

A newsletter for pork producers



PigBytes

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Right to Farm

Jayne Morgan

The NSW Government has developed a comprehensive, State-wide policy to deal with the issue of 'right to farm'.

The concept of 'right to farm' has multiple facets but the common interpretation – and the one used in this policy - relates to a desire by farmers to undertake lawful agricultural practices without conflict or interference arising from complaints from neighbours and other land users.

As part of the Right to Farm policy NSW DPI Land Use Planning has conducted annual surveys of Local Councils in 2016 and 2017. The Stage 2 interim report for 2017 has just been released. Stage 1 and 2 reports can be found on the [NSW DPI website under Land Use Planning](#).

Just over 80% of respondents of the Stage 2 survey (2017) reported complaints about agricultural land use with 57% of Local government Areas (LGAs) reporting 1 to 2 complaints per month (that's 12 to 24 complaints per year).

Summer is the most common period for complaints and most common complaints are odour (67%), noise (57%), dust (48%), spray drift (37%) and escaping livestock (30%).

Poultry farms and piggeries receive most complaints but livestock grazing (particularly beef) and broad acre cropping are also common sources.

When asked what factors drive agricultural land use conflict in their area the common reasons suggested were:

- A lack of understanding by new residents of the realities of living in an agricultural area and of agricultural industry operation
- A lack of communication between neighbours and within the community
- Encroachment of non-agricultural uses into existing agricultural areas
- Close proximity of agricultural uses to non-agricultural properties

Forty four percent of local government areas that responded to these surveys in both Stage 1 and 2 felt that land use conflict was having an adverse impact on local agriculture.

[Read the Report.](#)

Noise and Odour complaints – it's not just the big farms

Jayne Morgan

There is a tendency to associate noise and odour complaints with large scale pig farms but the reality is that these complaints do occur for all size farms.

Recently I was made aware of an issue of noise and odour complaints against a small scale pig farm (6 to 8 pigs) in central NSW.

In cases like these it can be very difficult for the farmer because it means their operation is investigated and there is the assumption that they are at fault.

There can be visits from council rangers and planners, Local Land Service Biosecurity Officers and sometimes even the RSPCA. Farms that are APIQ accredited may even be visited by an APIQ QA auditor depending on the seriousness of the complaints.

Sometimes there are issues to be addressed but often there is no apparent breach. So what should

a farmer do if this situation becomes your problem?

Try to get your neighbours perspective. Find out if the odour and noise occurs all the time or specific times?

If you can get this information you have a chance of analysing your activities to find any likely causes for the noise or odour.

Odour sources on small scale farms can be:

- Manure piles and wet areas
- Wallows that have never been renovated - a rank smell escapes whenever pigs disturb the mud
- Disturbances to compost heaps – when turning the heap or when adding new material

Noise sources can be:

- Feeding times – pigs do get excited for their feed
- Mixing males and females – unwanted mating behaviour can result in lots of squeals
- Loose gates or feed bins especially if the pigs are nosing these items in anticipation of feed or water or release to the paddock.

These days many people in country areas work off farm and some of this employment means shift work or unusual hours.

Normal operations on farm can disturb peoples sleep and make for cranky neighbours and complaints to councils.

Build relationships with your neighbours. A discussion over a cup of coffee or the offer of a ham or roast at Christmas can help keep communications open and friendly.

Make sure you are aware of and apply setback or buffer distances from sensitive receptors such as neighbour's houses and water ways.

For more information on these read the [National Environmental Guidelines for Rotational Outdoor Piggeries](#) produced by Australian Pork Limited (APL).

Benchmarking to improve your business performance

Sara Willis and John Riley

“What a business needs most for its decisions — especially its strategic ones — are data about what goes on outside it. Only outside a business are there results, opportunities and threats.”

Peter Drucker, American management consultant, educator and author

Primary producers are bombarded with technical information by consultants, veterinarians and sales representatives promoting the latest technology or must use new product.

Information is transferred by the written word, workshops, on-farm trials, one-one visits, multi-media and social media.

The information promoted by these sources concentrates on increases in yield and reduction in losses. There is seldom any reference to the key performance indicator, which is profit.

