



Pig Sector Workshop Notes – Padbrook Park 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:

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, 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.