

AUSTRALIAN PORK INDUSTRY WINS PRESTIGIOUS YOUNG SCIENTIST AWARD

Australian Pork Limited (APL) congratulates Megan Verdon for receiving the Australian Pork Award, as part of the 2014 Science and Innovation Awards for Young People in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Minister for Agriculture, Senator Barnaby Joyce presented the award at a gala dinner for the agriculture sector's key annual conference, Outlook, noting the government's investment in Research and Development (R&D). The award presentation was held last night at the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

Megan Verdon is currently completing her PhD at the University of Melbourne in collaboration with the Animal Welfare Science Centre, where she met her first sow and "fell in love". Megan is researching animal behaviour and well-being, particularly 'Social Strategies of Sows in Groups,' and is also the recipient of an APL Postgraduate Research Scholarship (PhD).

The grant Megan received will go towards her project titled *Pre-weaning Social Exposure: Effects on Aggression, Injuries and Growth of Weaner and Growing Pigs*. Megan plans to assess housing piglets in group-housed sow lactation systems and its effects on aggression and injuries following mixing at the weaning and growing stages of production, in comparison to piglets raised in a non-group lactation system.

Pigs form groups with a dominance hierarchy social system. Increased levels of aggression are observed when pigs are mixed into groups to establish these dominance ranks. These higher levels of aggression compromise pig welfare by increasing the occurrence fighting, injury and stress, ultimately effecting productivity by reducing growth, feed conversion and meat quality, can also result in increased mortality.

Megan said "I feel very fortunate to have won this prestigious award and am very grateful to APL for giving me the opportunity to continue doing what I love – working with pigs."

"This Award will benefit me both personally and professionally. In addition to enhancing and refining my research skills, this project will allow me to explore the welfare of the young and adolescent pig. This topic has not been as widely researched and it is exciting to be a part of new ground breaking science."

"I relish the opportunity to continue contributing to the differentiation of Australia's pork industry as world leaders in pig welfare."

The Science and Innovation Awards are held annually and are coordinated by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES). The Awards foster greater participation in agriculture, fisheries and forestry through providing grant funding for innovative scientific research projects.

For further information visit www.daff.gov.au/ABARES/Pages/conferences-events/scienceawards/.

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