Pork producers are continually coerced into utilising services and products which will increase pigs weaned per sow per year, improve feed conversion efficiency and reduce piglet mortality. Seldom are the financial implications for the specific business considered in detail by the provider of the information.

All pork producers implement some form of “Measure to Manage program”. They keep records of the breeding herd events (mating, farrowing, weaning), numbers born and weaned. The more progressive producers record the performance of the grower/ finishing herd.

The majority of producers have an aversion to weighing pigs and feed therefore results for the grower herd which utilises 80% of the feed purchased by the business are not accurate.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a way of measuring business performance against similar-sized businesses producing an equivalent product. It provides essential information for improving a business by comparison of results within a peer group to industry best practice at national and international levels.

Benchmarking allows a business to

- identify opportunities to be more competitive
- assess areas for reducing costs, increasing output and improving efficiency
- explore opportunities for the profitable adoption of new ideas and innovative practices
- forecast the impact of any change and implement plans for sustainable growth

Benchmarking in Practice

The objective of a benchmarking group is to develop strategies to ensure businesses are sustainable, innovative and competitive.

Businesses participating in a benchmarking group must collect financial as well as production data.

This data is analysed by a group facilitator and summaries of key financial and performance indicators are circulated to the members to allow the group to benchmark their businesses with their peers at regular (at least quarterly) meetings to allow members to make timely, accurate business decisions.

Group meetings provide a platform for information to be shared with experts from a range of disciplines which contributes to their continuous business improvement.

Group members discuss the results and identify key drivers of efficiency and profitability to fine tune management practices and quantify the adoption of new technology.

The presentation of the analysed data enables the members to rank their performance relative to their peers and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their systems.

Members implement change when appropriate to their business and results are reviewed and shared with their peers at subsequent meetings. Practices are refined based on results and experiences.

A key tool in enhancing improvements and practices could be the virtual farm tour providing an opportunity to see their peer's operations without compromising biosecurity standards.

Potential benefits

Some of the benefits of membership include:

- Commitment to collect data regularly in a structured format
- The sharing of problems and achievements
- Access to members who have experienced significant changes in the industry
- Peers identifying individual's problems
- A range of information flows – producer to producer, specialist speaker to group, facilitators to group
- Access to market intelligence
- Moral support in adversity
- Information for staff development
- Time out from the farm to gather information

As a group develops networking becomes increasingly valuable in motivating and assisting with decision making and can be on-going between meetings.

Whilst facilitators can justify the cost benefit of proven practices, members need motivation or ambition to adopt information and technologies.

Group members are more likely to adopt innovations after they have been influenced by and made aware of others' experiences.

The adoption of new information and technologies can be influenced by the individuality of businesses, age of the members and the individual's ambitions.

In measuring the success of a group, consideration must be given to the adverse effect of unplanned events which can limit business progress. Issues could include fire and flood, herd health breakdown, business restructure and personal setbacks.

The members need to be sympathetic to and understanding of the emotional impact of such events on the individual.

Measuring Performance

Evaluation of the member's performance against their peers and their competitors will be ongoing as their financial and physical performance is regularly updated. Evaluation of the results should be initiated by the facilitators with input from the member and their peers.

