



George Veterinary Group

High Street

Malmesbury

Wiltshire

SN16 9AU

01666 823355

E.mail –

[pigteam@georgevetgroup.co.uk](mailto:pigteam@georgevetgroup.co.uk)

January 2017

### NEW BUILDINGS – A NEW FOCUS!

I attended a meeting in London recently reference future TB control as pigs are being legally altered where TB is concerned to put them on the same footing as cattle. We continue to try to advise and direct APHA that TB in pigs is very different in terms of risk in pigs and is very different from TB in cattle. Along with NPA and other organisations we will continue on this project so that meaningful knowledge of our industry attempts to direct what may well be draconian regulations in future.

One facet of the meeting which struck me was the target which APHA have set of having the country free of TB by 2038. I am not aware of how this timescale (22 years when set) was achieved however admirable the intention but it struck me that there aren't many of our businesses which would be looking to plan for this length of time.

We live in a time of momentous change and we, as business owners and managers, have to adapt situations of which we very often have very little control. As I discussed in my last Talkshop article back in August 2016 over the last few years have seen a sea change away from the use of antibiotics to control disease to new building changes, along with vaccination to reduce disease challenge and improve the resistance of our pigs in a more controlled way. This has dramatically changed our business and our advice to our clients going forward. The majority of our clients are now well placed to meet the challenges ahead in terms of medication usage.

A big change over the last five years has been the amount of new building development going on our farms (a 10 – 15 year investment). We went through a long period of what I would call “make do and mend” in the pig industry where many of our buildings became tired due to lack of investment. This was understandable going through what were very grim economic times for our industry and during that period if we saw some newly laid concrete it merited a comment in a report.

There are new buildings going up on many farms now, mostly to replace older, tired units but also with a focus on improving management practices and often routine labour requirements over the next 10 – 15 years. With the bill going through Parliament to pass Article 50 we have no knowledge of where our labour will come from on farms subsequent to Brexit although it is clear that we will look to reduce staffing levels through mechanisation going forward.

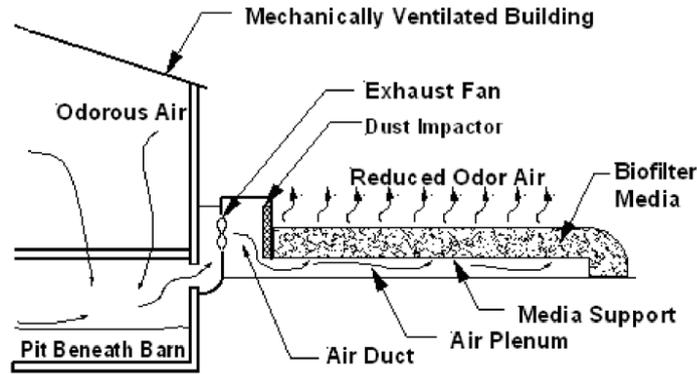
We have seen a number of units over the last two years switch from outdoor farrowing to indoors with eyes on productivity, staffing levels and staff retention as well as a concern for environmental issues bearing in mind the extremely wet winter we had 12 months ago.

In terms of environmental issues, we have never been under more pressure in terms of planning and the use of pressure groups to use planning and environmental pollution as a stick to beat a perfectly legal and well controlled and audited industry. Noise and smell complaints are common and any new planning faces a minefield of surveys, audits and local agitation and activism before a brick can be laid, whether the units have to comply with IPPC regulations or not.

New innovations which we are seeing in some of these buildings and one which was just completed last week was the installation of a biofilter. A sketch of the plan of this is shown below, but essentially it involves the exhaust of air out of a building through slats covered with tree roots which

T  
A  
L  
K  
S  
H  
O  
P

are kept moist. Bacteria on these roots remove the ammonia and smell from exhausted air to prevent local air pollution issues. These biofilters will take 70% of ammonia out through a central exhaust from a similar system that I saw a number of years ago in Brittany where air was exited through a water shower to remove the dust. These shower filters will remove the dust which contains the smell and will take a minimal amount of the ammonia out at the same time. I believe these types of systems are likely to be common place for any future expansion in our industry. We have had one up and running for some considerable time although this was the most impressive direct conversion of cattle buildings for pig finishing that I have ever seen.



Other features which I believe are likely to become common place are computerised laser apps for weighing pigs. There is no doubt that getting our pigs on spec, particularly as we are going for higher weights, is becoming even more important to maximise our output without hitting penalty bands. These are reported to be within 1 ½ % accuracy and will dramatically reduce the amount of labour on farm for pig marketing.

What the future entails for the pig industry in world trade is at this stage impossible to plot. We are a small industry but we need to ensure that our voice is heard, particularly if we are going to be exposed to more foreign imports from outwith the EU. These need to be from systems which are legal in the UK and if we have to have a medicines target, bearing in mind why this has been imposed on us, then all imports need to be audited to the same standard and comply within our target levels.

Use of the Beta-agonist Paylean is legal in the US but has never been legal in the UK or the EU. This improves the efficiency of pig production and is effectively a growth promotor and as such we need to ensure that any competition is on a level playing field.

I feel more confident of our industry than for any other agricultural sector in the UK. We are already trading on the world stage without any Government or EU subsidy and with the performance of our UK herds improving now and considerable investment going on, I believe that we are better placed than our other species sectors to compete in a post Brexit world. We do need a level playing field and this must be reinforced to our political masters at all opportunities.