



**Farm
Health
Planning**

Healthy Animals
Healthy Profits

Healthy animals – healthy profits

Farm health planning is not new. Many farmers are already planning for the health of their livestock and reaping the benefits.

Proactive farm health planning can offer real benefits for you, both in terms of the health of your livestock and the profitability and sustainability of your business.

Farm health planning involves:

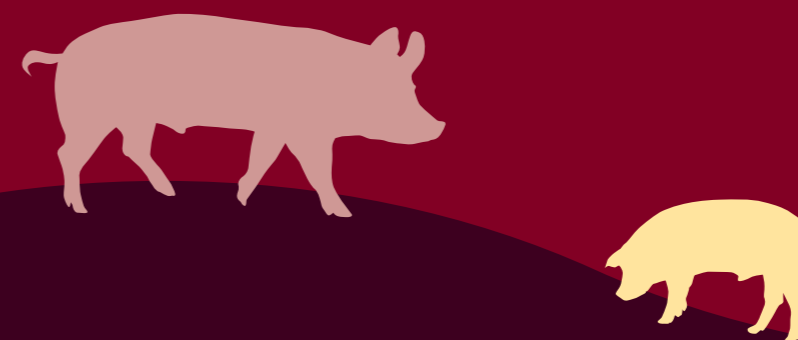
- Understanding how much disease costs your business each year
- Developing a health plan with your vet or adviser
- Regularly reviewing the progress of your plan
- Ensuring bought-in animals do not pose a disease risk to the existing animals

For more information on farm health planning visit:
www.defra.gov.uk/fhp

To find out more or get involved in **Farm Health Planning** in your local area contact:

Farm Health Planning

Pigs



**FARMERS
WEEKLY ACADEMY**
LEARNING FOR YOUR FARMING FUTURE

www.fwi.co.uk/academy

A series of livestock articles in association with Farm Health Planning

An industry led partnership in association with Defra www.defra.gov.uk/fhp



In the sixth of our series on farm health planning, MLC vet **Derek Armstrong** outlines the performance and financial benefits associated with health planning in the pig sector

Health planning is not new to pig farmers. However, on a busy unit where workloads are constantly changing it is easy for planning to prevent disease to be overlooked. Health planning is, therefore, all about being more systematic in identifying, evaluating and controlling the challenges to pig health.

Health planning does not begin and end with the development of a health plan. The health plan must be put into practice and its effectiveness reviewed regularly. These regular reviews should drive a cycle of continuous improvement in health status on the farm and of its productivity.

Diseases cost

Disease hits the producer directly in the pocket. A simple example is that when growing pigs are challenged by high levels of infection, the immune system kicks into top gear. This has a marked effect, reducing growth by up to 100g a day, which means it takes an extra 17 days to reach slaughter weight.

Enzootic pneumonia (EP) is a common problem that can be an expensive affair when poorly managed. The extra cost for EP problems ranges from 66p a pig to as

much as £2.18 a pig. Behind this extra cost lies reduced growth rate of up to 75g a day, poorer feed conversion and increases in labour and feeding days coupled with vaccination and/or treatment costs. Severe problems with respiratory diseases can result in even higher costs.

Health planning

Failure to plan is often simply a plan to fail and this is particularly true for pig health. Disease is always a potential threat, more a question of when, not if. Drawing up the plan should involve not only the unit's vet and other advisers but also all staff on the unit, as it is the people who work with pigs who will make the plan work or fail. The plan needs to be practical and take into account the particular circumstances on the unit. Health plans are only likely to be effective if all staff agree that the targets and the strategies are practical and sensible.

Health plans should identify the best ways to prevent or treat disease in the animals on the unit and to protect their welfare. It should set clear, realistic goals and outline the practical strategies to achieve these goals, including any necessary changes in farm practice. Wherever