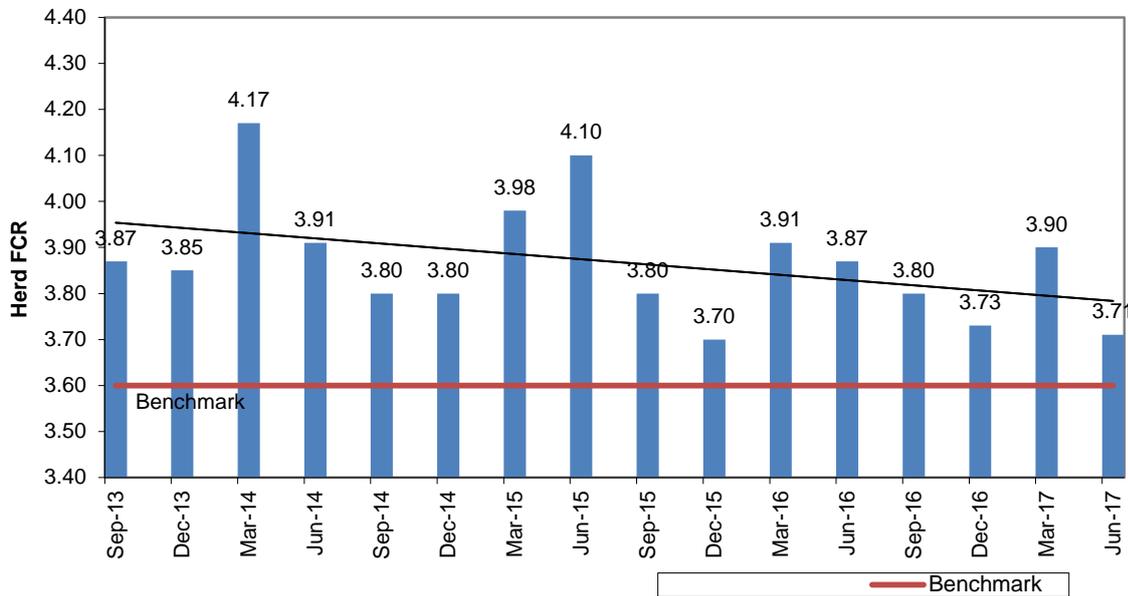
Financial results should be reported as costs and returns per kg carcass weight sold. The financial KPI's will include feed, labour, health, electricity and non-feed costs which when deducted from average pig meat price received gives the operating margin (normally excluding depreciation and interest)/kg of pig meat sold.

Performance KPI's calculated from detailed breeder and grower herd data include feed conversion ratio (FCR) and carcass weight sold/sow/yr.

Feed-conversion ratio is an important determinant of profitability for pork producers. Feed cost represents approximately 60% of the total cost of pork production with small increments in herd feed-conversion ratio having a major impact on the profitability of an operation.

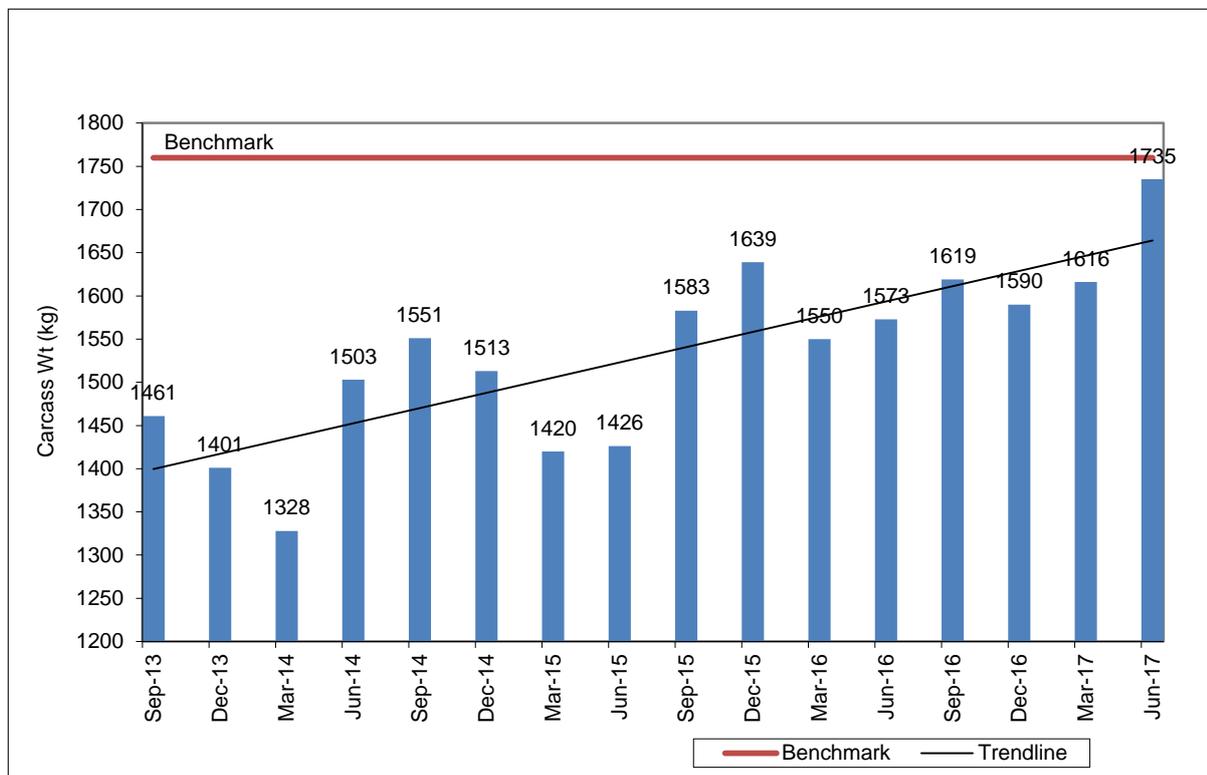
The data in Fig 1 relates to the results achieved by one member of a benchmarking group. It shows the movement in FCR over time. At \$450/tonne, a movement of 0.1 in FCR is worth \$0.05/kg or \$113 000/year for this 1300 sow piggery.

