

Dairy Sector Workshop Notes – Ruishton Inn, Taunton Monday 11th May 2009 10.30-13.30

Attendees:

Rob Hislop, Andy King, Nick Cobb, Fi Madgg, Sam Foot, Phil Jones, Stephen Parsons, Roger Trehwella, Richard Stanbury, Kate Brodie, Jon Reader, Shirley Preston, Neil Baker, Tim McKendrick, Nick Cork, Nick Bell, Dick Sibley.

Introduction & Welcome

Dr Nick Bell, Bristol Vet School

Nick thanked the attendees for giving up their time to help with the formulation of the priorities for the Dairy sector.

Project Overview & Background

Richard Stanbury, SWHLI RAP Chairman

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”.

As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to ensure that the available funding is used to directly benefit farmers, with Dairy being one of the key sectors in the region.

This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

1. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
2. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
3. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases (including TB, although the programme can help by funding projects that work with TB)
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)
- Cannot fund lobbying activities
- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

All

The group was asked to identify what they considered to be the top 3 regional disease priorities, in terms of greatest financial loss to the industry. There was plenty of discussion, both around the chosen priorities and concerning methods for delivering the funding to best advantage and value for money.

Priorities that came up included:

- Jöhnes
- Mastitis
- Lameness
- IBR
- Nutrition
- Cow comfort scoring
- Fertility
- Neospora
- BVD

From the discussion around particular diseases and conditions, there emerged a wider discussion on: staff training (to recognise conditions/diseases, undertake lameness & cow comfort scoring); quality of advice from outside agencies/consultants (especially in relation to building design/construction); the need for long term strategies around migrant workers, livestock qualifications and adopting a holistic approach to health and health planning (again in relation to environment and housing).

It was suggested that current herd health planning could be too generic and not specific enough.

There was also concern expressed over the possible adverse public reaction to lameness and Jöhnes should the media seek to exploit coverage. It was considered to be a positive move to be seen to be proactive.

Many farmers would be unaware of the extent of the Jöhnes problem and it may well be worth funding a testing regime (one free, next one subsidised) in order to encourage ownership of the problem and provide baseline data to refer back to at a later date.

Breakout Groups

All

The meeting was then split into 3 groups to discuss in more detail the top 3 identified priorities: Jöhnes, Lameness & Mastitis.

Group 1 – Lameness

Proposed training around mobility/locomotion scoring and in cow signals (training to be an advisor). Group training was preferred over individuals to provide better value for money. Training providers could either work with existing groups or groups could be established specifically to look at the problem.

There would be ongoing farm scoring, with records being kept in order to provide evidence in the future that the training was having a positive impact.

It was proposed that a pilot project be undertaken with around 100 farms in the region taking part.

Group 2 – Jöhnes

Possible collaboration with the beef sector was identified, as the disease will cut across both sectors.

The suggestion was that funding was provided provide free on farm testing for Jöhnes, with the sweetener of a subsidised follow up test. The vet would then interpret the results from each farm and provide an advisory/training role with the farmer groups in his patch.

By obtaining baseline information and then taking positive action to reduce the incidence (including separation or tagging of infected animals), it would be possible to provide detailed evidence to funding organisations that the money is well spent. Farmers would also see direct benefit in the increase in profits.

There was some discussion about whether to include the milk processors (who may be a source of match funding for any project) and at what

level they should be included – reluctance to tie testing to milk price long term.

There were concerns expressed over the mechanics of which testing body would be responsible and how this would work in practice with results going back to the vet to discuss findings with the farmer groups.

There was seen to be potential for joining up with other national initiatives.

Group 3 – Mastitis

There is currently a DairyCo Mastitis control plan that is being rolled out across the country and it was suggested that SWHLI links in with this project to provide the vet/consultant implementation/interpretation of the data gathered on a pilot of 100 farms.

The suggestion was that the 100 pilot farms that benefit from the advice/training will be required to open their doors to other farms in the future so more farmers could learn from their experiences.

By working with groups and by linking with projects already underway, it was felt that best value could be gained from the SWHLI money.

Recommendations

The group recommended their priorities for SWHLI funding as: Lameness, Jöhnes and Mastitis in that order.

It was generally felt that these 3 were so important that it should be possible to fund pilot projects in each, using around 100 farms from the region.

Gathering evidence to support the successes made was seen as vital.

There was some discussion over whether to bring the milk buyers in to help finance the projects, but concern over what demands may be made by them regarding herd health plans and how this may affect milk prices in the future.

The consensus was that these projects would work best by having groups of farmers, led by vets/consultants to provide training and advice to farmers based on the interpretation of collected data. This would then provide evidence for the project over time that measures had successfully reduced incidence of each condition.

Pig Sector Workshop Notes – Padbrook Park, Cullompton Tuesday 12th May 2009 15.00 – 17.00

Attendees:

Helen Thoday, Richard Stanbury, Nick Bell, Fran Beer, Robert Reed, Robin Bright, David Turner, Alister Burrow, Richard Ovenell, David Moorhouse, Nick Cork.

Introduction & Welcome

Dr Nick Bell, Bristol Vet School

Nick thanked the attendees for giving up their time to help with the formulation of the priorities for the Pig sector.

Project Overview & Background

Richard Stanbury, SWHLI RAP Chairman

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”.

As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to ensure that the available funding is used to directly benefit farmers, with Pigs being one of the key sectors in the region.

This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

4. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
5. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
6. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)

- Cannot fund lobbying activities
- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

Richard noted that the Pig sector is more proactive and further along than some of the other sectors when it comes to addressing health issues.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

All

The group was asked to look at the list of Big 5 conditions previously identified by BPEX and comment on what they felt were the main priorities for the sector in the SW. The Big 5 consisted of: PRRS, Enzootic Pneumonia, A. Pleuropneumonia, Swine Dysentery and Mange.

Of the farmers in the room, it was generally felt that Swine Dysentery, A Pleuropneumonia and Mange were not issues in the SW.

Enzootic Pneumonia and PRRS were identified (along with Salmonella) as the main concerns for pig farmers in this region.

It was pointed out that the SW is geographically removed from the central UK pig populations and is therefore able to maintain and retain any health status that could be achieved under this programme.

