

UK Pig Industry Discusses Threat of Exotic Diseases

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UK - Exotic diseases are threatening the UK pig industry from all sides and a special roundtable was attended by nearly 50 people to look at how to deal with these threats.

It was called by the Pig Health and Welfare Council and held in Westminster with representatives from across industry including feed companies, veterinarians, scientists, the NPA, BPEX, the BMPA, producers, Defra and the AHVLA.

By the end of the day more than 30 recommendations had been made and all those present made a commitment to them.

These included:

- Engaging with non-specialist vets to reach smallholders and widen understanding of the threats
- Communicating not only with commercial producers but also smallholders and hobby farmers
- Highlighting the existence of excellent sources of surveillance information and improving the communication of that information to the whole industry.

The programme also included talks from industry specialists in key areas and these were followed by workshop sessions with groups focusing on key issues, potential solutions, timescales and who would lead the action.

The presentations from the event will be available in due course along with further detail of the meeting outcomes.

The National Pig Association (NPA) has provided a list of more than 40 recommendations drawn up at the meeting, which were (in no particular order):

1. BPEX and NPA to help disseminate disease risk assessments more widely.
2. Check whether better use can be made of disease indicators, such as mortality figures.
3. Introduce horizon scanning for emerging disease threats, involving (for instance) pig organisations around the world, the International Meat Secretariat, and the World Organisation for Animal Health.
4. Assess risks caused by changing dynamics in the pig industry.
5. Improve communications between specialist vets and general practice vets to help identify emerging disease issues.
6. Build on existing disease surveillance — but also try to determine what "really good" surveillance would look like, as something to work towards.
7. At a European level, introduce a second-tier classification for important but non-notifiable diseases, so that diseases such as American PRRS and PEDv would be classed as "reportable".
8. Work with the European Union directorates-general, the Food and Veterinary Office, European pig vets, European farmer organisations, and others, towards greater transparency in disease information.
9. Work on the European Union stage to make it possible in the future to agree European Union-wide defensive actions (for instance banning live imports and porcine plasma products from specific regions, where appropriate).
10. The pig industry to work more closely with AHVLA and Defra to explain the ban on swill feeding and also to explain the law to those pig-keepers most likely to be unaware of the law regarding feeding kitchen waste to pigs.
11. Adopt a targeted approach when communicating with pet pig owners, bearing in mind the areas with the highest concentration of pet pigs are London, Manchester and Bristol.
12. Work with breeding companies to ensure the impeccable governance of live imports, for instance by introducing health declaration forms, and whole-chain audits that include people, fomites and third party agents.
13. Attempt to devise a system whereby breeding companies can work together to agree — if and when necessary — voluntary import bans on live pigs.
14. Clarify exactly where live pigs are imported from, so that risk analyses can be carried out.
15. Work with government, Border Force, airports, seaports, airlines and travel companies to improve border controls on illegal imports, with better signage and announcements.

16. Introduce signage on farms explaining the risk posed by meat products, including illegal meat imports from third countries and legal imports from disease-compromised areas in the European Union.
17. Improve communications around all aspects of emerging disease by ensuring all the agencies and organisations talk to each other regularly, including non-specialist vets.
18. With the help of airlines and travel companies, raise the profile of disease risk caused by the movement of people around the world.
19. Improve communication with small-scale pig-keepers, especially those who are unlikely to read smallholder magazines — perhaps by persuading feed suppliers to provide appropriate information on packaging.
20. British Pig Association and BPEX to introduce a jointly-owned website which explains the responsibilities of all pig-owners.
21. Work with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to highlight, with non-specialist vets, the risks posed by emerging pig diseases, and perhaps introduce webinars and DVDs to assist this process.
22. Work with local authorities to identify all landfill sites, and make the information readily available to outdoor pig-keepers to help them avoid high-risk areas.
23. Everyone in the industry to stop using the term "wild boar" when describing populations of feral pigs in this country. Refer to them as "feral hogs" instead, as this will help the general public understand why control measures are necessary.
24. Improve surveillance of feral hogs so that Government and industry gain a better idea of the numbers and locations involved — this will provide a better understanding of the threat of interaction with commercial outdoor pigs.
25. Information about imported pig products to be cascaded down to retail outlets, including market stalls, by government and local authorities.
26. Everyone in the industry to be alert for potentially infected meat products and to inform AHVLA — NPA to publish a guide on what to look out for.
27. Support National Fallen Stock Company in its bid to build a whole-chain biosecurity protocol for renderers, collectors and farmers.
28. Improve skills development on farms so that staff are alert to emerging disease threats, perhaps formalising new skills requirements in existing industry training modules or in farm assurance.
29. Investigate ways of sharing farm data anonymously (on mortality etc) via improved record-keeping, and ideally monitor this information in real-time so that emerging issues can be quickly identified and expertly analysed.
30. Investigate ways of capturing unusual signs that pig vets are encountering individually on pig farms, perhaps via a monthly or quarterly webinar, and perhaps by using an app that has already been developed with BPEX funding.
31. Consider a programme of active surveillance in the industry, for instance by spot testing abattoirs, markets, fallen stock collection centres and so on, ideally using an algorithm to help identify the highest risk areas.
32. Ensure the skills and funding exist in Britain to develop diagnostic tests at short notice, as happened in the States with PEDv.
33. Improve contact with non-assured farms and non-specialist vets — perhaps by encouraging non-specialist vets to consult specialist pig vets when they encounter unusual disease issues, and perhaps, also, by PVS opening lines of communication with other specialist vet groups.
34. Consider sampling lorries at abattoirs.
35. AHVLA and Defra to work more closely with industry when suspect notifiable disease is encountered so that (a) they can benefit from industry knowledge and (b) industry can cascade agreed information lines.
36. Help producers prepare contingency plans for use in the event of being placed under restriction.
37. Remove barriers to reporting suspicious indications on farms by investigating the use of levy funds through the Pig Development Scheme, to help producers under movement restriction — with temporary accommodation, for instance.
38. Introduce a checklist to help every producer prepare a farm profile, for use by investigators in the event of a suspected outbreak of notifiable disease.
39. Encourage every producer to have a similar contingency plan for serious non-notifiable diseases, and consider providing Pig Development Scheme funding for specific cases — for temporary housing etc.

40. As a matter of urgency all pig industry stakeholders to work together to prepare a National PEDv Contingency Plan.
41. When preparing the National PEDv Contingency Plan, investigate whether AHVLA and Defra could provide the same sort of support (albeit non-statutory) as they would in a notifiable disease outbreak — for instance defining movement restrictions and undertaking tracings in and out of the farm in question.

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