Figure 1: Improvement in Herd Feed Conversion Ratio (Herd FCR)



Carcass weight sold/sow/year reflects the performance of the breeder herd as well as marketing strategy. A high carcass weight sold allows costs, in particular non-feed costs, to be spread over a higher level of production. Fig 2 shows the data for the same unit. The increasing carcass weight sold/sow at a pig meat price of \$2.65/kg is worth in the order of \$800 000/yr.

Figure 2: Improvement in Carcase Weight sold per sow per year



Future pressures

Economic pressures facing members of a group will dictate agendas and programs. At the present time with the low pig meat price and increasing cost of grain, programs would concentrate on survival and attention to detail rather than investment in new buildings and technology. One input that could receive attention is energy cost. Energy cost has increased significantly in recent years and the cost effectiveness of solar power and biogas will be a high priority for the industry.

Getting the Best Result from your pigs' feed

Jayce Morgan

Feed costs represent approximately 60% of the cost of production and yet not all the feed provided to the pig will be utilised for growth and production.

Pig health, sex, nutrition, feed type, genetics, age, production stage and housing all impact on the pig and how the feed that it eats is used (or partitioned) within the pig. Nutrients consumed get distributed to areas of need such as body maintenance, growth, repair and renewal of cells, and reproduction.

For example outdoor pigs have a higher maintenance requirement due to exercise, diet and temperature fluctuations especially in winter.

There is a high cost in nutrient terms to support the immune system. Challenges to the immune system from internal parasites, respiratory or gastro-intestinal infections can change the pig's support of the immune system from maintenance to full operation depending on the severity of the immune challenge.

This then directly impacts how feed is partitioned within the body. The energy cost of supporting the immune system can be up to 25% of the total energy consumed and is a significant variable and major determinant of efficiency. (ACE Livestock Consulting 2011)

It has also been estimated that up to 2% of the bodies lysine is utilised in maintenance activities for antibodies, leukocytes and acute phase proteins. But a 'robust response' to an infectious pathogen is estimated to account for about 9% of the body's lysine. (Johnson 2012)

Provision of additional energy or amino acids does not alleviate the situation because of the tendency

for these pigs to eat less and then they become anorexic from not eating.

Feed conversion ratio (FCR) is a good indicator of changes in the herd or changes in the feed. Periodic investigation can be a useful tool in tough times allowing early intervention to get things back on track.

FCR measures the efficiency of conversion of feed into pig meat. Pork CRC Benchmarking from 2016-17 states grower herd FCR (wean to finish) as 2.47 as the group average and 2.26 for the best 3 herds on a liveweight basis. With the wean to sale period accounting for roughly three quarters of feed use on farm in a farrow to finish system FCR is important.

The recently released "Producers Guide to Pig Production & Nutrition 2017" has excellent nutrition and management information for all stages of pig production and provides guidance for calculating FCR and other production performance monitors.

There is useful information for all production styles with guidelines for practical production targets and how to measure and monitor performance indicators.

If you don't have your copy yet, contact Lechelle van Breda at Australian Pork Limited.

Email: lechelle.vanbreda@australianpork.com.au

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