

General Secretary's Report



Hello to you all.

As you will by now probably all be only too aware, the decision by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH) to adopt a visual system of inspection in pigs has now been voted through the European parliament in a full plenary session. Visual inspection of pigs is going to happen. You will all be aware of the position that the Association took on this matter and we stand by the reasons that we stated for not supporting the original proposal. But the situation has now changed; our concerns, well intentioned and plainly stated in an assertive though courteous manner, have been heard, discussed and considered, and the politicians decided that our concerns did not outweigh the perceived benefits by a vote of 368 to 268. This means that, as professional people, we now have to accept the situation and do our level best to accommodate and make the system work. Look at it this way if you will; as employees, we are contractually bound to perform our role in the manner that our employer prescribes.

The issue is still a “cause for concern” among the membership and I would like to include here for you an extract of one such letter that I have received;

“A bit of a rant

So as I understand it, the purpose of meat inspection is threefold – to protect public health and to carry out surveillance for animal health and animal welfare.

And, the whole direction of the modernisation of meat inspection was to enhance inspection with audit and holistic inspection systems which would cover the food production chain from ‘farm to fork’.

Inherent to these systems was the communication of information from the farm to the slaughterhouse, Food Chain Information, which would allow the animals to be slaughtered to first be categorised according to ‘risk’, not just in matters of public health significance but also animal health or animal welfare. This, as it stands is certainly not ‘fit for purpose’ and, once a suitable system is in place, the Vets in plants will at times, no doubt, have to demonstrate considerable fortitude when ‘traditional’ inspection is indicated.

Equally important was the feedback to the farm of origin; the information gained through ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection. This includes information on public health issues, such as C. Bovis findings but also findings of significance to the farmer on animal health and animal welfare, such as Fascioliasis, Hydatidosis, Ascariasis and pneumonic conditions

So, we are now going to post-mortem inspect pigs solely by gazing at them as they sweep by. It has been accepted that 'beady eyed' inspectors can see all sides and all nooks and crannies of a carcass, detaining and recording all incidences of pleurisy, contamination, tail biting, abscess, arthritis or bruising. In inspecting offal however, the inspectors will be required to use the powers of their tissue penetrating gaze to permit the detection and recording of conditions such as pericarditis, endocarditis and the degree of milk spot damage to livers, lungworm infestations, cysts of kidneys, abscesses or tumours in tissues.

Gazing into the distant (perhaps) future, Inspectors will do well to perfect their tissue penetrating powers of vision before visual inspection moves onto sheep if they are to ensure the pluck has even been removed, never mind the degree of purulence in cases of sepsis in the pleura or peritoneum".

At a meeting with the FSA in early November the Association acknowledged the facts of the situation and our intention to work with the FSA in a manner that befits a professional organisation. We did ask for clarification on some of the questions that have been raised thus far and stated our opinion that MHI's and the AMI could have been better informed from the outset. On a personal level, having previously been described as "ill informed" I sought to learn that which I didn't know and to clarify that which I had misunderstood. The answers to most of these issues was, that at the time of asking, were simply not known, and that several working groups have already or

are due to be, set up as a matter of urgency. I would imagine that, to a lot of people, this seems to a strange way of going about things, but the way this situation has come about should be kept in mind. This is a piece of EU legislation and it is down to the member states to implement it and make it work, and that is the stage that the UK finds itself in at this point in time. At the meeting with FSA, the Association re-asserted that there should be a two way dissemination of information, and that feed back and opinion should freely stated, be that positive or negative. It is to be hoped (by both parties) that where feedback is negative that any criticism is constructive criticism and that possible solutions are put forward for discussion.

EC 882/2004

As the membership may be aware, the EU Commission is in the process of reviewing regulation EC 882/2004. This will prove to be a massive undertaking and the revised regulation will supercede regulations EC 852, 853, and, most importantly for meat inspection 854/2004.

The revised regulation has the potential to influence the way meat inspection is carried out in the future, and, perhaps most importantly, by whom. It will detail what should be done and who is permitted/required to do it. Therefore, it is imperative that the revision is well thought through and all stakeholders consulted. The Association is involved in this process and also working with our colleagues in the EWFC, our main concerns being with the maintenance of an independent system of inspection that

addresses not just the safety of meat produced but the wholesomeness of the product as well.

Veterinary Advisor

The Veterinary Advisor to the Association, Robert Huey has taken on the role of Chief Veterinary Officer in Northern Ireland and the National Council would like to convey their congratulations to Robert on his new appointment and wish him every success for the future.

Unfortunately, Robert will now be stepping back from the AMI Veterinary Advisor role to more fully concentrate on his new position. His efforts for the Association over the past few years, particularly in working towards achieving a formal professional recognition for Meat Hygiene Inspectors, cannot be understated. We would not be in the favourable position we currently find ourselves in without his advice and guidance and he leaves us with our profound gratitude.

It does leave the role vacant going into the New Year but suggestions for a replacement have been forthcoming and I hope to be able let you know exactly who that might be by the time of the Association's Annual General Meeting.

C. Ovis - a call for consistency

Following a consultation exercise by a working group set up to look specifically at this issue I am extremely gratified to be able to inform you that an agreement between industry and the regulators has now been reached. There were several different ideas put forward for consideration by the working group,

including a model based on that used by our antipodean friends. But the model that was agreed by the group as being most suitable for the purpose was essentially that proposed by the Association. The FSA have documented the details in their "Tec files" and have requested that this procedure is adopted immediately. I sincerely hope that this will now be fully implemented by all MHI's and allow the consistency that industry have been asking for to actually happen.

AGM

The Association's AGM 2014 will be held, by popular request, at the Aztec West Hotel, Bristol on Saturday 12th April. The meeting will start at 10:30 and all members of the Association are welcome to attend. I would ask that members wishing to do so book their place by dropping me an e-mail so that we can ensure that a lunch is provided.

As this is my last report for 2013 I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our members a very merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,

Ian Robinson