

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

Note of Inaugural Meeting held on Tuesday 19 May 2009

Present:

Richard Lister, JC Lister (Chair)
Zoe Davies, NPA
Howard Revell, BQP/Tulip
Derek Armstrong, BPEX
Andrew Thornber, Morrisons
Pete Bown, PVS
[REDACTED] Defra
Marcus Bates, BPA
[REDACTED] consultant to BPEX
[REDACTED] consultant to BPEX
Duncan Prior, Task Force Secretary

Apologies for Absence:

Jan Anderson, Yorkshire Forward
Tom Allen, Young NPA
Stan Done, VLA
Dan Tucker, Cambridge University
Digby Scott, Pig World

1. Introductions and Background

1.1 The Chair welcomed those present to the first meeting of the Sub-Group, and briefly explained the background to the main Task Force (more detailed background had previously been sent to Sub-Group members by the Task Force Secretary). The Chair reminded the meeting that Jane Kennedy was giving the initiative personal commitment, and that it was important for supply chain stakeholders to grasp the opportunity to maximise benefits from it. The initiative had an initial 12 months' time-span, making it important to focus on key areas where lasting change could be achieved – notwithstanding the impressive portfolio of activity already being pursued by stakeholders. The Sub-Group should not duplicate such activity, but seek to add value, accelerate progress, and identify important gaps in the drive to enhance pig health and its contribution towards economic productivity.

2. Setting the Scene in a Wider Context

2.1 In order that members of the Sub-Group shared an up to date understanding of the wide range of existing relevant activities being undertaken, [REDACTED] and Derek Armstrong each gave a presentation on the work of Defra and BPEX/industry respectively. They covered initiatives from the Government's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy (and its implementation in the pig sector through the Pig Health and Welfare Strategy), generic sector specific R&D programmes, to direct on-farm and abattoir surveillance support. Key points to emerge from the presentations and ensuing discussion were:

- State intervention in animal health did not generally extend directly to endemic disease management, but that beneficial spin-offs did occur from Government activity (eg veterinary surveillance and data collected that could be of wider use to industry; advice on bio-security for exotic disease applied equally to endemic disease). Government intervention in animal health and welfare was based on the four reasons for intervention identified in the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy:
- some existing industry support schemes were not delivering optimum benefit due to lack of take-up in some quarters;

- there was a direct link between animal health and environmental performance (eg reduced GHG emissions) which could be promoted when considering the costs and benefits of different interventions, which should justify Government intervention more broadly than human health (eg zoonoses) and exotic animal diseases;

- there should be more scope for species specific domestic movement licensing during disease outbreaks akin to 'compartmentalising' arrangements possible at EU level (eg within secure pig pyramids);

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Comment [m1]: I'd rather this was removed. It certainly wasn't a key issue.

- there were more may be cost effective ways of sampling pig herd health at farm, regional, national levels than traditional methods of expensive blood sampling or 'cursory' checks by meat inspectors at abattoirs (eg chewed 'play ropes' taken from pig units would potentially give cost efficient results from a wider evidence base – or at least an indicator of possible problem units);

Comment [m2]: This test is not yet validated for PRRS and it is speculation that it could be applied to other diseases (although I hope it can!)

- there was scope for exploring the sharing and brigading of health and other related surveillance data that could enhance knowledge and reduce collection/management costs (including the identification of 'hot-spots' in poor animal health performance).

3. Animal Movement and Identification Programme

3.1 [REDACTED] gave a presentation of work BPEX had been undertaking to develop an Animal Movement and Identification Hub for the English pig sector (though with roll-out potential across all livestock sectors). The project had been developed in partnership with many industry stakeholder bodies and Defra/Animal Health to provide a comprehensive solution to the needs of Government and industry in managing livestock identification, movements and tracing. It was being built on existing food chain information systems involving producers, food business operators and the MHS. It was hoped that the prototype would be piloted in an English Region to test its effectiveness of rapid information management in the pigmeat production cycle from start to finish.

3.2 Despite Defra/Animal Health being principal partners in the project, and having called for formal Request for Information on implementation, BPEX has been getting mixed messages about the next stage of development. BPEX understand from Animal Health that the project specification has won support, but that Animal Health are not able to commit to funding (or even able to confirm that funding is available at all). That was putting at risk the significant investment already made in the project, jeopardising the realisation of the undisputed benefits to all parties (not least Animal Health) and straining the existing effective working relationship between Government and industry - including in the context of Cost and Responsibility Sharing.

