

ON 14th DECEMBER 2021

TELECONFERENCE

PRESENT: Mike Sheldon (MS) – Chair, Robert Beckett (RBe), Robert Mutimer (RM), Rupinder Ashworth (RA), Mark Houghton (MH), Tim Bradshaw (TB), Chris Aldersley (ChA), William De Klein (WDK), Adam Cheale (ACH)

APOLOGIES: Robin Thompson (RT), Rick Buckle (RB)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Angela Christison (AC) - Strategy director – AHDB Pork, Will Jackson - Divisional Director of Engagement, Lenka Rihova - Personal Assistant (Minutes)

AGENDA ITEM 1 – Apologies for absence

The Chair opened the meeting at 10.30am and welcomed those in attendance. This was an interim Pork Sector Council meeting held as a teleconference.

Apologies were received from RT and RB.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – Cull and Render Facility update

WJ provided an update on cull and render facility. Conversations have been held across the industry in order to find a workable solution. Due to various reasons (legal issues, impact on Cheale's ability to operate), the solution was not workable. Defra are leading on exploring another solution, and AHDB is supporting. Other government agencies need to be aligned so it is sensible that Defra lead. All are aware that, even if a site can be found, there will be a challenge to identify a team to operate the service.

The Pork Sector Council endorsed the proposed plan.

On behalf of the Pork Sector Council, WJ and the Chair, thanked ACH for his efforts and willingness to fully explore operating such a service at his site.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - Revisit of Cost of Endemic Diseases work

At the last Pork Sector Council meeting, there was a proposal for some work on establishing the cost of Endemic disease. This discussion was held to debate further the benefit for levy payers.

MN reported on the value of the work and Jonathan Rushton's (professor in animal health economics) proposal, which is a complex model that measures the costs of diseases over years. AHDB has been working with a number of groups on animal health economics. If AHDB funds this project, the aim would be to use it as an exemplar for the pig sector (to demonstrate the cost of endemic disease). The estimated timescale is 6 months. The output will provide a model that could be used and fed into a larger piece of work. It is key that we can demonstrate the impact we are making. It was felt that the project (£50K) is a well-leveraged piece of work & appropriate use of levy payer funds .

The Pork Sector Council has endorsed this project.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – Revisit of Zinc REA proposal

This work would consider the alternatives to zinc at weaning to prevent diarrhoea. At the last meeting, some concern was expressed over the benefits for levy payers and AHDB's role. More evidence was requested.

MN reported that AHDB is the independent evaluator of the data that is out there. Research to be evaluated and give producers evidence for what may work in their situation, allowing them to make an informed decision as to what to do on their farm. It was felt that the vets might find the work more useful than producers would.

The timeframe for this piece of work is around 6 - 8 months. There is a time pressure on this due to the upcoming Zinc ban next year (June 2022). MN reported on benefits for vets and producers if this work has been conducted (accessibility tool). The guide price for this project is around £25K, subject to tender response.

It was felt that there is a lot of commercial activity, the market is working hard on solutions for this challenge. AHDB's role is to provide the best collation of evidence. The benefit for producers is that vets, nutritionists, and pharmaceutical companies will all be better informed as a result of this piece of work as well as levy payers themselves.

The Pork Sector Council endorsed the project but will be looking very carefully how is this being made accessible to producers and to others in the supply chain. How to offer a practical, usable service rather than an academic piece of research.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Welfare Training and Launch

MN reported on Welfare Training. The scheduled launch date is now 1st March 2022. The feedback was that that it would be beneficial to enable training to be done in groups (it has been designed for individuals on a computer, as such we will need time to address this extra industry request). Early launch is possible but without the group facility. Some concern was expressed over possible expectations for AHDB to cover costs for the group sessions (meeting rooms etc.), it was agreed AHDB should not be expected to cover such costs. Any decision to change a specification/offer is the decision of this Sector Council.

Adding group facility set up will cause a delay in the launch (to March 22) as it poses issues around validation of individual people completing the training and issuing of the certificate which is needed to meet Red Tractor standards. If we launched in January launch it would initiate the start of the six months free period, thus it was concluded to launch in March.

The Sector Council has agreed to launch the service on 1st March 2022 (the 6 free months will start from the point of availability). The service will be available for individuals and group sessions. Producers to fund group sessions. The added cost for AHDB is the cost for modification of the model to group settings. Some concern was expressed over criticism over the delay of launching this service. Communication is key that the delay is due to the change in specification following the pilot which has been accommodated by AHDB).

AGENDA ITEM 6 – Defra Consultation re NPCB/BFT

The culling of 'back logged' pigs on farms is not deemed as emergency culling as the animals are healthy. Thus, it falls under the welfare of animals at the time of killing legislation (WATOK). WATOK was designed for slaughter in abattoirs and does not currently have an approved method for the killing of neonatal animals. This was flagged by a number of groups. Defra is considering revising the legislation, the concern is if the legislation is changed and allows non-penetrative captive bolt as an approved method, that method will become a requirement on every farm and will be the only method of euthanasia allowed, which would outlaw blunt force trauma. This has big implications for the sector, as well as sheep and goats. Defra has launched a short, targeted consultation, The close of the consultation was on 14th December 2021. Evidence from the industry has been supplied, arguing that non penetrative captive bolt devices are not a panacea, and that there is a lack of evidence on the humaneness or otherwise of blunt force trauma. Discussions with vets have been held, and AHDB has submitted a response to the consultation.

AHDB's position is that we do not have the evidence that the non-penetrative captive bolt offers advantages over blunt force trauma. It is encouraging that we are in line with NPA, PVS on this subject.

AGENDA ITEM 7 - Close & AOB

The processor members provided an update on butcher recruitment, which remains a challenge. Issues remain around recruitment and, especially, accommodation. A small number of butchers has arrived so far. There are several challenges in relation to the administration around the process, but it was felt that the schemes are delivering some results so not completely without merit.

The meeting closed at 12pm.