

2TS Recording project: Maximising the value of data collected from recording systems commonly used on pig farms in England (BPEX field trial)

The 2TS Recording project was a field trial involving six different pig producers. Each farm was visited by Danish pig consultant and ex production manager, Sanne Baden, and BPEX knowledge transfer managers on a quarterly basis. Producers were also sent monthly reports on what the data was saying, what progress was being made against set targets and where the focus should be on-farm for maximum benefit.

The project started with a review of what and how each producer was recording. Without good record keeping, the decisions made on farm can be little more than guesswork. Sanne says: “You need to ensure that the right information is being collected and is recorded accurately before you can even start figuring out what it means and whether change is needed to keep performance and costs of production to target.

The key points which this trial has highlighted as crucial to maximising the value of data collected from recording systems, are:

- **Recording the right data**
- **Running regular reports**
- **Benchmarking**
- **Target setting**
- **Check progress and monitor interventions**

Recording the right data

The first step is to make sure all staff are recording data accurately and that what is actually happening in the herd is reflected in the data itself. Stock-taking and correctly naming different groups of pigs is critical, otherwise, information can be skewed. For example, one producer’s report was showing a high number of non-productive or ‘empty’ days. At first this looked like sows were returning or aborting but, on closer inspection, it turned out that the dataset still included sows which had already been culled.

Producers need to group their data in the same way as their pigs are grouped on the unit. For example, when a group of pigs is weaned, producers must also remember to tell the system how many have been moved or sold and where they have gone.

Sanne believes in making things as simple as possible, while still recording all the information it is important to know. In some cases, she has shown producers areas where recording new data would be useful, such as noting the age and cause of pre-weaning piglet deaths on a simple data sheet.

Running regular reports

Sanne has worked with producers in the project to help interpret their existing reports and has also suggested new reports that are useful, which producers may not have been aware of before.

Once producers have established which reports to run and analyse to help them monitor key performance areas, Sanne recommends having a daily or weekly checklist or ‘to do’ list to remind them and their staff. It can be set up within the recording system and should include both which reports to run and the specifics of what to check within the data.

It is also important to show or send the most relevant reports to everybody involved in the management of the unit so that causes and effects of any changes can be discussed and understood in more detail.

As a starting point, Sanne has suggested a few of the most useful reports to run:

- Weekly performance against target (including targeted farrowings and numbers weaned)
- Performance of sows by parity (to check gilt management policy, parity two dips, etc.)
- When sows are returning (and whether they are being identified on time)
- Effect of breed, age of gilt at first service and influence of lactation length on next performance
- Parity distribution graph (to see whether the replacement strategy is working)
- Stock take (to check that the correct number and type of animals are in the recording programme).

Producers can also talk to their software provider to check they're getting the most from the particular program and reviewing the most relevant information.

Benchmarking

Before you can set realistic targets it is sometimes helpful to know what other producers in the industry are doing and what is typical in similar systems. BPEX updates its physical performance data on the website every quarter, using 12 month rolling data from Agrosoft. Producers can quickly compare their figures with the industry average, the top third or the top 10% [here](#).

Target setting

For Sanne, target setting is central to achieving overall performance objectives.

"It's essential that all targets are realistic and that everybody knows what is expected of them. Progress against these should be reviewed and any variances discussed with all staff involved. Targets can be entered into some recording systems and a report of performance versus target printed out. Performance targets and progress reports can also be posted on the staff room notice board.

Check progress and monitor interventions

Following the implementation of any action plan, it is useful to review progress by looking at reports, such as those in section two and talking things over with everybody involved in the unit. Vets, nutritionists, breeding company representatives and staff are all important to include when working out the cause of a performance issue and what steps can be taken to address it. More heads are better than one and it's important that all changes in herd management are practical and coordinated properly if change is going to be made.

Some changes will take a while to show themselves in the results, whereas other things will be noticed much sooner. It might also be the case that a particular intervention was not the right one. In this case, a tweak might be needed to keep things on track, or a new strategy trialled instead.