

The 20th JSR Genetics Technical Conference

Chairman's introduction to the Conference

A warm welcome to the 20th JSR Technical Conference. To see so many of you here is a good reflection on this conference. You are all busy people but you make the effort to come here today and that must mean it's worth it. I say this because it is our 20th Conference. It might be the time to draw stumps and do something else with the time and investment that goes into the day. We have discussed this internally but have come out in favour of batting on.

This is because we are a science based business and scientific solutions will ensure that we are able to feed a world population of 9 billion by 2050. Without science the world will continue to lose its capacity to feed itself. That sounds like common sense to you and me but there are an increasing number of people in Europe who are anti science. I will come back to that in a moment.

The theme for the 20th JSR Technical Conference is 'Opportunities in turbulent times'. The pig industry knows all about turbulence. Two years ago we were dealing with the effects of the Foot & Mouth outbreak from Pirbright. A year ago we were trying to cope with record high feed prices and today we have H1N1 to contend with. Mercifully the UK has not suffered the fall in consumption of pork that has occurred in markets around the world such as North America. We probably have the MP's expenses scandal to thank for this but also the continued over-exaggeration by the government of the risks whipped up by a compliant Press means most people in Britain just don't believe the hysteria anymore – and they are right of course.

So seizing opportunities in turbulent times is something the world pig industry has done many times over.

At present governments around the world are focussed on 3 areas in agriculture. Food security, competitiveness and climate change. Different countries give different priorities. Russia would put food security No1 closely followed by competitiveness. Climate change would be a distant third. Hilary Bean in the UK would put climate change as No1 priority and now food security would be No2 Competitiveness is a distant third. But we have to acknowledge progress. Two years ago DEFRA had a statement on their website that said 'Food security is neither necessary or desirable'.

Government legislation on climate change is the only one of the three that we might not regard as an opportunity. However I don't think we have too much to be afraid of here unless we do nothing. Understanding greenhouse gas emissions from pigs and identifying options for emissions reduction will put us on the front foot and prevent inappropriate legislation being placed upon us.

It's a good time too because politicians and supermarkets are all talking about the carbon footprint. Most have little idea of what they are talking about or are using a selected method of calculation to show their product, supermarket or government in a good light. Also I believe that the pig carbon footprint will not be too bad. In fact there is a close correlation between productivity and low carbon emissions. The more productive you are the less CO₂

equivalents per kg or hectare. Not good for organic farmers but good for modern pig farming. It means that for green house gasses intensiveness is more sustainable. Big is beautiful!

So science is going to produce most of the solutions in these 3 areas that concern governments around the world. Except that the EU and the UK are anti science. The view of the role of science has changed now from a force of good to protect us from the evils of nature to, suddenly, a force or technological machine that big business brought in and which is destroying and polluting nature. And now nature is going to take its revenge with global warming. It's a new religion, Eco-religion, and religions tend to fight science.

It should be that if you communicate science clearly to politicians and the public you get better policies and improve public perception. This rarely happens now – increasingly facts don't matter. Influence matters more and well funded single issue groups carry a lot of influence in the UK and Brussels.

On food security and competitiveness the EU fiddles while Rome burns and all their efforts will be directed to climate change measures based on populism rather than science based decision making. Meanwhile the Americans will focus on food security and competitiveness issues which will be the major factor in whether we are successful in feeding 9 billion people by 2050. Monsanto an American company, have more of an understanding of the needs of the human race than most EU policy makers, environmentalists or globe trotting pop stars.

But that is not the reason we have purchased a nucleus unit in Canada! We have purchased it as a safe haven for our genetics and an ideal location to export breeding animals into Latin America and Asia. It also gives us a strong link with the Prairie Swine Centre in Saskatchewan who have a worldwide reputation for research in nutrition, engineering, applied animal behaviour and production management. You will have seen the banner promoting PSC and I am delighted that Lee Whittington, President and CEO of PSC is here today. The first pigs have already arrived in Elstow with the second batch due next month.

This investment really moves us up a gear in our ability to supply competitively to international markets. Canadian agriculture is very export orientated and government and state policies tend to be focussed on helping rather than hindering. Agriculture is seen as part of the solution rather than the problem. Notwithstanding this Canadian Pig Producers have had a tough time over the last few years not helped by the COOL Legislation, high feed costs and a strong currency, Ben Wooley will present his experiences to us this morning.

Next week we start work on our 8,500 pig finishing facility in East Yorkshire, which will be the biggest in the UK. This £2 million investment will replace some worn out facilities and allow us to finish more of our own pigs. The facility will compliment our focus on feed efficiency, which makes up 60% of the cost of production. UK producers need to be like their European partners and have feed efficiency information such as FCR and saleable meat per tonne of feed at their fingertips. There is still rather a lot of myth and guesswork on sire line efficiency in the UK. We intend to use the facility as a showcase for our sire line products and twelve Gro-master Pro Sorters will allow us to feed 3 different rations and produce accurate real-time batch information.

Next month we will also start work on the JSR Cookery School. This facility will allow us to put more effort into our meat quality work both in beef and pork. Givendale Prime beef sales continue to rise due to the wow factor from the exceptional eating quality. We aim to do the

same with Crackling Farm Pork but based on sound science rather than a good story. There are quite a few myths and emotional rhetoric with regard to pork eating quality. It will also complement the work we are doing with the University of Guelph on boar taint. Its main income though will be as a Cookery School with no end of options for all age groups and genders. It seems entirely appropriate therefore to have Rob Rees – the Cotswold Chef to speak to us today.

We believe it is essential to have an industry platform to present science in an understandable way which can be applied at farm level. It will also help improve public perception of science by engaging with delegates across the food chain and through the publicity generated from the Conference by the Pro Science Press invited here today. If the Conference also helps the understanding at government level too then we have an opportunity to influence better policies. So whether to continue to run the JSR Technical Conference or not really was a no contest. Location is a different matter. Saskatoon, Canada must now come into the running as an alternative to Nottingham, England.

T S Rymer
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