There was concern raised over what the SWHLI funding could be used for. It was felt that one of the greatest needs for support within the pig sector was with de-population and re-population costs – help would be needed to rent interim accommodation whilst premises were being disinfected. Further support would then be needed to provide capital grants for improving on farm bio-security.

Richard explained that the funding is limited by the programme requirements of RDPE, but that the issue of capital grant funding would be taken back to the RDA as a concern. Helen added that BPEX were working at a national level with Defra to try to address this issue.

BPEX are also working on producing national projects, linked with each RDA and have submitted a proposal to the SWRDA which will include mapping the region's pig farms (already begun) and establishing clusters to address issues within each area.

There is an identified problem with the numbers of small scale pig owners (hobby farmers), who may be near to larger units and compromise the

bio-security of farms without realising the risk they pose to commercial operations.

There is scope to target these small owners and ensure that their pigs are disease free, reducing the risk to larger producers.

The group agreed to split into 2 smaller groups to address the top 2 priorities, which were identified as PRRS and Enzootic Pneumonia (Salmonella having been rejected as beyond the scope of the SWHLI project).

Breakout Groups

All

The meeting was then split into 2 smaller groups to look at the ways in which the top 2 priorities could be addressed within the SWHLI project.

Group 1

Identify clusters of units situated within 2k radius of each other and obtain the health status of each unit using blood tests, etc.

Using the 1000 point model and computer software, produce a detailed audit of each unit and identify the best and worst health performers in each cluster. This awareness will be the spur to drive up the health status of the worst performers using vet input and cooperation from the better performers.

In conjunction with the farm audit, it will be necessary to conduct a manure audit to find where the manure goes and identify potential paths of infection spread. This will also link in with similar studies on feed sourcing and fallen stock – essentially taking a holistic approach to health planning.

There will be shared principles on bio-security within each cluster, which will involve monitoring wagons coming onto farm, talking with feed producers and getting better feedback from abattoirs (BPHS noted as a good example).

Funding could be used to employ a pig project manager to help with the admin for each cluster, gather and collate information centrally and provide an alert service when outbreaks of disease occur.

Other possible areas that could be addressed were matching pig producers up with pig specialist vets, looking at the issue of Ascarids and helping with more information on Salmonella and meningitis.

Group 2

Using the cluster approach, to identify the financial benefit for farms within the cluster – providing information on the payback time for engaging with a de-pop/re-pop strategy.

The cost benefit of engaging with the process must be communicated strongly to farmers in order to achieve buy-in to the cluster approach. The 2 main stages associated with this approach are the clean up (removing disease) and bio-security (remaining disease free).

Success would be measured by the reduction in costs of medicines and drugs. This can be measured on an individual farm basis within the cluster.

Recommendations

The group felt that the approach was more important than identifying individual diseases and working on projects to eradicate those diseases. The mapping element of the cluster approach has already begun through BPEX.

As each farm will have different needs and health status, the cluster approach, collaboration, cooperation and communication were seen as the vital elements of any project for the pig sector. This will stretch beyond the individual units and farmers to include feed companies, vets and an overarching project management structure.

Dairy Sector Workshop Notes – Duchy College, Callington
Thursday 14th May 2009 10.30 – 13.30

Attendees:

Nick Bell, Duncan Forbes, Stephen Ridgway, Bryan Lewens, Andrew Cobner, Richard Cooper, Susan James, Richard Griffiths, Stephen Wadland, Marshall Clements, David Horton, Rosemary Risdon, Chris Just, Nick Cork.

Apologies

Richard Stanbury (SWHLI Chairman)

Introduction & Project Overview

Duncan Forbes (Kingshay & Member of SWHLI RAP)

Duncan welcomed the delegates and thanked them for their time, then gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”.

This part of the project is the consultation phase, as it was felt important that any initiatives arising from the funding were demand led.

This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

7. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
8. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
9. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Duncan also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies. This includes TB, although there are plans to use some of the money on a project that works with the disease
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)

- Cannot fund lobbying activities
- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

Dr Nick Bell (Bristol Vet School)

Nick asked the delegates to list what they considered to be the top 3 animal health priorities for the dairy sector within the SW region. He explained the format of the day, which would be split into 3 sessions: the first would be prioritisation of the issues; the second would involve break out groups looking more closely at each priority and attempting to address the objectives; the third would be a group discussion to collate all the ideas discussed at group level.

A list of possible priorities was displayed at the front, based on feedback from earlier sessions, but delegates were not restricted to choosing from this group.

Once all the delegates had listed their priorities, there were 2 clear priorities (Jöhnes & Lameness), plus a further group of diseases that delegates thought could be tackled as one – with the working title of Eradicable Diseases (including BVD, Lepto & IBR).

Other responses included mastitis, nutrition, fertility, metabolic disorders, stress (both of the animal and the farmer) and the need for better feedback from the abattoir.

The group agreed that Jöhnes and lameness had the potential to be very damaging to the industry, both from an immediate economic perspective and from the potentially damaging public perception (following recent claims that 40% of dairy cattle exhibit lameness and the theoretical link between Jöhnes and Crohn's disease). It was felt that awareness around these issues could be improved within the industry and that it would be a positive step forward to begin to take action now.

Other conditions such as mastitis, nutrition and fertility were being addressed through existing schemes and delegates were keen not to duplicate work already underway.

Potential barriers to the success of any programme were identified as:

- Awareness of the extent of some disease/health issues was low with many farmers
- There are farmers who are very difficult to engage with or get interested in schemes or training – this will remain a challenge of any programme
- It could also be a challenge to engage vets to help the farmers – a possible solution to this could be in working with a range of farmer contacts, such as feed reps, milk link, dairy crest, etc
- It is always easy to waste public money on administration – there is a danger that a lot of money will be spent with very little to show for it

The issues raised formed part of the remit for the next session, which aimed to look at addressing the 3 priorities in more detail, especially around how funding could be best utilised.

Breakout Groups

All

The 3 priorities were identified as Jöhnes, Eradicable Diseases (BVD, IBR & Lepto) and Lameness.

Group 1 - Jöhnes

The most important aspect of addressing this disease was felt to be identifying the herd status in relation to the disease.

