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CUT OUT THE WASTE

With feed prices edging upwards and pig price under pressure, it is always important to try and be as efficient as possible.

With feed typically accounting for 70% of costs/pig/unit then this is obviously the area to concentrate on to have as big an impact as possible on unit profitability. It is one that is seen every day and with this feed efficiency and wastage can become the norm.

A recent study indicated that approximately 10% of feed delivered to a farm is lost through waste. This is almost certainly from a failure to get it into the pig in a format in which it can be useful.

The biggest impact on any unit is the finishing house as this area accounts for approximately 60% of feed used. I will concentrate mostly on this area for this reason.

FEED WASTAGE

This is an area where we can have the greatest effect on the farm. We may not be effectively getting the feed into the pigs for the following reasons.

Damaged bins

On one of our farms very recently, when a bin was cleaned out it was discovered to have 8 tonnes of stale feed stuck to the sides. This is not only 8 tonnes of wastage but will have accounted for spoilage of the feed that ran through this bin and actually went into the pigs due to the exposure to mycotoxin growth.

Feeder Waste

This is by far the most common cause of wastage on the farm. For a 500 sow unit with 25 pigs/pen we can have 144 finisher feeders on the farm and 100 weaner feeders. It is not uncommon to see 5% of feed wasted and if one does the sums then each feeder will be putting through approximately 18 tonnes of feed per year and if we are wasting 5% through the feeder then this equates to almost a tonne per feeder per year or in a 500 sow unit with 144 finished feeders on site, then 130 tonnes of finished feed on that site. This could be over £27,000 annually lost, purely through loss at the feeder.

So how do we ensure we are not losing feed out of a feeder?

In some units, feeders are often old and not in good repair. If we are losing £27,000 annually on feed lost through the feeder, then if a third of this amount is reinvested each year then we will have a 2:1 return on investment through minimising feed lost. £27,000 annually comes to a lot of feeders and a massive reduction in waste and improvement in profitability. This equates to around £2 per pig produced through simply reducing wastage.

So other than damaged feeders, what else can we do?

It is important to prevent loss of feed through not controlling the feeders enough and the aim is to have 50% of the pan of the feed tray visible at any one time. The exception to this is in the few days post weaning when there should be 75% coverage. This is obviously to maximise intakes in the weaners.

If feeders are controllable then it is important that all those who are inspecting the pigs every day are knowledgeable on how to alter the throughput of the feeder to ensure that no more than 50% of the pan is visible.

Vermin Waste

One which is often forgotten about, particularly with high value feed such as creep, is losses to rats. I was always told that if you see one rat then there are 50 more lurking in the environment. It is thought that a rat can eat 30g of feed per day which is over 10kg per rat per year. Simply if one rat is seen per day then you are losing half a tonne to rats every year. If this happens to be creep, and I commonly see rat holes in creep bags, then this feed can be valued at £800 per tonne. Losses can certainly mount up in this way.

Animal Health

It is well recognised that healthy animals are more efficient. Much of our time is spent trying to control disease and with antibiotic usage under pressure, much of this is done through vaccination or elimination programmes. We have been very successful in this over the last few years but we will need to carry on this drive. We are constantly monitoring disease at the abattoir and through our post mortems to try to identify whether we are losing money through disease pressure. This will continue and have to be adapted as the years go on.

Cleansing and Disinfection

It is well recognised that animals in clean conditions will grow more efficiently. One trial indicates that feed conversion will improve by 7% in the six weeks post weaning if animals are kept in clean conditions rather than dirty conditions, and at the same time, daily live weight gain can increase by 11% when kept under both conditions. This can equate to an extra 2 ½ kg per pig for animals coming out of the weaner house with a lowering of the cost per pig of ~£1 per pig in terms of feed despite this extra 2 ½ kg of growth rate. All in all, this £1 per pig goes a long way to pay for the cost of labour and power washing and the value of the disinfectants used.

All in all, there are plenty of numbers for us to look at on the farm to minimize losses with the expensive inputs which are going into these pigs.

FARM INSPECTIONS

With the activity from vegan terrorists on farm we are seeing an increased level of spot inspections. If anyone turns up announced or unannounced on farm claiming to be there to inspect the farm, it is paramount that their credentials are examined, checked and verified before you allow them on farm. Some of these will be bona fida but if they are they will have no problem with you checking out their identity documents. DO NOT GET CAUGHT OUT because there are some charlatans out there.

On another front APHA have published their “consultation document” ref. welfare inspections on farm. They will be using this in the months and years ahead and cross compliance payments will be at risk if farms are not audited to this standard. We are currently reviewing to see if there are any differences to Red Tractor Standards but anybody who is currently in the process of building should ensure that they have consulted this document which is available on the NPA website before proceeding.

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