



**Distinguished Visitors Award – Professor John Deen
to present at Bendigo producer seminar:
“Reducing Piglet Mortality”**

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2011/2214 Distinguished Visitors Award – Professor John Deen to present at Bendigo producer seminar: “Reducing Piglet Mortality”



Approximately 80 registrants attended Day 1 of the DPI Bendigo Pig Health and Research Unit’s “Survivability” Seminar.

Recent seminars organized by the Bendigo Pig Health and Research Unit were judged a success by attendees and organizers. Approximately 160 pig producers attended the seminars, representing approximately 35% of producers and more than 90% of pigs in Victoria. The seminars, entitled “Survivability – the key to success”, were held in Bendigo over two days. Attendees included farmers who were new to the industry, self-employed owner-operators from family farms, and managers and stockpersons from larger commercial operations. With such a variety of experience of attendees, the seminars were tailored to meet a range of needs and interests.

International speakers Drs John Deen (USA) and John Carr (UK) provided global perspectives on piglet and sow health and welfare. Dr Deen opened with a presentation outlining how productivity and profitability are compromised not only when a pig perishes, but also when it is culled, when it is sold under (or over) weight or when a pig space is not occupied (ie. reduced throughput). He went on to emphasize that these losses vary greater among herds and contribute far more to a producer’s bottom line than do growth rate and feed conversion efficiency. He suggests that producers need to review how they monitor herd performance by focussing less on “average pig performance” and more on measuring the proportion of pigs that meet targeted growth and marketing specifications. He recommended monitoring treatment outcomes for sick and compromised pigs as a guide to determining future management decisions regarding whether these animals should be retained in the herd, culled or euthanized.

Local speaker Dr Trish Holyoake, Senior Veterinary Officer Pigs with the Department of Primary Industries, spoke on environmental and management strategies to reduce pre-weaning mortalities

among piglets. Focussing on the importance of good stockmanship, her four key messages were to: (1) monitor environmental temperatures for lactating sows and to ensure they can be cooled if the temperature exceeds their upper critical temperature of 22C, (2) keep piglets warm (30-37C) to minimize energy loss and the risks of death due to cold exposure, (3) ensure all piglets have access to colostrum from the sow in the first 24 hours to provide energy for survival, and (4) supervise farrowings to minimize stillbirths and early deaths.

Dr Tony Fahy, Manager of the Pig Health and Research Unit, spoke on diagnosis, control and prevention of Haemolytic colibacillosis in sucker and weaner pigs. Tony introduced how the *E. coli* bacteria have changed over the past 10 years, and how the disease now affects older (10 days+) sucker pigs in addition to older weaner pigs. Pigs with disease due to Haemolytic *E. coli* are often labelled as having a “cold scour” as they may die suddenly due to acute septicaemia without showing diarrhoea. Antibiotic control of this disease is problematic due to the sudden onset of disease and the resistance of many *E. coli* strains to antibiotics. Tony focussed on how the *E. coli* bacteria need to attach to the pigs’ intestine to cause disease and how there are effective vaccines that act by producing antibodies preventing this attachment.

Dr John Carr, a veterinarian well-known internationally, presented a talk on Porcine Circovirus associated Disease (PCVAD). The disease is associated with Porcine Circovirus Type 2 (PCV2) and whilst the virus is present in virtually all pig herds worldwide, disease severity varies greatly from herd-to-herd. He suggested this may be due to other factors including environmental and management stressors and/or an unidentified infectious agent. Control of the disease is by improving management, but ultimately by vaccination of pigs against PCV2.



Seminar speakers (L-R): Professor John Deen (University of Minnesota), Dr Trish Holyoake (DPI Bendigo), Dr Tony Fahy (PHRU, DPI Bendigo), Dr John Carr (UK).

Dr John Deen gave the final presentation on sow wastage, with particular emphasis on the importance of diagnosing, monitoring and controlling lameness in sows. John identified that most lameness problems occur in sows as a result of mechanical or physical injury which often occurs as a result of poor conformation. He recommended that lameness can be controlled by selection of



Dr John Carr (UK) presents on weaner pig management during a demonstration at the Survivability seminar.



Mr Brian Smith (Greta Valley Free Range Pork) “delivers” a piglet from a “sow” during the Survivability seminar.

Seminar evaluation

Evaluation forms were received from a total of 75 registrants. The evaluation form asked for registrants to state their degree of satisfaction with the main talks, the demonstrations, the usefulness of the information provided, the quality of the information itself, the supporting resource material, the venue and lunch. Figure 1 presents the results of the evaluation survey.

Figure 1: Results of evaluation survey of approximately 75 seminar registrants.