The suggestion was made that a one off screening test for all bulk milk (with an opt out clause rather than an opt in) could provide the baseline evidence for Jöhnes positive herds.

The scheme could then fund vets to provide support and training for Jöhnes planning – possibly through a voucher scheme.

Long term, the herd could be re-screened in 3-5 years to show how the training had positively affected the health status.

If this was available to every farm (with the provision of training and advice to those who tested positive) it could go a long way to reducing the impact of the disease on the Dairy herds in the SW. The repeat screening would provide the evidence base for success of the project.

There was some discussion of the value and risks associated with an accreditation scheme – it was agreed that taking action as an industry at this stage (proactively) would be a positive move if media attention became focussed on the disease in the future.

There was concern that any accreditation and testing regime was not used as a stick to drive prices down for farmers in the future.

Group 2 – Eradicable Diseases (IBR, Lepto & BVD)

Having grouped these diseases together as they were potentially eradicable, the group also noted that complete eradication in the SW would be too large an undertaking for a project within SWHLI. A more realistic aim of the project would be to raise awareness of the prevalence and extent of the diseases across the SW.

The group felt that getting Dairy buyers on board was important. A questionnaire could be sent to farms in the region (to establish the health status in relation to these diseases), supplemented with a road show aimed at raising awareness of the potential for BVD eradication. Education on the use of vaccines could be provided, working with demonstration farms that had successfully eradicated the disease. Other ideas for raising awareness were to get the markets on board to have BVD-free markets; to get match funding from the drug companies to help with testing; the possible mandatory culling of PIs (Persistently Infected) and expanding the certification and accreditation schemes that are already in place.

For eradication purposes, it was suggested that Cornwall could be used as the first model for a programme. Once the county was disease free, it could then be rolled out to the rest of the region and beyond.

The success of the Bluetongue vaccination programme was highlighted as an example of what could be achieved with the right strategies.

Added following feedback from group:

1. The breakaway group subject Eradicable Disease is a good one but it is not technically accurate to include Lepto in the topic. BVD and IBR are eradicable as has already been achieved in a multitude of areas/countries in Europe. Lepto will never realistically be eradicable due to wildlife reservoir infection/spread. I propose it is removed from the list for accuracy OR the subject is changed to Vaccine Controllable Diseases and keep the list as it is, however the bulk of the proposal ideas cease to make sense so I prefer just to drop Lepto.
2. A key thing we wanted some funding to pay for is an initial herd screen using bulk milk antibody testing, hence getting dairy companies involved as they are handling the samples already. It was proposed an opt-out policy for the test was applied and the questionnaire is backed up by phone calls from the milk buyers for those who don't fill it in. Also v important to state test and questionnaire results go to the farm's vet. This snapshot status is critical in assessing the size of the problem to be addressed both in

terms of herds infected and degree of vaccination already occurring.

3. Missed out the point of following up the questionnaire to measure at least the educational impact of making people aware some of the disease are eradicable with the right strategy and support. Ensuring 100% of dairy farmers know it is possible to eradicate some diseases in the SW is a more achievable goal with some of the SWHLI funding than actually enforcing a mandatory eradication policy.

Group 3 – Lameness

The aim would be to reduce lameness in the Dairy herds of the SW by raising awareness and attaching a cost to the condition.

Farmers could be trained in mobility scoring and there would be a need for data on animals leaving the herd (the Healthy Feet initiative was mentioned).

There was a call for cohesion between projects and the encouragement of collaboration to address the issue.

The group felt that the project should focus on the farms that wanted to get involved and leave the ones who don't engage with anything, as there is a limit to what can be done with the funding and the group did not want to see money wasted on trying to get to those who would never engage.

The use of case studies and demonstration farms/champions would be an excellent way of raising awareness and may encourage those who don't normally participate to see the benefits first hand and come on board.

There could be demo farms or champion farmers within each area or cluster of farms for other farmers to visit.

The tangible benefits of increased profitability should be communicated consistently to show the value of engaging.

There was also a call for the accreditation of foot trimmers and mobility scorers and a plea to continue to use positive language in relation to lameness projects – focussing on health.

It was also felt that more feedback/lesion scoring from abattoirs would be beneficial.

Recommendations

The group felt that, although they had identified these diseases as priorities, it was the approach that would make the biggest difference to the health of the SW Dairy herds. Awareness raising, using as many farmer contacts as possible, relating training and herd health improvement to financial benefit were vital to get farmers on board.

There was support for using clusters or areas for targeted intervention, engaging vets/consultants in providing training, allowing farmers to have choice in what they spend money on by use of a voucher scheme, avoiding duplicating what was already there and getting match funding from commercial support organisations.

Beef Sector Workshop Notes – Trethorne Farm, Launceston Tuesday 19th May 2009 13.30 – 16.00

Attendees:

Nick Bell, Phil Hadley, Mick Cranwell, Richard Stanbury, Andrew Cobner, Christopher Delbridge, Tim Bebbington, Mark Dallyn, Mark Thomas, Paul Williams, Steven Cottle, Stephen Edmond, Martin Howlett, Sarah Whiting, Jonathon Cole,

Welcome & Introductions

Phil Hadley (Eblex & Member of SWHLI RAP)

Phil welcomed the delegates and thanked them for their time, explaining the reasons for this meeting – to set the priorities for the beef sector in relation to the SWHLI project. Delegates introduced themselves and gave a brief explanation of their interest in the project.

Project Overview

Richard Stanbury (Farmer & Chairman of SWHLI)

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”. As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to see that the money is used effectively to benefit farmers directly and is not swallowed up in administration.

This stage of the project is the consultation phase, as it was felt important that any initiatives arising from the funding were demand led. This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

10. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
11. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
12. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies. This includes TB, although there are plans to use some of the money on a project that works with the disease
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)
- Cannot fund lobbying activities
- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

There were questions from delegates regarding how the project could address the issue of bTB in the region – and whether funds could be used to help with the management of the disease. Richard explained that SWHLI and the RDA recognised the huge impact that bTB has on livestock farming within the region and were currently looking at ways in which the funding could be utilised in projects that looked at working with the disease (which could be funded) rather than eradication (which would be ineligible under the scheme).

