

TALKSHOP – November 2020

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Isn't that a poultry disease? Well yes, and the good news is that the H5N8 variant currently causing real problems in poultry has never been proved to infect pigs, and indeed is not theoretically thought to be able to. The bad news however is that several outbreaks have occurred within our practice area (in birds!) with the result that restriction zones have been applied around these holdings. If you are a pig keeper within a restriction zone and, have poultry on your holding, movements are automatically restricted for all other mammalian species on the holding. Usually in the case of pigs on the holding, movements can continue after a general license has been applied for and been granted but, this all takes a bit of extra time. People who find themselves in such a zone would do well to make sure they are ahead of the curve by applying for a movement license in good time. NPA have produced a really good summary document on AI and implications for pig units which is available on their website:

[The National Pig Association \(npa-uk.org.uk\)](http://npa-uk.org.uk)

BETAMOX LA

Norbrook who manufacture Betamox LA have just notified all users of a significant change in withdrawal period. For pigs this has changed from 19 to 42 days. The data sheet has also been amended to specify that a maximum of 4ml is injected at a single injection site. These changes apply immediately and to all stock in circulation, including that already on farm. If you need specific advice about Betamox LA, or other alternative medicines, please get in touch.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Currently pigs appear to be moving OK but there remains considerable concern across the sector regarding the potential for the backing up of pigs. Potential disruptive factors include Covid impacts on abattoirs or processing facilities, avian influenza challenges, EU pig market disruption resulting from ASF in Germany, and all of this on top of the usual Christmas break disruption. If you feel you be running into problems, please let us and NPA know at an early stage. The reality of contingency planning on many farms presents great difficulties- nobody puts up buildings just in case- and on many farms more than a few weeks without movements would see significant problems. However, a bit of planning now may make all the difference and all producers are urged to review their contingency plan, just in case. Further useful information and a template is available at:

<https://ahdb.org.uk/coronavirus-planning-and-compliance>

RUMA PUBLISHES PIG SECTOR ANTIBIOTIC TARGETS, 2020 to 2024

PHWC Antimicrobial Use subgroup has done a great job formulating the next round of antibiotic usage targets for the pig sector. Richard Lister and myself have both been heavily involved with this group and have also been responsible for taking these targets forward to RUMA. As we approached this second round of target setting, the pig sector found itself in a significantly better place with respect to antibiotic use than it was 5 years ago, and much credit must go to Mark White and Richard Lister for their contribution. The last couple of years have seen a lot of consultation with pig vets, pig farmers, regulatory authorities and many others. This was crucial work as we know the path forward from here is going to be more challenging, and we need to maintain that groundswell of support and positive attitude that has seen a 60% reduction so far. We also knew we had to broaden out the targets to include some more holistic elements to managing and monitoring pig health- chasing numbers in isolation just won't work in the longer term! A complicating element in all of this has been Brexit (as ever!) and 2 very important pieces of EU legislation concerning veterinary medicines and medicated feed that are racing towards us in 2022. We still do not know exactly how all of this will affect, or indeed how all of this will be transposed into UK legislation but, the

'playing field' most certainly will look different with regards pig health management and the role of antibiotics therein.

The TTF2 headline, and main numerical target, of a 30% reduction in pig sector use from 2020 to 2024 is most certainly ambitious but, we firmly believe this is achievable. We will obviously not know until early 2021 exactly where our 2020 use ended up but, it is likely the final number will be in the low 70's mg/kg PCU. So, the direction of travel must and will stay downward for the time being. There are many, many reasons why this is the case but prominent amongst them are the need to preserve the efficacy of these crucial treatments for the future and so that pig meat, and especially British Pork, can find itself in a resilient and sustainable position for consumers faced with alternative protein sources, or from pig meat from other countries. It is important to make the differentiation at this stage between the national targets across all production classes mentioned above, and its relationship with individual farm level use. Every farm is different, and it is well recognised that there will always be a spectrum of use. A large proportion of farms are already using well under the 70mg/kg figure and it would clearly be ridiculous to suggest they work upward towards the 'target'! We are well aware that there are significant differences in PCU ranges and averages for different types of production and so again, a single target doesn't work.

Persistently high users of antibiotics (PHU's) will be identified using new functionality in eMB and encouraged to develop an Antibiotic Reduction Plan (ARP) with their vet. This is about encouraging improvement, not publicly shaming anyone- eMB data remains a confidential resource with only producer and allocated vet having access. Other non-numerical targets in the pig sector cover off important aspects such as:

- monitoring for the development of AMR (after all, this is one of the main reasons for wishing to control antibiotic use).
- monitoring pig health using reliable tools such as Pig Health Scheme- hopefully to restart soon.
- encouraging a continued shift in mode of delivery of antibiotics to pigs from in-feed to in-water so as to help target pigs really requiring treatment, rather than a bigger population. We do hope some elements of post Brexit grant finding either within, or without, the Pathway may be helpful here.
- encouraging uptake of vet med training so that we can optimise responsible use and improve all of our understanding of pig health, and the part that antibiotics have to play.
- data in the form of eMB has been one of our 'trump cards' compared to some other sectors and in facilitating our progress. On-going timely submission will be a target.

Predicting the future is always fraught with difficulty and, in some instances, will be challenging but we have already made great progress and I really hope these proposals can take us forward again.

Wishing you and yours a very happy Christmas from all at the George

Richard B Pearson BVSc MRCVS