

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all.

Seminar 2013

A brilliant Seminar; our favourite venue, great to be back; excellent speakers; great balance of subjects; all comments made to Trustees by various delegates throughout the course of this year's Seminar, held at Harper Adams University.

The Trust also received positive comments on the balance and topicality of the subjects and the quality of the speakers. All of which is very nice for the Trustees of course, but it is the delegates which make or break a Seminar. And the Trustees found the delegates to be courteous, willing to participate and professional when they did so. There were plenty of questions for the speakers which is always an encouraging sign.

We enjoyed papers on the Friday night by Phil Latham of the National Farmers Union and Liz Mullineaux from Secret World Badger sanctuary on the Bovine TB control debate, where two different points of view on the ongoing badger cull were put

forward. On the Saturday we fascinated/concerned by Robert Huey's paper on African Swine Fever; a disease that we all will have read about, and which is currently sweeping Westwards across Russia, and which we might all be wise to read up about at least once more. Then followed papers on Farm to Fork by Richard Griffiths of the British Poultry Council, German Meat Inspection by Dr. Katrin Schumann and a presentation by some bloke called Ian Robinson on Generalised C. Ovis; a call for consistency (I hope that delegates enjoyed that one anyway).

The main "meat" of this year's Seminar was always likely to be the papers delivered by Ron Spellman representing the EWFC and Javier Dominguez and Martin Evans of the FSA on Visual Only Inspection. A topic currently raising great passions and much debate among our membership, Javier and Martin must have felt a little like Daniel entering the lions den, and their efforts and time in coming to talk to us are very much appreciated!!!

There followed a lengthy question and answer session which, unfortunately, still did not allow time enough for every delegate wishing to pose their question to do so. I think the very competent way that the Chairs of all the sessions allowed as many questions to be taken as they did should also be acknowledged.

I think it is fair to say that passions were running fairly high during this particular Q & A session, but that the questions were

succinct and relevant and the answers delivered frankly.

One point that all parties agreed upon is that the “only” should be dropped from “Visual Only Inspection” (VOI) and that the term “Visual Inspection” (VI) should be referenced in future discussions.

It should now be very apparent (it was certainly very plainly conveyed at Seminar) that member’s concerns stem from a common perception that, under a VI system, more pathologies and faecal contamination will be missed (acknowledged in the original EFSA report) and that VI will lead to a lowering of standards.

Some members feel very aggrieved that MHI’s are apparently being held accountable for the spread of microbiological contamination when they are very well versed and adherent to best inspection practices (two or even three knife techniques) and that the multitude of operatives hands during the course of production does not appear to have been taken into consideration. A pig line running at 400 per hour means a pig goes by each position on the line every 9 seconds, so you have to question just how microbiologically “clean” that process could possibly be? To then suggest that MHI’s, with their acute awareness of cross contamination contribute significantly further to an increased bacterial loading has incensed some of the membership.

Early feedback has indicated that some members feel a little easier on some aspects of visual only inspection, or, more particularly, some of the criteria that would have to be applied if VI comes to

pass. But the overarching point of view remains that this is not in the best interests of the consumer. The presentation by Dr. Schumann was largely about VI inspection of pigs in Germany, where trials have been in place since 2009. Dr. Schumann clearly indicated that in cases where FCI’s were not provided, or not provided to an adequate standard, all pigs in the relevant batch are subjected to full post-mortem inspection. It was also apparent across the course of the Seminar that everybody was in agreement that FCI’s as they are currently provided are not of a standard where they could be considered to be adequate.

Dr. Schumann also informed us that Serological testing was used to detect Mycobacterium Avium/Intracellulare in pig herds prior to them being sent for slaughter and if there was any risk of these organisms being present in the herd, then again, the pigs would be subjected to full PM inspection.

Martin Evans of the FSA indicated that there will be further opportunities for MHI’s within the FSA and he urged members to put themselves forward and take advantage of these opportunities. He also expressed his desire to see the FSA and the AMI “working together” to make Visual Inspection work.

The Council’s thinking here is that adopting a system of Visual Inspection and that the apparent willingness to consider conditions that are not zoonotic as little more than quality issues, is misguided, and that if we did not express our concerns at the earliest opportunity then we would be letting the membership

down. Be assured; there is no doubt that those concerns have been expressed, and heard, and this is now a matter of record!!!

I hope that all this year's presentations will be made available through the pages of the Meat Hygienist in this and future issues.

At the end of our Seminar, immediately after the formal dinner, we awarded the Robin Irish Award. This award is presented to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to aspects of meat inspection, animal health or welfare, or who have given outstanding service to the Association over many years. This year I am extremely pleased to announce that the recipient was Charlie Mason, Technical Director with the Humane Slaughter Association for his sterling work in the field of animal welfare.

Charlie has been a long time supporter of the AMI and a regular speaker at Seminar over the years. Indeed, he rounded off our Seminar this year with a very entertaining talk about the history of Uppingham Fatstock Market.

A very worthy recipient, our wholehearted congratulations go out to Charlie.

The European Working Community for Food Inspection and Consumer Protection (EWFC)

Ron Spellman, Assistant General Secretary to the EWFC clearly expressed the Boards concerns about Visual Inspection at Seminar. He informed us that the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH) had agreed the decision to adopt (some) of the EFSA opinion and

submitted their proposal to the Environment Committee just a couple of days before it broke for Summer recess. Consequently, there were only a very few days when the Committee reconvened for it to be scrutinised and for any objections to be made. It is the case that if no objections were received then the proposal would have been immediately adopted "unopposed".

Ron informed the Seminar that such an objection has indeed been made and the matter will now be voted upon on the 25th September. If a majority is not reached in favour of the proposal the matter will then go to a full plenary vote in the parliament itself, sometime around the 7th – 10th October. This would at least allow time for the proposal to be fully considered by all interested parties.

A Point of Order

I was criticised at one point during the Seminar for my last report in The Meat Hygienist, it being called ill informed among other things.

I would like to make clear in this issue just how these reports are compiled;

The first point to note is that the opinion reflected in these reports is not necessarily my own but that of the Council.

Secondly; that the Council has many sources of information, all of which are taken in to consideration before that opinion is formed.

The third point I would like to make is that this opinion is not always going to be what some interested parties are going to wish

to hear, and I do expect (and get) some criticism, sometimes. However, if I ever shied away from expressing AMI opinion on these sometimes difficult subjects, then I would no longer be the right person to be in this role. That's something for the membership to decide!!!

In the meantime, I will continue to follow the direction of the Council.

As always,

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson