



Real Welfare update for Vets – January 2014

No. 6

Headlines

- Real Welfare sampling strategy to be streamlined
- Sampling numbers likely to stay the same
- For small pens with good visibility (e.g. ≤ 25 pigs), pigs can be scored from outside the pen (provided all pigs have been seen up and walking)
- Recording of mild body marks and mild tail lesions remains optional
- Recording of enrichment use remains optional
- Box ticking and information gathering to be reduced
- Grow outs to be included in requirement to receive Real Welfare assessments

When will changes come into effect?

The BPEX Board have already accepted the recommendations and the Red Tractor TAC is likely to follow. In the meantime BPEX are working with statisticians to check that the proposed sampling streamlining will not adversely affect accuracy.

Once this has been confirmed and Red Tractor TAC agreement has been received, the changes will come into effect. **You will be notified via email as to what date that will be.**

BPEX will aim to update all relevant documents on the website, including datasheets in line with the agreed date.

Press release following third Real Welfare meeting:

REAL WELFARE REVIEW LATEST

Real Welfare sample sizes are recommended to remain unchanged following the latest meeting of the review committee.

The question arose because of a change to the protocols in November when the requirement to score mild body marks and tail lesions was suspended.

The meeting involved people from across the pig industry including producers, vets, the NPA and BPEX.

All those at the meeting pledged their continued support for the principles of assessing welfare outcomes on farms through Real Welfare.

This was the third meeting of the group which is charged with developing the Real Welfare assessment protocols to make them more acceptable and practical, while maintaining accuracy as a useful farm management tool.

The group recommended maintaining the current requirement to sample up to 900 pigs per year, subject to confirmation that this will have a minimal effect on accuracy, as expected.

Red Tractor Pigs Chairman Mike Sheldon said: “The practicalities of the sampling strategy will be streamlined, making it easier to do the assessment, while maintaining current provisions for small farms and batch finishers. As recommended at the previous review meeting the assessment of mild body marks and mild tail lesions will remain optional.”

The Pig Veterinary Society agreed to co-ordinate the development of guidelines for an overall farm finisher welfare assessment. Its aim is to encompass the farm vet’s overall judgement of the welfare of all finishers on farm, including pigs outside the sample assessed for Real Welfare, such as those in hospital pens. It is expected that this will be included in the existing Veterinary Health Plan

The requirement to collect information on the use of environmental enrichment remains optional for the time being. However, a working group will revisit the challenge of collecting objective, meaningful data which assesses pigs’ use of enrichment. Recording the types of enrichment that are present in the pens continues to be required.

The group recommended collection of additional information, such as ventilation systems and herd genetics, should be streamlined to reduce box ticking and duplication.

The next steps are for the recommendations to be reviewed and approved by the BPEX Board and Red Tractor Technical Advisory Committee. Systems for collecting and recording the information and guidance on the revised protocols will need to be updated and the new requirements are likely to be in place by the end of February.

Notes:

The group decided to maintain the sample size at 900 pigs/annum and three assessments/year, with the existing adjustments for small farms and farms with batches of 7-100kg pigs. The group also decided to introduce a criterion that each assessment should encompass at least six different pens, assuming there are >six pens on the farm.

What does it mean for vets?

Assessments should be more straightforward as (subject to confirmation) all pigs in each selected pen will now be sampled rather than the sub-sample used before. In many cases this will mean that, overall, fewer pens need to be sampled (the exception being farms with many pens of 25 pigs or less, where there will be no noticeable change).

Pens with up to and including 25 pigs, and where visibility is adequate, can now be scored from outside the pen, *provided that all pigs have been seen up and walking*. This should help to reduce vet time spent in pens, and also reduce health and safety risks.

The five required measures remain as hospital pigs, lameness, severe body marks, severe tail bites and enrichment *type*. Recording of mild body marks, mild tail lesions and enrichment *use* remains suspended, but the option to record these will still be supported.

The datasheets will be streamlined to reflect the new changes, you will notice that some questions on the sheet have been removed; we are also looking at increasing the number of prefilled answers on the portal to reduce duplication of data collection. New datasheets will be circulated by email and provided on the website in time for the changeover date.

Database update

Thank you for your patience whilst the database is being upgraded. We will re-open this for use by the end of the month. The bureau service has continued to transcribe as many of your assessments as possible, but please allow some extra time as the backlog that built up during database downtime is being cleared.

The high level of encryption we have been using on emailed results has been posing a challenge for users. We have now found a solution that still affords a good level of data security but is much more user friendly.

Once the database has reopened results can be downloaded directly using the pdf facility on your home page.

Inclusion of grow outs

To clarify: growouts are a subset of finishing units, and are therefore subject to Real Welfare assessments, just like any finishing unit with pigs >50kgs; please ensure that growout units receive these assessments.

A "growout" unit is a unit where candidate breeding animals, usually gilts, are housed. Typically this period is from 30kg through to 100kg, at which point the unselected animals are sent to slaughter, and the selected gilts are retained on site for up to 6 weeks ("hardening off"), prior to being moved to their breeding herd.