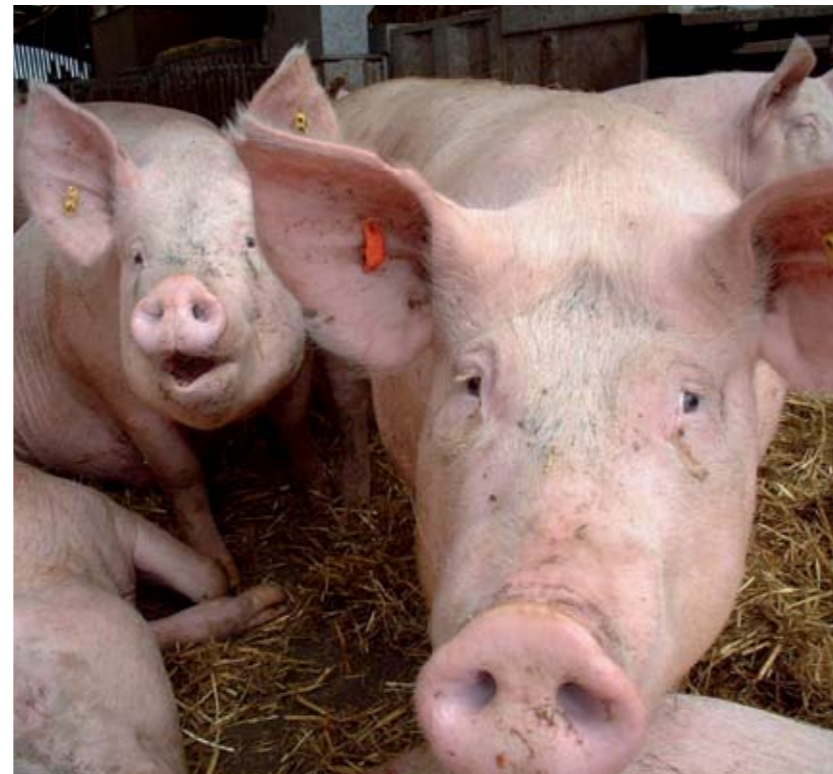
possible protocols and procedures should be developed that make it easier to follow the plan than not to do so. The plan must be put into practice, reviewed regularly and updated in the light of experience and progress.

Keep disease out

The first and most important part of any health plan should concentrate on keeping the farm free of diseases which are not already on the unit.

The key biosecurity areas you need to consider for your farm's health plan are:

1. The biggest threat to pig health is other pigs. The greatest risk of introducing a new disease comes when you buy-in new pigs.
 - * Check health status of suppliers
 - * Isolate pigs until you're sure they are healthy
 - * Check pigs remain healthy after mixing
2. The biggest threat to the health of young pigs on your farm comes older pigs on your farm.
 - * Have a strict one-way flow for pigs and people
 - * Do not share equipment between age groups unless cleaned and disinfected so well you would be happy to stir your tea with it
3. Vehicles, particularly those that have been on other pig units, are the next biggest risk for introducing disease.
 - * Keep vehicles out
 - * Properly clean and disinfect any vehicles that must come in
 - * Fallen stock vehicles are high risk – take extra precautions
 - * Load pigs at the edge of your unit
 - * Clean and disinfect the collection point and loading bays after every use
4. Vermin can also introduce other diseases, particularly Salmonella, on to your farm
 - * Have a vermin control programme that is effective all year round
 - * Keep the unit clean and tidy. Get rid of rubble where rodents can live and breed
 - * Control bird access where possible ie keep lids on feed hoppers, sweep up feed spills
5. Visitors who have taken sensible precautions are a low biosecurity risk.
 - * Make visitors wear clean boots and overalls



- * Overnight freedom from pig contact with a change of clothes and a shower before arrival should be enough except for very high health units
- * Make them wash their hands and sign your visitors book before entry

Stop the spread of disease

The next step in health planning is to decide how to tackle diseases that are already on your unit. Do you know what these are? The British Pig Health Scheme (BPHS) provides members and their vets with valuable information on the health status of finished pigs sent to abattoirs taking part in the scheme. For conditions such as Enzootic pneumonia, the information shows how many pigs are being affected and how severely damaged their lungs are. It can also show how this is changing over time and whether disease control measures such as vaccination are being effective. Results from the ZAP Salmonella programme will tell you whether Salmonella needs to be tackled on your farm.

When you know how diseases are affecting the pigs on your farm you can then tackle them more effectively through the farm health plan. Every health plan is unique but the areas to consider what you need to do on your farm include the following:

Health planning needs action as well as thought.

1. Cleaning and disinfection

Thorough cleaning and disinfection between batches. Keep passages, walkways, loading ramps and trailers clean and disinfected.

