



The
GEORGE
Pig Practice

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BPHS – GOODBYE TO ALL THAT!

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This week saw my last visit to the Tulip plant at Westerleigh as an assessor for BPHS – the British Pig Health Scheme. AHDB Pork (in their wisdom?) have awarded the new contract to Hallmark, one of the companies that currently employs European vets to work as meat inspectors for the Food Standards Agency. BPEX launched BPHS with considerable fanfare in July 2005 with the aim of providing farmers, their vets, abattoirs and funding partners with regular, objective and detailed post-mortem health assessments, performed by a team of specialist pig vets.

I have been involved since scheme inception as an assessor, as a regional standardiser, and for the last 5 years plus on the BPHS Steering Group. In the early years BPHS formed one of BPEX's key health strategies, the basic premise being that if you can't measure it (health), how on earth can you improve it. If the truth be told, BPEX appear to have fallen out of love with BPHS some years ago and there is an on-going drive to replace the scheme with improved CCIR information provided by meat inspectors. Will BPHS end up going the same way as other 'flagship' health strategies such as ZNCP Salmonella and PHIP (Pig Health Improvement Project)? I expect many of you will remember both projects well and wonder, like me, why a huge amount of resource was thrown at these projects, in a short period of time, and then suddenly withdrawn. My suspicion is that what we are seeing here is a prime example of the new 'effect' – throw resource at whatever is "new" before gradually losing interest and eventually abandoning that "new" project for another "new" project! The current "new" project is clearly antimicrobial controls and recording, which is hot on the heels of Real Welfare. Understandably antimicrobials, and all the issues surrounding their use in agriculture, are very important issues in the pig industry at the moment, and it is right that AHDB Pork now prioritise them. What seems to have been overlooked in the headlong rush to set up antibiotic usage audits, and as impending reduction targets loom, is that we face the biggest shake-up of pig health management for the past four decades. Prophylactic feed medication looks likely to be banned, or at least very strictly controlled, and against this background I would have thought that a robust health monitoring package, with good historical baseline data, would have been important.

I have to confess to experiencing mixed emotions at the end of my involvement with BPHS. Yes, it may well be a good thing that AHDB have found a way to keep the scheme going at reduced cost. Can the high standards and consistency offered by professional pig vets to date be maintained? Only time will tell. I look back with considerable pride over the last few years at the other bits and pieces of value we have added: the previously undiagnosed cases of Swine Dysentery, Ileitis, Erysipelas etc.

all of them very important but not actually part of the BPHS assessment per se. Will these oddities which come up from time to time, or the subtle differences in pathology noted with different infectious agents, be picked up under the new arrangements? I have to doubt it.

Will I miss the early starts and long days stood on a production line, probably not, especially at this time of year. The combination of heat, humidity and protective clothing had something of a “boil in the bag” effect on me. On the “upside” every abattoir I’ve ever been in does have a good cafeteria and a cooked breakfast at break time has become one of my “guilty pleasures”. In the last 11 years I conservatively reckon I’ve personally assessed ~300,000 pigs, consuming well over a hundred abattoir cooked breakfasts in the process – certainly food for thought!

GVG PIG FAIR

We are looking forward to this year’s Pig Fairs. Annie has put together an interesting programme including looking at novel health management strategies in the brave new world of fewer antibiotics, and how we can use novel technology to more fully understand pig behaviour and performance. There will be the usual round-up of current issues in the pig industry, the opportunity for good banter, and the usual soup and pasties. Please try and keep one of the dates free, the more the merrier:-

Exeter Racecourse – Tuesday 4th October 2 p.m.

Wincanton Racecourse – Wednesday 5th October 2 p.m.

CHANGING FACES

Sadly Laura will be leaving the team in mid-September for pastures new at the pharmaceutical company Zoetis. We all wish Laura well with her new job. Difficult shoes to fill but we have been very lucky in finding a replacement in Alice Bednall-Brough (pictured). Alice has been working in pig production in East Anglia and prior to vet school worked on a large commercial sow herd.

Alice will join the team in November and I’m sure you will all give her the usual warm welcome.



All the best
Richard