

Pig Fair 2023

It was great to see so many people at this year's Pig Fair at Taunton Rugby club, there was a busy feel and hum around the commercial stands as well as good discussion about the presentations. For many reasons there are always those that are unable to attend, so below is a brief overview of the afternoon's proceedings.

Z3D monitoring technology

Laura Hancox, from Zoetis, treated us to an overview of exciting advances in pig monitoring. Zoetis are working with Innovent technology to deliver this new camera tech, capable of both weighing and monitoring pig behaviours. Innovent technology offer over-pen cameras that constantly monitor pig behaviour, including tail posture as well as recording a weight for every pig that feeds, every time they visit the feeder. The capturing of this data enables tracking of weights throughout the monitored pen to facilitate analysis of growth rate and to feed-in to marketing decisions. The tracking of behaviour enables early identification of changes potentially indicating a within pen issue requiring stockperson intervention. Tracking of tail posture also alerts stock people to the early stages of a tail biting outbreak, again to encourage action as early as possible to limit the impacts of this vice.

Pig Health Scheme (PHS)

In June of this year, we launched the George Vet Group Pig Health Scheme for our clients as a replacement the AHDB PHS scheme withdrawn by AHDB Pork at the end of 2022. Richard gave us a reminder of the key parameters that the health monitoring scheme records and how this relates to disease challenge and clinical presentation of disease at farm level.

We have been supported in launching this scheme by Zoetis and they have also provided help with the more complex analysis of the data collected. For those clients enrolled we are recording a reasonably low level of Enzootic pneumonia-like lesions. In known EP positive herds we have recorded a range of EP scores from quite high to very low and Richard emphasised the crucial importance of the pigs environment in terms of disease expression, linking with the environmental work outlined by Tom below. To date we have recorded 8% of pigs scored being affected by pleurisy and that a little under 50% of carcasses have an easily readable slap mark, meaning that just over 50% have been recorded as having poor or unreadable slaps. This being one of the key take home messages accompanied by a plea for some attention to this from producers.



The next set of assessment dates are:

Westerleigh: 16th and 24th November, 12th and 18th December and 12th and 24th January.

Gills: 8th December and 10th January.

If you have not yet joined the scheme and would like to, and market your pigs to either Pilgrims Westerleigh or F.A.Gill please email PHS@georgevetgroup.co.uk or call the office.

Pain relief at farrowing

This was the first of our "real life, real data" presentations of on-farm projects the team has been working on. There is a body of information and prior work that has been carried out around the globe showing the benefits of using pain relief for sows and gilts around the point of farrowing. This includes work from the Irish Agricultural and Food Development Authority, Teagasc, in which it was felt that the intervention of greatest positive influence on the weaned pig was giving pain relief to the sow.

Annie presented the trial data from a large indoor unit that gave Metacam to sows and gilts producing results that showed an increase in average number of pigs weaned of 2.6% and a 1.02% increase in average weaning weight when compared to litters from sows and gilts that were not treated. These results gave a cost benefit of £48/sow/year as well as the health and welfare benefits of providing pain relief to sows and gilts.

Environmental assessments – one year on

Tom reminded us of the environmental monitoring assessment that we have to offer as well as introducing us to new work that he has been developing over the last year. In addition to CO₂, ammonia, humidity, temperature, air speed and light we can offer particulate matter monitoring. Most would know this as dust, but there is more to particulate matter than this. It covers all particles that are carried in the air e.g. pollen, seaspray or smoke. Some are small enough to be carried into the upper respiratory tract of pigs others, that are even smaller, can enter the lower respiratory tract and even the blood stream. All of these increase challenge to the respiratory system at the cost of the pig and its health and efficiency.

Tom has also been working with industry partners including Galebreaker, Ekogea and ARM on several projects to get more from the environmental kit. He gave an overview of the progress of these projects and how their outcomes will positively impact how we approach the environment of pig buildings.



Monitoring sow body condition for improved performance

Another “real life, real data” project, this time in conjunction with PIC and another large, indoor, farrow to finish producer.

Sow body condition, how to monitor and manage it on farm has been discussed for many years. Visual and manual body condition scoring, ultrasound backfat monitoring and weighing have all been used as monitoring tools. This work used a body condition caliper, developed in the US as a

practical, repeatable and objective method of tracking body condition change by measuring the angularity of the top line of the sow at key production stages (farrowing and weaning). By monitoring caliper scores on this farm over several years, significant improvements have been made in maintaining better stability of body condition with positive impact on total born and born alive per litter and reduction in wean to service interval and wasted days. Studies from other units also indicate that stability of caliper score leads to improved farrowing rate and reduced pre weaning mortality. It is possible to use body condition calipers on genotypes other than from PIC but this requires consultation with the specific genetics suppliers to ensure correct application of the equipment.

South west round up

Finally, Fran gave us his usual summary of what has been topical in our region and further afield. He particularly highlighted an increase in Oedema disease and Erysipelas cases, the clinical signs to look out for and the impact to affected herds.

We are already looking ahead to next year and look forward to welcoming both producers and our allied industry partners to GVG Pig Fair 2024.

Alex