

Pigmeat Supply Chain Task Force – Improving Pig Herd Health Sub-Group

Note of Fourth Meeting held on Monday 16 November 2009

Present:

Richard Lister, JC Lister (Chair)
Howard Revell, BQP/Tulip
Jan Anderson, Yorkshire Forward
Chris Franklin, Yorkshire Forward
Zoë Davies, NPA
Derek Armstrong, BPEX
Pete Bown, PVS
Tom Allen, Young NPA
Marcus Bates, BPA
[redacted] consultant to BPEX
[redacted] consultant to BPEX
[redacted] Defra
[redacted] Defra
Duncan Prior, Task Force Secretary

Apologies for Absence:

Andrew Thornber, Morrisons
[redacted] VLA
Digby Scott, Pig World
Dan Tucker, Cambridge University
[redacted] consultant to BPEX

1. Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed those present and thanked those responsible for organising the video links from York, Leeds and London. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising from Last Meeting

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September were approved and adopted as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising from the last meeting nor the last Task Force meeting that were not covered by the meeting agenda.

3. Workplan and workstreams progress review

WS1: Review BPHS

3.1 Pete Bown reported that the workstream was progressing to schedule. From the survey conducted of pig keepers not participating in BPHS, a main consideration of non-participation related to the ownership of the pigs (ie contract growers took the view that it was matter for the pig owner to manage such matters. Owners using multiple finishing sites often took the approach, however, that it was sufficient to monitor two or three sites and extrapolate the results across their entire stock. Multi-sourcing companies did not find BPHS helpful in back-tracking problems. BPHS did have limitations, whereas a private vet was able to provide a complete health analysis of pigs/units. It was possible that the benefits of BPHS were not fully appreciated (eg by some corporates), suggesting that more effort was required to promulgate those benefits more clearly. The regional Herd Health clusters may also provide a useful route to encouraging higher take-up.

3.2 The Sub-Group noted that BPEX was due to undertake a review of BPHS in 2010. It would be helpful if the work of the Sub-Group fed into the BPEX review in a way that added value and avoided potential duplication of effort. The Task Force had an opportunity to voice a view (from across the supply chain) on the merits of BPHS, and it was important to capture

that opportunity before the Task Force had completed its work and wound-up early next year. Interestingly, there was evidence that elsewhere in the EU the supply chain was itself a driver for pig health schemes. **Action: Pete Bown and Derek Armstrong to include consultation with main Task Force within their workstream plan.**

WS2: Developing an economic model

3.3 [REDACTED] updated the subgroup on progress, and displayed his proposed model to assist producers with the economic aspects of pig health management. The web-based model was interactive, and allowed for the profiling of individual units on an actuals basis. Not only did the model provide profiles of existing practice, but it permitted a flexible approach to using 'what if' scenarios to help producers identify the economic impacts of possible health management decisions. The Sub-Group considered the model to add value, and noted it had been tested through limited trials. It might assist users further if the model was accompanied by an operator's manual, and helped the user set targets as desired outcomes.

3.4 The model was essentially a tool for farm advisers, and required pre-determined operational costings to be available in order to be most effective. A programme of training was being implemented (ie training trainers).

3.5 Overall, each milestone element of the workstream was on schedule.

WS3: Produce bio-security protocols

3.6 Zoë Davies explained that although the content of the workstream was progressing well, the process of adopting biosecurity practice within the Certificates of Competence regime was slow. She intended to discuss that issue with the relevant managers at BPEX.

3.7 The work on contingency planning was progressing. The work of the Sub-Group had to be managed in such a way as to complement the work of Defra's Core Group on Classical Swine Fever. That Group's main focus was exotic disease, but the principles of biosecurity went beyond that. Guidance was being prepared to help pig unit managers develop plans for use in disease outbreaks (focusing on units falling within Protection Zones and Surveillance Zones. The guidance would include a decision tree the identified possible actions/decisions available to a unit manager relative to the situation of the unit at a given time. A draft guidance document was anticipated to be available by January 2010.

3.8 Biosecurity scoring at unit level was being taken forward with the aim of being available by the end of 2009. Eastern Region Health was implementing scoring, which would provide some useful lessons in due course. Regional Herd Health clusters could also be encouraged to adopt formal scoring regimes – indeed, that could be made mandatory for all cluster participants.

WS4: Review transport washing facilities

3.9 Howard Revell reported that industry was currently being asked to complete a standard form on transport washing practices, particularly at abattoirs. The result of that survey would be analysed by BPEX, leading to the preparation of action plans to rectify shortcomings/problems. The British Road Haulage Association was believed to be collaborating with Defra in a review of related practice, but the Sub-Group did not have the details of that initiative. [REDACTED] undertook to liaise with relevant Defra colleagues

and provide background on the Defra initiative. It was agreed that BPEX should establish links with BRHA in order to allow them to input to the review and assist with action plans for remedial activity where necessary. **Action:** [REDACTED] to explore Defra's initiative and **Howard Revell** to ensure BPEX pursues BRHA.

3.10 Overall, the workstream was making good progress with some positive impact already being witnessed. However, wider roll-out was required to maximize the benefits to all and the supply chain as a whole.

WS5: Address Smallholder Issues

3.11 Marcus Bates explained that engagement with smallholders required giving smallholders incentives via the identification of benefits flowing from wider industry engagement. The two areas he proposed were (i) the "Breeds at Risk Register" and (ii) 'assurance light' – where participants enjoyed lower levels of formal inspection supplemented with self-certification. For (i) the principal interested bodies appeared to be Defra, Animal Health, BPA, and PVS. For (ii) the bodies would be BPEX, BPA, NPA, AFS and PVS. The Sub-Group agreed that it would be helpful for an action plan to be presented to the Task Force for endorsement, which if successful could lead to a subsequent implementation programme via RDAs contacting smallholders in their areas.

