

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

The welfare of outdoor kept pigs

In the UK an increasing percentage of the pig breeding herd is being kept outdoors. Some surveys have suggested that perhaps 30 to 35 per cent of sows now spend all or a significant part of their year outside. They are usually kept in groups in paddocks containing a number of small moveable huts which have been designed and constructed to accommodate a breeding sow and her litter.

This move towards de-intensification in pig breeding has generally been welcomed by the animal welfare community but it has also, perhaps inevitably, led to the appearance of new or different welfare problems.

The UK Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) was asked by the national Agricultural Departments to consider the on-farm welfare of pigs kept outdoors and to make recommendations to the Agriculture Ministers. FAWC set up a working group which carried out an extensive consultative exercise, obtained oral and written evidence from experts in outdoor pig production and carefully examined the appropriate scientific and technical data. Visits were made to a number of outdoor pig farms; a seminar was held with invited experts from industry and research bodies and oral and written evidence was taken from protection societies.

The report, which has now been published, gives details of current practice within the industry and goes on to suggest changes which would improve the welfare of animals kept outdoors. There is a valuable technical appendix on site suitability for outdoor pigs. The general suggestion is made that the current statutory *Pig Welfare Code* which concentrates on the welfare of pigs kept indoors should possibly be supplemented by a separate document for pigs kept outside. This supplement could take on board the 48 recommendations made in the report.

This is a most useful and well thought out report; the implementation of its numerous recommendations must inevitably lead to an overall improvement in the welfare of the outdoor kept pig stock.

Report on the Welfare of Pigs Kept Outdoors. Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) (1996). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 38pp. Obtainable from FAWC, Government Buildings, Hook Rise South, Tolworth, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7NF, UK. Free.

Pig disease information on the Internet

Since October 1996, Cambridge University's Pig Disease Information Centre (PDIC) has been on-line. The URL (Internet address) of the PDIC web site is <http://www-pdic.vet.cam.ac.uk/>. From this base, clicking on icons provides round the clock access to many other pig information sites around the world. The PDIC provides information on diseases, breeding and infertility, UK and international news, and it also provides search facilities and discussion pages for vets.

<http://www-pdic.vet.cam.ac.uk/>. Pig Disease Information Centre, University of Cambridge, Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ES, UK.