



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:

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 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

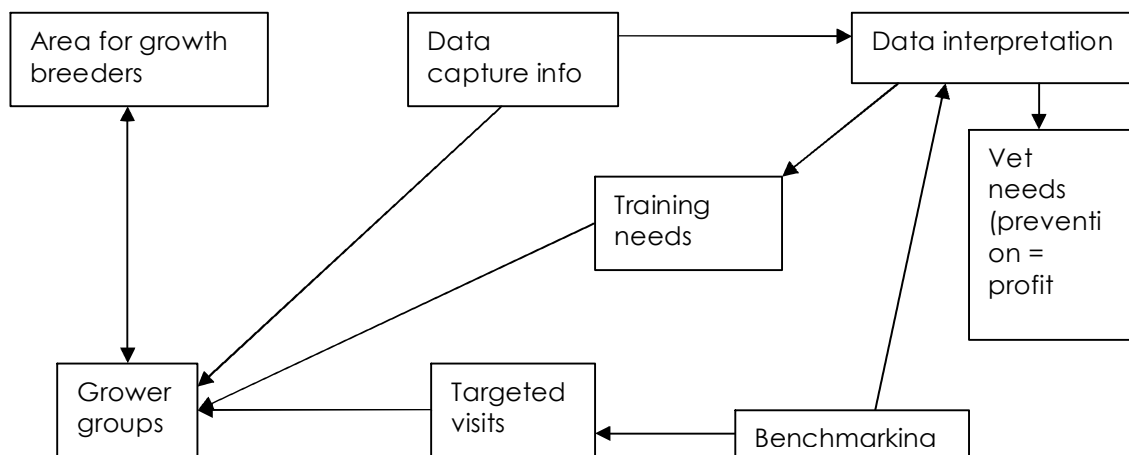
The group envisioned a similar model to Group 1. Benchmarking would occur online via a website. There was some discussion over the security of this information and it was eventually accepted that this could not be guaranteed, but that the project was important anyway.

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.

