

**Animal Care
Council Report**

2013 NIAA Annual Conference

Wednesday, April 17, 2013



The Animal Care Council met on Wednesday, April 17, 2013, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. during the 2013 NIAA Annual Conference in Louisville, Kentucky with about 40 people present. Ms. Sherrie Niekamp and Mr. Jim Fraley served as Co-Chairs.

The council session focused on the impacts of implementing animal welfare standards and its impact on production in the UK swine herd, animal welfare implications in an FMD outbreak scenario, reviewed preliminary results of three different housing types used in egg-laying systems, and research showing consumers' attitudes toward farming. The following speakers presented relevant information pertaining to the meeting's theme:

Dr. Zoë Davies, General Manager, National Pig Association, England, presented "UK Experience with Pig Welfare."

The U.K. has 400,000 breeding sows and 4.2 million total hog inventory, with about 2,000 assured hog farms accounting for 92% of the production. Some of their producers are very large with more than 30,000 sows. About 60% of the sows are housed indoors (48% straw, 10 partly slatted, and 2% fully slatted). The finishers are about 60 straw-based bedding systems. 41% of sows are housed outside in a "radial" system. About 21% of the weaners are kept outside, but only 2% are finished outside. It's simply too expensive. Their "Farm Assurance" program is full-chain assurance of traceability. They use the Red Tractor label to differentiate their product. The UK breeding herd has steadily decreased due to FMD, CSF, and the sow-stall ban. When retailers have found out how much more expensive this pork is, retailers have been importing less-expensive pork from other countries. The Pig Welfare Directive, came into play in 1999 in the UK. The EU ban was effective at the first of the year 2013. Not everyone is "playing the game." Only about 10 EU states are in compliance, and the EU Commission has started legal proceedings, but this is a lengthy and largely ineffective process. The challenges the UK producers face: producers must do it properly, risk of rewarding non-compliance, traceability of pigs and product (10 million hogs went from Holland to Germany for finishing last year), managing the market, having the right resources in place, lessons learned from the egg sector (UK had to go to enriched cages which made prices increase), and getting buy-in from the retailers. There are new slat and slot width requirements that are being enforced as well as minimum pen lengths. The term "unobstructed floor area" is also ambiguous and has been a point of discussion. Straw may be difficult to obtain in some areas of the UK, so they may use other "manipulable materials." The lobby groups would like to see a ban on farrowing crates and move to free-farrowing. Other practices coming under pressure are needle-teeth clipping, tail docking (UK producers just take the tip off of the tail), ceasing the use of slatted-floor systems. RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming, and EURO Group for Animals are the main lobby groups that are working to implement these animal welfare changes. The National Pig Association works to ensure that the pig producers' positions are not compromised. They are starting several outcome assessments of these animal welfare regulations. Their focus is on the pig, not the surroundings. Is there an optimal tail length? The evidence tells them it depends upon the system, and the specific farm conditions. They also must provide specific manipulable materials that pigs seem to enjoy. In the UK, pig producers haven't been making much money. There is a premium for animals produced under high animal welfare standards, but it is very expensive and more inefficient to produce

pork in this manner. Animal rights challenges: video exposes, attacks on “mega” farms and antibiotic use (local community opposition to farm construction), eating less meat to save the environment, and eating meat causes cancer. The Germans have instituted a ban on castration to be implemented in 2018. There is a small percentage of consumers that are willing to pay more for product raised under these standards, but generally the consumer could care less about animal welfare standards.

Dr. Patrick Webb, Director - Swine Health Programs, *National Pork Board*, presented “Animal Welfare During a Disease Outbreak.”

If the US had an outbreak of FMD, for example, it would shut off trade immediately and that would stop about 24% of our pork production that goes offshore. There would be a cost of \$200 billion lost by livestock and crop producers over a ten-year period. We have been focusing on biosecurity and vigilance to keep FMD out of the country. Our first emergency planning for FADs were mass euthanasia. Today, we will detect, control, and contain. That means we would set up control areas to limit movements. The number one thing you need during an outbreak is good information. This will help determine the scope of the disease and allow for an appropriate response. This will give us the best opportunity for a quick recovery. Backlog problems will start showing up on farms (during a stop movement order) within three days to one week. At any given time, there are about one million hogs on the road each day. We are harvesting 450,000 pigs on a daily basis. If mass euthanasia is part of the plan, we need to be able to do this in a responsible manner, dispose of the animals properly, and to assist the people that are performing this task. It can create a considerable toll on those conducting the euthanasia.

Dr. Janice Swanson, Chair, Dept of Animal Sciences, *Michigan State University*, presented “Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply Research.”

This is an effort of many stakeholders that eventually became a public-private partnership to develop a systems-based research project that is conducting a commercial-scale study of housing alternatives for egg-laying hens in the U.S. The website posts results at: any.sustainableeggcoalition.org. The researchers are looking at three different housing systems: conventional cage, enriched colony systems, and cage-free aviary. They are evaluating environmental impact, food safety, worker safety, animal health and well-being, and food affordability. Enriched colony cages have scratch areas, perches, and nesting areas. Aviary housing systems provide social areas, nesting and perching areas over several different levels. Manure and egg belts are still used in this system. They are looking at having some preliminary data in early 2015. They are evaluating egg shell strength and quality, as well as microbial tests on the eggs themselves. Worker safety and respiratory health will also be evaluated to examine workplace issues associated under the different systems. Food affordability will be the last factor the researchers will evaluate. They have some preliminary findings from three different areas from Flock One. The mortality was highest in the aviary system (11.6%) and lowest in conventional system (4.7%). The higher mortality was due to behavioral issues associated with excessive pecking. The birds in the enriched systems experienced more broken wings. There was a higher incidence of keel bone (breast bone) deviations in the enriched and aviary systems. Conventional and enriched houses had very good indoor air quality. The aviary system had ammonia levels that tended to be 1.5 to 2 times higher due to the manure litter on the floor. This resulted in 8-10 times more dust due to dust bathing and scratching. For overall costs, the aviary had the highest cost of production, followed by the enriched, and then the conventional.

Mr. Bill Zucker, Partner and Director, Ketchum Midwest, presented “USFRA Briefing: Engaging with Consumer Values.”

Over 70 affiliated organizations belong to USFRA. The simple mandate is to build trust with the consumer. 75% of consumers have favorable about farmers, but have a significantly lower opinion on the ways food is grown or raised. Most consumers think with their heart, rather than their minds in the way they look at their food. Three areas of concern: long-term health, anything not labeled “natural” is a threat, science and logic does not help. During Dial Testing, the phrase, “safe, abundant, and affordable food supply” no longer resonates with consumers. The message of “family farm” also is not readily believed. Consumer studies show that they believe 70% of the farms are owned or controlled by large corporations. Messages that did resonate were the word, “improvement” and acknowledging consumers’ concerns. Consumers appreciate that farming is very technical and farmers are using precision tools to ensure they are not over-applying crop protection products or fertilizers. Most people just want to know that farmers are not abusing their animals. Consumers like BQA and PQA programs.

Old Business: None

New Business:

- 1 new resolution presented, and recommended for adoption as amended.
 - *Support for Fact-based Animal Welfare Education*
- Consensus Points for NIAA White Paper Development:
 1. The conclusions were that regulations will increase consumer costs and reduce demands. If regulations are adopted, they need to be based in science and not as a result of pressure from animal rights organizations.
 2. Involving many stakeholders on these issues will help bring.
 3. Consumers want to believe farmers care for the environment and have a high level of care for their livestock. A dialogue between farmers and consumers has to be cultivated.

General Discussion: None

Council Session adjourned at 11:40.