An answer to 'dirty eggs' and 'dossibility' or flight issues

'But the Market still holds sway'

Fundamentally this is the direction the industry is going, for marketing/supermarket gain in serving public perception/opinion of what quality is

- Genetics should have caught up by now but we are still lead as an industry by the American Breed, which are bred for a vast number of cages
- But it only takes 2/3 years to genetically modify the chicken for its appropriate environment

'People go by egg/yoke colour'

- But this is harder with free range
- farmer in less control
- maize and grass meal

There is a perception in society that Sainsburys 'produced what customer wanted'

- but its not built on the public perception, its built on marketing
- For example, caged eggs on bottom shelf 'forcing' consumers to buy others

Group asks NB about how this info will be used, who is responsible/accountable for the project?

NB explains use of information, as research to form survey for livestock farming through south west.

GROUP VISION

- A sustainable body (20 years at least)
- Route for funding
- A development council between young generation and academics
- A new constitution
- A spectrum of ideas, not one political agenda

SUMMARY TABLE

Who do you go to for advice and what needs to change here?

THE MEDIA no

POULTRY WORLD for the layman, too flowery, limited, more £ needed for this, undersubscribed.

Need more scientific magazine for information transfer about disease/specialisms

VETS 1st port of call, can't question quality of information however. Question £ thinking not deep enough. Contact with vet now maybe less than it will need to be in the future

OURSELVES Honest, more reliable. Less axes to grind

BREED COMPANIES Not much in past but potential for important basis information. For example water readers

PRODUCERS need more contact with them. Here we should develop a strategy so they become the 1st port of call

NFU talked about above

MARKET

H2S don't see themselves as disseminators. Its early days yet but only 1 way of information exchange so far. Business relationship. They are more about ticking the right boxes and not a genuine learning process. There has been an increase in training opportunities here, and Duchy training as facilitators, but we are too close to them in a way so they tell us what we want to hear.

Need meetings with broad spectrum of opinion in the room, so we don't become divorced from each other once again. H2S got it wrong when they saw us as customers. You can't teach under this relationship. Used to be spoon fed information but this attitude needs to be modified

DEFRA need a face to organisation, point of contact, and responsible guidance

SOUTH WEST BROILER CONFERENCE speakers on different subjects, trying to reinvent and inject ideas/education back into industry

THE GOVERNMENT pulled out of ADAS and 'took the academic arm'. This left a strong void and no one in the younger generation to fill

Group asks itself whether there is a need for whole industry movement?

- Are we 1) Poultry or 1) Growers 2) Breeders, or 3) Layers??
- WE ARE 'POULTRY'
- NO SEGREGATION

A cooperative buying group?

*'The emphasis has to be on technical discussion, **not buying**'*