Clarification was also given that around £3 million of the SWHLI budget had been ring-fenced for Cornwall.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

Dr Nick Bell (Bristol Vet School)

Nick asked the delegates to list what they considered to be the top 3 animal health priorities for the beef sector within the SW region. He explained the format of the day, which would be split into 3 sessions: the first would be prioritisation of the issues; the second would involve break out groups looking more closely at each priority and attempting to address the objectives; the third would be a group discussion to collate all the ideas discussed at group level.

A list of possible priorities was displayed at the front, based on feedback from earlier sessions, but delegates were not restricted to choosing from this group.

The range of suggestions included: BVD, Lepto, Jöhne's, Fertility, Pneumonia, Lameness, Nutrition, IBR, stress, Bio-security, knowledge transfer, added value, knowledge in disease prevention, data recording, respiratory problems/ventilation, SW laboratory establishment, SW breeder plan & parasites.

Other comments included: not to put any money towards capital grants, as this has been done in the past with little long term benefit for the industry as a whole; a desire to see effective measurements against cost to provide guide to success; SW could lead the way in reducing, controlling or eradicating certain diseases (such as BVD); using health cards as a marketing tool.

With reference to the feedback of abattoir slaughter data, Phil informed the group that the MHS is now taking the issue seriously at a high level and will possibly have electronic data capture systems in place by the end of the year for post mortem findings. Plants could then provide this information to producers.

There was some general discussion regarding possible methods of delivery: it was noted that there was a good system in France, where taking a group approach had been very successful. Working in groups was seen as key to the success of the project as a whole in terms of addressing the issues and achieving real results. It was also considered preferable to work with existing groups wherever possible. The success of the bluetongue vaccination programme was highlighted, where groups of farmers got together to vaccinate within an area.

The discussion moved on to consider how to reach the proportion of farmers who do not engage with these kind of initiatives, the group reaching the conclusion that it was not worth wasting money trying to reach the unreachable ones – the key was to work from the top down: the most proactive would already be looking to engage, they would pass knowledge and experience down to the next third to bring their level of involvement up.

The good farmers will set the standards for the others to follow – there is no point in chasing after the poor ones. The project could capture best practice as case studies – showing where benefit has been achieved. Mick gave the example of where this had been achieved with farm groups in New Zealand.

There was some concern that with the relatively limited time span of the project left, continued benefit and sustainability would be difficult to achieve. The group were keen to see real lasting benefits to the industry

and there was a feeling of urgency that the project was 'opened for business' sooner rather than later. Richard explained that the process was well underway and that money would start to be released by the RDA within a matter of weeks, following the consultation phase of the programme. Vets would also be key to the delivery of the project.

The issues raised formed part of the remit for the next session, which aimed to look at addressing the 3 priorities in more detail, especially around how funding could be best utilised.

Breakout Groups

All

The 3 priorities were identified as BVD, Jöhne's & Pneumonia

Group 1 – BVD

The plan was based on a selected screening policy, involving vets working with groups of 10 farmers in a cluster/area. The funding would pay for the screening and the vet's time. This would provide awareness of the levels of the disease within those herds, which would also be used as a baseline to measure the future success of the project.

PI animals would be removed from the herd (there was an identified risk that some farmers could then try to sell on the PI animal, but a system of recording what happened to the PIs would probably counter this possibility). The effect of this would be an improvement in the health of the young stock and it was felt there would be an economic value attached to BVD free herds.

Knowledge transfer of the benefits to farmers would be achieved through having the farmers who engaged with the project going out and talking to other farmers within the area/region. Farmers will tend to listen more to other farmers who have seen real benefits from a scheme and are more likely to engage in future.

As the programme develops, it would be possible to demonstrate real and lasting benefits for the sector with a collection of data and other measurements, including reduced spend on vaccines/drugs.

It was also felt that to be completely effective, there would need to be some kind of certification or accreditation for herds that were BVD free.

Group 2 – Jöhne's

Unlike, BVD it was felt that Jöhne's could not be eradicated, but that control was possible. Animals could be sampled and blood tested when performing the TB test, blood can be stored for a long time so even if the animal was free of Jöhne's, the blood could still be used for other tests in the future, so the farmer would not have wasted any money.

The testing would be linked with training and awareness raising of the disease for farmers with positive animals. Again, it was felt that the best way to do this would be to use farmers that had personal experience of the disease and could provide good case stories of how they tackled it on their farm. This would be linked with veterinary input and the use of regional experts in the disease.

The group mentioned the work that was undertaken in Scotland to reduce Jöhne's and the success of this initiative. Again, reducing the incidence of Jöhne's could be linked to a market differential which would have long term benefits to the industry. There was some consensus that pedigree herds would receive higher levels of funding support under this scheme, because of the greater impact that this would have.

Measurement would be in monitoring Jöhne's free farms over a number of years and through numbers of farmers engaging with the programme over time as they recognised the benefits.

Group 3 – Pneumonia

Again, it was felt that pneumonia could not be eradicated, but reduction was possible.

The project would engage with all elements in the production chain, from breeder through rearer to finisher. There would be a combination of veterinary assessment and buildings assessment – to establish the prevalence of the problem and identify simple, effective ways in which it could be reduced.

Monitoring would be through abattoir feedback, which would be linked to daily live weight gain and the usage of antibiotics. It should be possible to record levels of disease/mortality on a monthly basis (possibly be adding another column in the medicine book).

There was some discussion of certification and the need for an educational element within the programme to raise awareness of the extent and severity of the problem and provide the impetus for taking

action. It was noted that the beef cycle is long term and it would be preferable to pump prime the early years of the programme and taper funding towards the end.

The need to sell the idea was considered as vital to the success of any project.

**Beef Sector Workshop Notes – Sedgemoor Market, Somerset
Tuesday 19th May 2009 18.00 – 21.00**

Attendees:

Nick Bell, Phil Hadley, Richard Stanbury, Kevin Whiting, Dick Sibley, Gavin Iles, Rupert Dod, Elwyn Rees, Nick Cork.

Welcome & Introductions

Phil Hadley (Eblex & Member of SWHLI RAP)

Phil welcomed the delegates and thanked them for their time, explaining the reasons for this meeting – to set the priorities for the beef sector in relation to the SWHLI project. Delegates introduced themselves and gave a brief explanation of their interest in the project.