2. Batches

Keep batches separate, all-in-all-out or batch rear/finish/farrow wherever possible.

3. Mixing pigs

Change system to avoid or minimise the stress of mixing. Don't put poor pigs back with younger ones. Adopt a "slow track" system for casualties.

* Farm health planning is an industry led initiative in partnership with DEFRA. Our initiative includes farmers, vets and experienced representatives from a variety of poultry and game organisations across industry. We are working together to develop information, systems and training to help farmers continue to achieve the best from their livestock and prevent disease.

This includes tools that will highlight the benefits of a proactive approach and help you:

- * Manage costs
- * Save time
- * Reduce avoidable stock losses and
- * Improve performance on your farm

4. Vaccination

Develop a vaccination programme in consultation with your vet and make sure that animals are vaccinated and get their boosters as scheduled.

5. Medication

Follow the instructions for medication prescribed by your vet.

6. Equipment

Keep separate implements for each group. Clean and disinfect between groups if shared – barrows, tools, tractors, instruments and farrowing house trays.

7. Order of work

Start with youngest pigs and work up through age groups; change overalls at end of day; wash hands, clean and disinfect boots regularly.

8. Personal hygiene

Clean and disinfect boots and wash hands between houses/groups. Provide staff toilet with wash basin, always wash hands after use. Take care if staff have salmonella-like infections.

9. Outdoor pigs

Rotate pasture regularly, especially weaners – every group, replace wallows regularly.

Increase resistance to disease

The severity of disease is affected not only by the cause of the infection but also by the quality of the environment and the resistance of the pig. It is particularly important to make sure all piglets get enough colostrum because the antibodies in colostrum protect pigs from common diseases for up to 10 weeks. It is also important to feed an appropriate balanced diet free from spoilage and mycotoxins. Feed bins need to be pest proof and cleaned and disinfected regularly. Don't forget about the water your pigs drink. Clean

the water system regularly, use a known safe water source and keep outdoor pigs away from watercourses.

Adequate ventilation is vital for pigs of all ages and good temperature control is particularly important for the young weaned pig. Pigs are very sensitive to draughts and growth rates are reduced in very dusty conditions, so try to avoid these.

Professionalism

The key to any health plan is the commitment and skills of people working with pigs. They need to be able to recognise when health problems occur and to know what to do. Staff training can be part of your health plan. There is now a pig industry training strategy that aims to

attract and retain highly motivated and enthusiastic people into the industry and provide training in a format that is practical, relevant and easy to access. Staff should be encouraged to gain NPTC certificates in pig husbandry.

All health plans need to be reviewed and updated regularly in consultation with a vet for advice on disease prevention, control, diagnosis, and treatment. If the health plan hasn't worked you need to identify why it has not delivered and make changes. A health plan that has achieved its targets needs to be updated with new targets – there is always room for improvement. Disease affects performance so herd health plans can make a positive contribution to your business.

Test your knowledge

1. The biggest risk of introducing a new disease to your farm comes from:

- a Visitors
- b Purchased pigs
- c Birds
- d Rodents
- e Older pigs on farm

2. How much could Enzootic pneumonia be costing per pig?

- a £1
- b £5
- c £10
- d £25

3. Who should be involved in health planning?

- a Vet
- b Owner
- c Manager
- d Stockpeople
- e All of the above

4. How often should health plans be reviewed?

- a Never
- b Annually
- c Quarterly
- d If there is a new disease

5. BPHS stands for?

- a Bright Pigs Have Sense
- b British Pig Health Scheme
- c Bright Pink Health Scheme
- d Beet Pulp Helps Salmonella

6. What is the most important factor increasing resistance to disease in piglets?

- a Draughts
- b Fluctuating temperatures
- c Colostrum intake
- d Vaccination
- e Mixing pigs from several sources

7. Which of the following increase the risk of disease in pigs?

- a Draughts
- b Fluctuating temperatures
- c Vaccination
- d Mixing pigs from several sources
- e All of the above

8. When buying-in pigs should you?

- a Check source health status
- b Quarantine
- c Vaccinate
- d Check for disease after mixing
- e All of the above

Answers: 1b, 2a, 3e, 4c, 5b, 6c, 7a, b and d, 8e



Turning your back on health planning is no longer an option.