3.12 The Sub-Group noted that 148 new smallholder producers had bought breeding stock during October 2009. Although a possibly higher monthly figure than normal, it was clear that significant numbers of people were entering into the small-scale pig production business. That enhanced the need for better engagement with these people in order to manage the increase in associated risks of expanding pig numbers across the country. Marcus had been in contact with Defra's Communications Team about their work in developing better communications channels with smallholders, and was waiting for a paper that Defra had undertaken to prepare. It might also be possible to use the regional pig herd health clusters to identify and engage with local pig producing smallholdings. **Action: Marcus Bates** to reflect on points raised within the context of driving forward his workstream. [REDACTED] to explore perceived lack of engagement by Animal Health in using the Breeds at Risk Register to assist via Defra's CSF Core Group.

WS6: Adopting EU wide best practice

3.13 The Chair informed the Sub-Group that he was in contact with Vion and Denmark. It appeared that Denmark and some other EU countries had significantly higher rates of farm vet inspections (as many as monthly); faster access to on-line and robust MHS-equivalent information (within 48hrs of slaughter); and a system of penalties levied on producers who fail to implement remedial actions in respect of herd health failures/standards. Also, biosecurity rules were more stringent than in the UK, though it was acknowledged that mainland EU countries had mostly indoor pig herds which were more easily managed). Transport washing was proactive, helping turn-round times; combined with fasting pigs prior to transportation to reduce the incidence of slurry deposits on/in vehicles. There was also greater liaison across the supply chain where issues were of common interest.

3.14 The Sub-Group recognised, however, that notwithstanding certain management methods and protocols elsewhere in the EU, it did not necessarily result in better herd health. What mattered was to identify lessons from across the EU where the outcome was better performance. At present, the UK out performed many EU aspects of herd health management. **Action: Richard Lister** to prepare written report for the Sub-Group.

WS7: Facilitate Efficient Roll Out of Regional Pig Health Incentive

3.15 [REDACTED] reported that previous issues creating impediments to progress with individual RDAs had been addressed. The specific work of the Sub-Group had virtually been completed: there were now no outstanding issues to resolve, and wider roll-out was progressing. In particular, [REDACTED] had a meeting later in the day with East Midlands RDA to explore take-up in that region.

WS8: R&D Herd Health Priorities

3.16 [REDACTED] confirmed that the workstream of the Sub-Group had been completed. The main Task Force had agreed to the priorities for R&D (which had incorporated advice from the Sub-Group). The Task Force had commissioned further work to identify possible funding sources that could assist in taking forward specific R&D projects, and [REDACTED] at BPEX had undertaken to prepare a paper on that for the next meeting of the Task Force on 7 December. Defra had also undertaken to prepare a paper on existing relevant R&D projects in which the Department was involved. The paper would be sent to the Sub-Group. **Action:** [REDACTED] to ensure Sub-Group receives paper in due course.

4. Communication Strategy

4.1 Duncan Prior explained that the Task Force had reached the point in its life when it expected sub-groups to be focusing on finalising outputs that would deliver the agreed workplans and therefore contribute to the principal aim of the Task Force initiative. The Task Force had asked for an informed discussion at their next meeting on 7 December that would consider such issues as (i) tangible outputs; (ii) key messages associated with those outputs, and cross-cutting messages; (iii) timing of delivery; (iv) required promulgation towards implementation; and (v) publicity opportunities. A 'communications grid' had been constructed to help capture that information from each sub-group. The results would then be collated and submitted to the task Force with an outline communications strategy that would consider issues such as ownership, branding and specific launch events where appropriate.

4.2 Each workstream leader was invited to complete the communication grid (focusing on principal outputs/messages only – ie one or two per workstream) and send it to Duncan Prior not later than Friday 20 November. **Action: Workstream Leaders** to send complete form to Duncan Prior as soon as possible.

4.3 A meeting to consider the component of a communications strategy had been arranged for Monday 23 November. All sub-groups were invited to send representatives if they wished. The Sub-Group noted that there would be sufficient representation of interest at the meeting (not least by Digby Scott) and decided not to propose further representation from the Herd Health Sub-Group.

5. Issues Log and Risk register

5.1 The Sub-Group agreed there were no changes to the Issue Log or Risk Register.

6. Issue to Raise at Next Task Force Meeting

6.1 Colleagues raised a number of specific issues of concern, including:

- transport washing facilities;
- the need for enhanced Animal Health involvement in engaging with smallholders;
- presentation on the mapping of pig units;
- national biosecurity/food security;
- imported pigs going direct to Chelford market and then on to multiple sites having mixed with many other animals and increased disease spread risks.

6.2 On reflection, the Sub-Group concluded that those issues were not themselves appropriate for raising as specific discussion points at the Task Force meeting. But the following **actions were agreed**:

- **Richard Lister** would reflect on some of these points in his oral report to the Task Force, especially where the concerns helped underpin the work of the Sub-Group in developing solutions;
- industry was anticipating writing to Defra about its concerns relating to imports/markets. [REDACTED] would alert her Defra colleagues accordingly.

7. Dates of Next Meetings

7.1 The Sub-Group agreed to meet again in January, ahead of what was anticipated as the last Task Force meeting on 1 February. **Action: Duncan Prior** to canvass Sub-Group members for a meeting suitable date.

7.2 It was also agreed that a teleconference of workstream leaders would be useful soon after the Task Force meeting on 7 December, to allow for workstream progress to be monitored, and feedback from the Task Force to be conveyed. **Action: Workstream Leaders** to participate in teleconf call at 16.00hrs on Monday 14 December (joining instructions to be circulated in due course).

Task Force Secretariat
November 2009

