



## **Dairy Sector Workshop Notes – Ruishton Inn Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2009 10.30-13.30**

### **Attendees:**

Rob Hislop, Andy King, Nick Cobb, Fi Madgg, Sam Foot, Phil Jones, Stephen Parsons, Roger Trewhella, 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 3<sup>rd</sup> strand of the market research element, as below:

1. On 11<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> stage was a commissioned questionnaire and consultation with vets and farmers, using telephone and paper based data gathering
3. This, the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 project 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.