Project Overview

Richard Stanbury (Farmer & Chairman of SWHLI)

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”. As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to see that the money is used effectively to benefit farmers directly and is not swallowed up in administration.

This stage of the project is the consultation phase, as it was felt important that any initiatives arising from the funding were demand led.

This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

13. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
14. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
15. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies. This includes TB,

although there are plans to use some of the money on a project that works with the disease

- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)
- Cannot fund lobbying activities
- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

There were questions from delegates regarding how the project could address the issue of bTB in the region – and whether funds could be used to help with the management of the disease. Richard explained that SWHLI and the RDA recognised the huge impact that bTB has on livestock farming within the region and were currently looking at ways in which the funding could be utilised in projects that looked at working with the disease (which could be funded) rather than eradication (which would be ineligible under the scheme).

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

Dr Nick Bell (Bristol Vet School)

Nick asked the delegates to list what they considered to be the top 3 animal health priorities for the beef sector within the SW region. He explained the format of the day, which would be split into 3 sessions: the first would be prioritisation of the issues; the second would involve break out groups looking more closely at each priority and attempting to address the objectives; the third would be a group discussion to collate all the ideas discussed at group level.

A list of possible priorities was displayed at the front, based on feedback from earlier sessions, but delegates were not restricted to choosing from this group.

The range of suggestions included: Pneumonia, Jöhne's, nutrition, Coccidiosis, BVD, IBR, Parasite control, fertility, performance & survival of young stock, growth rates of young stock, ventilation and the principles of building design & infectious disease status.

Other comments included: huge increase in the incidence of liver fluke within the past year or so (estimated 50-60% infection rate); pneumonia is linked to humidity as well as ventilation; abattoir information is currently being under utilised.

With reference to the feedback of abattoir slaughter data, Phil informed the group that the MHS is now taking the issue seriously at a high level and will possibly have electronic data capture systems in place by the end of the year for post mortem findings. Plants could then provide this information to producers.

The group reached the consensus that the priority was tackling pneumonia and the problem could be split between focussing on suckler and rearing systems, to address the issue in respect of the young stock of both.

It was then pointed out that it would be possible to address the issue of BVD and possibly eradicate the disease in the region, which would have a further beneficial effect on other diseases, such as pneumonia and scours.

By tackling BVD, the region would also improve the trading with other regions/areas – this is important as other regions are also tackling BVD, so to do nothing could put the SW in a poorer trading position long term.

Tackling BVD would have the greatest effect on other diseases/conditions.

The group therefore agreed to look at both pneumonia and BVD as priorities.

Breakout Groups

All

The priorities were identified as BVD & Pneumonia

Group 1 – BVD

The group discussed a structured approach to tackle BVD in suckler beef herds.

The project would work by blood testing animals to identify their disease status and provide a base measurement for monitoring purposes. Animals that were disease free could be issued with a certificate identifying it as disease free – this gives an improved trading edge and in the US has led to a price differential, which in itself is motivation to tackle the issue.

The control and eradication process (quarantine and testing, coupled with vaccination and training) will systematically ensure that the SW could become BVD free over the life of the project. The SW could run the project through the private veterinary practices, who would also monitor the certification scheme.

Measurement will be possible through the number of certificates issued and the increasing numbers of herds certified as BVD free. Progressive farmers would lead the way and provide feedback to the aspirational farmers who will follow. It was not thought to be a good use of funding to attempt to chase the farmers who traditionally never engaged – they would hopefully see the benefit of joining the scheme as time progressed and more evidence was collected.

Group 2 – Pneumonia

It was noted that there is already a lot of pneumonia related education available – Pfizer have been conducting studies (cf the Paul Williams/Blade farming study).

By conducting lung scoring exercises in abattoirs and relating the results back to the farmers, explaining the cost to them and the potential economic return from seeking to improve the situation. After demonstrating the economic benefit, farmers would then have the opportunity to attend training and demonstration farms to talk directly with farmers who had made a difference and achieved the benefits.

90% of the problem could be attributed to environment and could be addressed through better housing. The problem can be traced back to how the calves were started in life: so calf selection would make up part of the training – how to get the best stock and then keep them healthy through improvements to the housing environment.

It was anticipated that this approach would provide some quick wins, giving a number of case study opportunities to share with other farmers. This group also considered it not worthwhile to attempt to target those groups that never engaged.

The key to the success and measurability of the project was in getting the base line information and showing farmers the potential cost savings of taking action – plus the direct and hidden costs of not doing anything.

Poultry Sector Workshop Notes – NFU, Exeter
Tuesday 26th May 2009 09.30 – 12.00

Attendees:

Nick Bell, Charles Bourns, Richard Stanbury, Julie Edwards, Alison Colville-Hyde, Peter Coleman, John Riddell, Robert Lanning, Simon Barton, Brian Brown, Sid Lunn, Alan Benyon, Jason Gittins, Nick Cork.

Welcome & Introductions

Project Overview

Richard Stanbury (Farmer & Chairman of SWHLI)

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”. As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to see that the money is used effectively to benefit farmers directly and is not swallowed up in administration.

This stage of the project is the consultation phase, as it was felt important that any initiatives arising from the funding were demand led. This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

16. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
17. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
18. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies.
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)
- Cannot fund marketing/lobbying activities
- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

- The money will not all be spent in one area

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

Dr Nick Bell (Bristol Vet School)

Nick asked the delegates to list what they considered to be the top 3 health funding priorities for the poultry sector within the SW region. He explained the format of the day, which would be split into 3 sessions: the first would be prioritisation of the issues; the second would involve break out groups looking more closely at each priority and attempting to address the objectives; the third would be a group discussion to collate all the ideas discussed at group level.

A list of possible priorities was displayed at the front, based on feedback from earlier sessions, but delegates were not restricted to choosing from this group.

The range of suggestions included: Marek's, Pododermatitis, Gumboro, IB, Campylobacter, Salmonella, wet litter, disposal of fallen stock, 'biological bed', chick quality, monitoring disease challenges, CPD (training), profit or production indices, range & litter management, welfare & performance, bio-security, data sharing/benchmarking/data procurement, farm walks & meetings, ducks & turkeys.

The group came to the decision that their priorities for further discussion would be: bio-security, data sharing/benchmarking and CPD/training.