3.3 The Sub-Group felt strongly that the project should not be allowed to lose momentum. Julie Ross agreed to make enquiries of her relevant colleagues at Defra/Animal Health; and, subject to that, the Sub-Group would consider raising the matter as an issue at the next Task Force meeting on 10 June. **Action:** [REDACTED]. [Defra]

4. Disease Mitigation Programme

4.1 [REDACTED] gave a presentation about industry's national/regional disease mitigation programme for England. It was estimated that sub-clinical disease was costing industry £8 per pig, so the effective management of the challenge had the potential to make very positive

Impacts on productivity and production costs – contributing significantly to enhanced competitiveness. The programme was a huge undertaking; needing as near 100% engagement of all pig producers/owners (from large commercial undertakings to small 'hobby keepers', across as wide as possible an area (ultimately the whole country). BPEX had tried to engage all Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) towards implementing a single national plan; but the RDAs were autonomous local development bodies with individually set priorities and administrative processes. It was clear – though frustrating – to industry that a regional approach was required whereby multiple regional initiatives could combine to provide a national response to the challenge.

4.2 Yorkshire Forward RDA had already approved the first phase of the programme in its area, by committing RDPE funding of £300,000 (ie 70% of the collaboration on-costs – ie planning, management, extra tools, and infrastructure). Industry had to invest ten times the collaboration on-costs. Standard farming practice costs were ineligible for support. Momentum was beginning to build up towards greater roll-out – both in other regions and across industry. But there remained significant obstacles that had the effect of slowing progress. In discussion, the Sub-Group took note of the following specific difficulties:

Comment [m3]: I thought this was an estimate based on what would be expected would be expected over time (including cost of depop, repops etc). At the outset, industry have to provide 30% of costs I think?

- national RDPE bids are virtually impossible (despite the benefits to a national industry and regional economies); with the challenge exacerbated by the need to construct detailed tailored bids for individual RDAs (with resultant delays in implementation);
- there was a need for a more realistic definition of standard farming practice, without which RDAs were likely to be overly cautious in their interpretation of eligible expenditure;
- the EU interpretation of Statutory Levy as a para-fiscal tax made it very difficult to use Levy income as part of industry's funding contribution, even though the purpose of the Levy included development, as it might score as publicly funded commercial support under EU rules;
- public procurement competition rules could get in the way of exploiting the Yorkshire Forward project in other regions (and put at risk the development of a single national programme): it should be possible to justify Single Tender Action where only one provider was capable of delivery, and also secure economies of scale.

5. Principal Aim and Objectives of the Sub-Group

5.1 The Chair introduced the draft Sub-Group workplan which had been distributed with meeting papers in advance. During discussion, Sub-Group members speculated on the type of work that the Sub-Group could pursue. In conclusion it was decided that the draft aim and objectives could be adopted with certain amendments and capable of being flexible enough to accommodate specific workstreams and projects that were identified subsequently. The Task Force Secretary was asked to revise the draft workplan accordingly, and the Chair would present it to the next meeting of the main Task Force for approval.

6. Key Issues and Risks

6.1 Duncan Prior introduced the draft risk register and explained that such registers were being maintained for each sub-group, the Task Force itself and other separate workstreams. The registers were live documents and should be kept up to date as risks were identified and their status changed. The same was the case for the 'issues log', and sub-groups were

encouraged to raise issues where necessary for task Force consideration. The Sub-Group reaffirmed its desire to raise with the Task Force the issue about funding the AMI Hub (see para 3.3 above).

6.2 The Sub-Group expressed concern about the absence of a dedicated budget for taking forward specific pieces of work; but took note that the Task Force had agreed that existing resources should always be the first point of consideration (re-aligning priorities where justified). However, Defra had told the Task Force - without commitment - that in identifying crucial work resources should not be an automatic show-stopper. In such circumstances, the Task Force should be invited to consider a full and robust business case and make recommendations on next steps.

7. Conclusion, Next Steps and Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The Chair concluded by saying it had been a very positive meeting with some useful insights to some of the challenges faced. The draft workplan would be refined where necessary and submitted to the Task Force for endorsement on 10 June. It would then be important to determine urgently a more tangible programme of projects to deliver the Sub-Group's objectives. The next meeting, to take that forward, would be held on Thursday 2 July at Morrisons' HQ in Bradford. The meeting noted that on the previous afternoon there would be an open public meeting in Malton, North Yorkshire, for stakeholders to consider the disease mitigation programme for the Region. Sub-group members would be welcome to attend.

7.2 Actions:

1. **Duncan Prior** to amend draft workplan as necessary.
2. **Richard Lister** to present proposed workplan to Task Force on 10 June.
3. **Duncan Prior** to confirm notice of second meeting to all Sub-Group members particularly so that those absent from the first meeting were able to note their diaries accordingly.

Secretary to the Pigmeat Supply Chain Task Force
May 2009