Breakout Groups

All

Group 1 – Bio-security

Marek's would be used as a model.

Information sharing is central to tackling issues around bio-security, especially in relation to: gumboro, marek's, salmonella, campylobacter, blackhead, worms & botulism.

Gathering information around the prevalence and incidence of each of these diseases is also important.

Disease mapping would be done by sector and geography: broiler, layer, game, turkey, ducks.

This would then be further broken down into: transport (of feed, chicks & catchers); cleaning & disinfection; carcass removal; on farm bio-security; visitors and movement records.

All the information collected would be fed into an information sharing platform, accessible to all who partake in the programme. Using Marek's would make people aware of how disease is transmitted.

Discussion groups could learn from talking about the disease findings, also making other connections. Training and awareness programme would work alongside the information gathering and sharing. There is already software available to help map the incidence of disease (Microsoft mapping).

Group 2 – Benchmarking

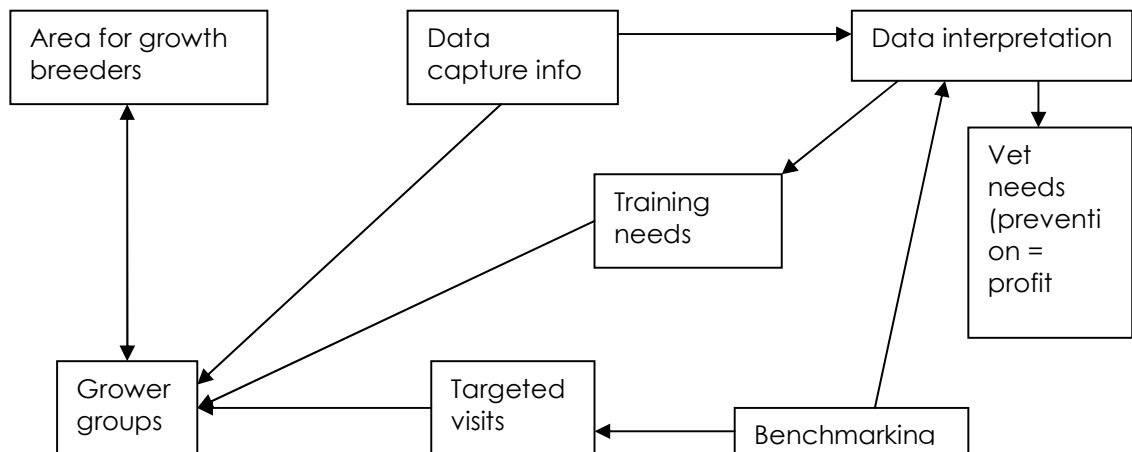
The group envisioned a similar model to Group 1. Benchmarking would occur on-line via a website. There was some discussion over the security of this information and it was eventually accepted that this could not be guaranteed, but that the project was important anyway.

Training would also be needed in IT skills for farmers in order to make the most from the project. There would be a need for a webmaster to administer the site, control the data and interpret it on behalf of the users.

There was some discussion over who would have ultimate ownership of the site and it was decided that it would only work if it was farmer owned/controlled.

The information would be best utilised in a proactive, rather than reactive way – information could be used to find out whether a problem was specific to a particular farm, area, flock, time of year – or whether it was something that was affecting everyone. This information would be vital in dealing with any patterns of disease.

A model was drawn, as below, showing each aspect of the plan:



This model could similarly be applied to the ideas coming from the other 2 groups, to form a coherent mechanism for sharing and accessing information.

Again, there were concerns about how the information obtained from the project would be used, especially by the supermarkets. It was felt that base financial information should be available on the site, such as margin/metre/week and information on input costs.

Group 3 – CPD/Training

The point of the project is to identify the training that the industry needs and wants. This may change over time, depending on disease needs and prevalence, but it is envisaged that the training will be 'rapid reaction', able to quickly respond to the needs of the industry.

There should be a centralised register of training availability, covering 3 key areas:

- Profit
- Health & welfare of birds
- Disease scares

Measures used would be production results and the response to courses. There would be little practical value in qualifications for the sake of it, as this would then become the 'norm' and would not be added value. There should be recognition of the training undertaken, to back up food scare training.

There was some discussion of a poultry passport scheme and NVQ modules.

It was felt that training could be undertaken by every farm in the SW, if people wanted to take it up. The training must be relevant and targeted and could be linked with vets and benchmarking on farm.

The outcome would be that producers would realise the benefit of training and CPD by seeing for themselves the improvements in health and welfare and the effect that this has on the bottom line.

Final Session – Group Discussion

There is a lot of information already available that will need to be collated and tapped into. Any project undertaken within the poultry sector would need to add considerable value to existing initiatives and join up information sources with accessing training, benchmarking and bio-security knowledge.

It was recognised that the best way to move forward with the proposals was for farmers to take ownership of the project and demonstrate commitment. The group agreed that proactive, progressive farmers would need to take the lead, with the funding from SWHLI there to kick start the process.

There was acknowledgement that a key strength in the poultry sector was the relative low numbers of expert vets – and it was felt that they should be approached to lead the project on behalf of the SW industry.

It was noted that other regions have already begun getting producers together and the SW needed to act quickly to avoid being left behind.

The next stages were identified as:

- Agree project
- Put project ideas together
- Work with existing groups wherever possible

The group agreed again that the project must be farmer controlled, rather than supermarket – and that the project itself would provide common ground for getting groups together.

Sheep Sector Workshop Notes – Trethorne Farm, Launceston Tuesday 26th May 2009 13.30 – 16.00

Attendees:

Nick Bell, Phil Hadley, Richard Stanbury, Peter Baber, Brian Preece, Paul Williams, Mark Dallyn, David Turner, Tom Foot, Darren Reed, Robert Palmer, Edward Hosegood, Phillip Hutton, John Crook, Roger Heggadon, Mervin Hutching, Clare Parnell, Nick Cork

Welcome & Introductions

Project Overview

Richard Stanbury (Farmer & Chairman of SWHLI)

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”. As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to see that the money is used effectively to benefit farmers directly and is not swallowed up in administration.

This stage of the project is the consultation phase, as it was felt important that any initiatives arising from the funding were demand led. This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

19. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
20. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
21. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies.
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)
- Cannot fund lobbying activities

- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

Clarification was also given that around £3 million of the SWHLI budget had been ring-fenced for Cornwall.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

Dr Nick Bell (Bristol Vet School)

Nick asked the delegates to list what they considered to be the top 3 animal health priorities for the sheep sector within the SW region. He explained the format of the day, which would be split into 3 sessions: the first would be prioritisation of the issues; the second would involve break out groups looking more closely at each priority and attempting to address the objectives; the third would be a group discussion to collate all the ideas discussed at group level.

A list of possible priorities was displayed at the front, based on feedback from earlier sessions, but delegates were not restricted to choosing from this group.

The range of suggestions included: housing education, lameness, more information on breeding (to help with abortion/fertility issues), coccidiosis, mastitis, abortion, record keeping systems improvement, good culling policies, better handling systems, fertility, nutrition, knowing the disease status of sheep bought, wastage between lambing and weaning, planning programme, recording process, worms, bluetongue, fluke, shortage of skilled labour, agricultural management advice, joint ill prevention, lack of abattoirs.

There was then a short discussion to attempt to prioritise 2/3 areas to address. It was felt that it would be a missed opportunity to only focus on one particular condition and that a whole farm approach should be taken, accounting for the overall management of sheep – health planning rather than a reactive, fire fighting approach.

Some had found undertaking a flock health plan very beneficial | tackling abortion and lameness, although it was noted that handling systems could be a limiting factor in any health plan.

Data recording on most farms was viewed as problematic and almost non-existent, but it was essential to have an active health plan – to discover where losses were actually occurring. Progressive farmers look at active health planning rather than using drugs as a fire fighting method.

The health plan needs to be a living document with the intention of making things better – collaborative groups can help with benchmarking. There is a need to capture and interpret more information to help achieve this.

Early diagnosis is vital in to ensure that health planning is preventative from the start.

It is important to establish baseline information to know where we are going and to be able to forecast outputs. Many farmers use each other for advice and guidance rather than vets, as there was a distinct lack of expert sheep vets in the region.

Some issues around benchmarking were identified as: difficult in practice (reluctance among farmers to cooperate); need involvement of vets; may need the carrot of capital grants to encourage some to engage with the project.

The group agreed to look at benchmarking in general within the context of 3 areas in particular: anthelmintic resistance, abortion/fertility issues & lameness – to see how each could be tackled with a benchmarking project.

Breakout Groups

All

Group 1 – Anthelmintic resistance

Funding should be made available for a testing/sampling regime. The next stage would involve the use of wormers to control the infestation, followed by re-testing. This would identify resistance to any of the wormers used.

This information would then be used to develop an action plan, including access to good, consistent advice from sheep vets/experts. This was seen as vital and could best be achieved through the use of farmers discussion groups – experts could then be invited from outside the region as well.

This approach would result in a more targeted use of wormers, coupled with greater farmer education. The group saw the scheme as starting off slowly in year 1, allowing the opportunity of ironing out any identified problems, providing benchmarking baselines.

In subsequent years, it would become more high profile, with greater publicity, the sharing of positive results and could be rolled out to the rest of the region.

The group identified several recognised sheep experts as: Leslie Stubbings, John Vipond & Neil Sargisson (members of the SCOPS group). They could be approached to cascade training to the local vet, who would then train farmers.

It was also recognised that this project could have major trading implications.

Group 2 – Abortion/Fertility

This project would support the need for more farmers to keep better data, so that they are aware of what is going on in their farms. The group felt that any improvement would be better than the present situation.

The project would begin by collecting baseline data and benchmarking this data in groups with a vet present. The data would be anonymous, with the top performers asked to explain how they achieved their success. Hopefully, some of the poorer performers could also be encouraged to explain their own particular problems and how they dealt with them. In this way, a bank of shared knowledge would be built up.

Minimum records to keep were identified as:

- Condition scoring at tugging
- How many ewes were tugged
- Scanning %age, lambs tugged
- Lambs weaned

The process would get more complicated in years 2 & 3. Any diagnostics or complications would be addressed via the VLA. Improvements would be measured through the records that were kept. The reporting structure and data collection/analysis would need funding. Similarly, some funding would be required to facilitate veterinary involvement and specific SWHLI disease information bulletins.

There are potential issues with recording at the busiest times, but it was acknowledged that if some can do it, others can. It was more a matter of finding a simple system that could be adapted for each farm – so using example/demo farms would be a very good way of sharing best practice.

Group 3 – Lameness

The group noted the lack of good agricultural advice in the UK and there was a brief discussion on the lack of specialists on sheep health. They suggested funding to help with the provision of a regional sheep specialist (based possibly at Bristol Vet School) to cascade training and lead discussion with farmers.

There was a need to build on existing work around lameness (such as that of Eblex) with follow up exercises designed to bring about change. Meetings should be held on farms, through benchmarking clubs.

There would have to be a strong vet involvement, with the emphasis on treating for what is there, not for the sake of it – which would involve correct diagnosis in the first place.

The project would demonstrate the value of addressing the issue to such an extent that it would foster a 'never go back' attitude – where the gains and benefits were so clear that farmers would endeavour to make the change permanent.

Recording would be straightforward, creating records of best practice and a history of success – leading to a consistent, positive message coming from the groups.

Knowledge Transfer would need to be clearly focussed and it would be better to use farmers as facilitators and champions to educate others. This scheme would work alongside other schemes, to add value and move what is currently available up to the next level.

**Sheep Workshop Notes – Sedgemoor Market, Somerset
Tuesday 26th May 2009 18.00 – 21.00**

Attendees:

Nick Bell, Phil Hadley, Richard Stanbury, Peter Baber, Louise Moorhouse, Mervyn Davies, Bryan Griffiths, David Rossiter, David Disney, Edward Chudley, Jim Stephens, John Hoskin, Richard Webber, Peter Morris, Nick Cork

Welcome & Introductions

Project Overview

Richard Stanbury (Farmer & Chairman of SWHLI)

Richard gave a brief introduction to the SWHLI project and its background. The project has £12.17 million of RDPE funding over 5 years to deliver “an uplift in the profitability of the SW livestock sector”. As a farmer himself, Richard is keen to see that the money is used effectively to benefit farmers directly and is not swallowed up in administration.

This stage of the project is the consultation phase, as it was felt important that any initiatives arising from the funding were demand led. This part of the preparatory work of the project is the 3rd strand of the market research element, as below:

22. On 11th March, there was a cross sectoral meeting at Westpoint, Exeter where delegates were asked to comment on and inform the broad outlines to the proposed programme
23. The 2nd stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
24. This, the 3rd stage, involves the individual sectors (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Pigs & Poultry) staging a series of consultation workshops to establish sector disease/animal health priorities.

Richard also explained where the money cannot be spent, due to EC funding constraints:

- There will be no rapid reaction fund for notifiable diseases, this being the remit of Defra and its agencies.
- It cannot be a capital grants scheme (there will be elements of funding available for capital grants, but only up to 10% of the total)
- Cannot fund lobbying activities

- Cannot be used to fund vaccination schemes or buy drugs

Essentially, projects will be heavily involved with training, spread around all sectors according to priorities proposed within these workshops (demand led). Public money will be used to address the market failures and it is envisioned that the benefits gained will continue beyond the life of the programme.

There were questions about what the next steps would be once the priorities had been identified. Richard explained that the next step would be a meeting of the SWHLI Regional Advisory Panel (RAP), which would consider the feedback from all the sectors and come up with recommendations for the RDA to begin to release funds, based on the priorities identified within each sector.

Identifying Top 3 Disease Priorities

Dr Nick Bell (Bristol Vet School)

Nick asked the delegates to list what they considered to be the top 3 animal health priorities for the sheep sector within the SW region. He explained the format of the evening, which would be split into 3 sessions: the first would be prioritisation of the issues; the second would involve break out groups looking more closely at each priority and attempting to address the objectives; the third would be a group discussion to collate all the ideas discussed at group level.

A list of possible priorities was displayed at the front, based on feedback from earlier sessions, but delegates were not restricted to choosing from this group.

A further discussion identified the highest costs to the industry in monetary terms to be worms, lameness and abortion.

The range of suggestions included: foot rot, joint ill, mastitis, nutrition knowledge, genetic understanding, worms, handling, fluke, alternative crops for fattening/feeding, fly control, growth factors, lack of expert advice in region, recording/surveillance training, bluetongue, scab, anthelmintic resistance, fertility, bio-security, forage issues, stress, lamb survival, teeth problems, better management & planning.

There was then a lengthy discussion around the best way to approach dealing with disease. It was felt that the answers to many of the diseases were already known and the focus should be on getting the principles of good management right, which would then take care of the disease

aspects. The group felt that the cascade system works well and the project could look at addressing issues such as genetics, alternative cropping, health planning & management. If the progressive farmers in the top tier take action and lead the way, others will follow. There was seen to be little value in wasting funding chasing people who would not engage at an early stage.

Discussions split into 2 areas – the need to address genetics and seek ways to breed out problems; and the desire to concentrate on education of the farmer, especially around nutrition and the use of innovative forage crops.

All agreed that the money should be used where there was a market failure and that taking a group approach would yield best results. Groups could learn from within and with each other. Working with existing groups was viewed as a sound, practical option, rather than re-inventing the wheel and duplicating what was available. On farm meetings was identified as a key mechanism for getting farmer engagement with the process, as well as the use of positive language and avoiding the use of tainted terms, such as health plan.

There was concern that the funding may be used to obtain quick wins and it was felt that a long term, strategic approach would have a more lasting benefit for the sheep industry.

The group agreed to look at the priorities of: breeding, feeding and worms/fluke.

Breakout Groups

All

Group 1 – Breeding/genetics

The group struggled to get a mechanism for using genetics. Recommended the use of monitor farms containing groups with specific interests, who must be open to receiving visits and have had a programme of genetic manipulation over years to achieve health improvements.

More data would be required to measure the success of any programme – recorders could be sent to farms to capture data, looking at such issues as worm resistance and lameness to identify improvements.

Success would be measured by attendees at meetings and the growth of groups making use of monitor farms. This was seen as a long term issue, which would be difficult to prove a success within the 4 years remaining in the SWHLI project.

Group 2 – Nutrition/Feed Management

The main aims/objectives of this initiative were identified as: the ability to manage forage access, paddock systems rotation (addresses worms through pasture management), different needs at different times of year, utilising the farms own reserves, forage forecasting – looking at when the flush is coming, intake of dry matter per lamb, talking about grassland in an objective way.

Measurements would be: improved fertility (which could be measured by scanning results, number of lambs weaned etc); there would be less need for veterinary treatment; improved stocking rates; golden hoof – healthy sheep from healthy pastures; feeding would link into other farming enterprises.

It was seen as important that farmers maintained an open mind about change and learnt from other farmers. Knowledge transfer would be key, as would the use of exemplar farms. The financial improvements gained would be cascaded to other farms.

Could also use new knowledge to make better use of what is already available. The success of the Kiwis was highlighted, where their philosophy played an important part in their success.

Group 3 – Worms/Fluke

The main objective would be control rather than eradication. Abattoir feedback was viewed as important, but food chain information could be a risk as well as an opportunity – there would be the potential for financial penalties to be imposed on problem flocks etc.

Blood testing and faecal egg count kits could be used in conjunction with vet advice to engage in positive health planning.

Measures to be used would be performance parameters such as daily live weight gain, the incidence of flukey livers (abattoir feedback) and also financial performance over time.

CPD amongst vets was viewed as variable across the region, but there was plenty of enthusiasm from many vet practices to engage with projects of this nature.

Potential mechanisms for achieving these aims were: demonstration farms, monitor farms, farmer champions, focus groups, best practice, on farm meetings, farm visits and walks – a variety of approaches.

There was also an identified potential for cross-RDA collaboration over genetic research.

Phil mentioned the model in the US, where they appoint chairs for each sector. The chair would then coordinate from a University base to generate information on behalf of the sector. This was seen as a positive step, given a perceived lack of University based sheep experts in the SW.

The meeting ended with the group reaching some positive conclusions for future activity: work should concentrate on the more fundamental themes of feeding and breeding, rather than specific diseases such as lameness; there was a strong need for increased access to sheep specific expertise.