

## These next two months will decide the future of the British pig industry



DENNIS BRIDGEFORD

I freely admit I am biased but the four-day Royal Highland Show held near Edinburgh met the criteria that we have come to expect of this major event. The aisles were full of people. The trade stands appeared to be busy, in most cases the standholders admitting it. The weather was kind and the top of my head got frazzled. When you consider the Scottish Golf Open and the T in the Park music festival were both hit by almost freak-like weather, we were very fortunate. The finest accolade came from one international visitor who commented that he would never, in his lifetime, 'see a better show of

livestock' — praise indeed.

The show went as smoothly as any event with 185,000 people attending, the attendance being similar to last year with the first day being a show record. There is no doubt the improvements in capital infrastructure that have taken place have helped this greatly. Future plans for improved transport, accommodation and new facilities for members will all help drive the show forward, making it the major agricultural event in the country. It's sad that the demise of the English Royal has no doubt help boost numbers of both British and international visitors, making it a 'must attend' event.

**My love hate, and more hate, relationship with the DAPP continues.** When the price goes up, we are informed the DAPP will follow a couple of weeks later, almost kicking and screaming, being dragged along with an anchor trying to hold it back.

Then lo and behold, when the price drops the very next week, the DAPP starts to fall. Little wonder it has little credence in the production sector. The usual July malaise is being blamed, but taking money out of our price will have no bearing on the price on the shelf.

Nice touch really! We have one retailer's employees protesting at its annual general meeting for a living wage, and at another retailer's we have suppliers protesting for a fair price for their product. Nice to see them being reminded that if you push people long enough they will rebel. Remember we had one retail giant not that many years ago on it uppers with share value diving. When the Press and the populace gang up against you they are a powerful enemy.

On the production front my efforts to cut input costs have come unstuck. They normally do. Growth rates were not just what we were looking for on pigs coming out of the flatdecks. Head scratching and a rethink took place and we now feed the pigs on the first-stage diet on the wet feeder a couple of weeks longer. The down side is that it has almost doubled the requirement for an expensive diet —

but the improvement in pig growth is tremendous.

That was one problem solved. We then move on to machinery. We have gone from one expensive disaster to another. Bore-hole pump fell apart, pressurised vessel for pump burst, boost pump tank faulty, mixer gearbox stripped threads, welder burnt out and, to cap it all, even the washing machine for the boiler suits has decided enough is enough. Someone out there doesn't like me.

To cheer me up, we are poised mid -July with the combine sitting at the edge of the field, winding up my neighbours, ready to roll into winter barley. It's looking good. We managed to keep it standing, even with the monsoon weather. Crows have been a problem but the local hot shots have, to a certain extent, minimised the damage to one area.

The next two months are going to determine the future of the British pig industry. If grain races off again I'm afraid we will see a dramatic fall in sow numbers. The question is, do we forward buy grain at prices making it difficult to make a margin or do we hang fire and hope prices fall back. Big decision. It's pretty obvious that some in the retail sector have thrown the pig industry to the wolves with no real thought about supply. Their attitude is, 'We will get it somewhere'. Interesting and worrying times.

## MORTALITY

The first four Jetwash portable



The first four Jetwash portable farrowing houses in England, each with 10 farrowing pens, have been neatly installed at the Hoyland family's pig unit at Tollerlerton, near Nottingham.

Bert Hoyland and his wife Kathleen have been married for 63 years. They bought their farm in 1947 for £4,000 which at that time seemed a lot of money for 50 acres and buildings.

They continue to take a keen interest in what happens on the farm, which is now 300 acres, half of which is rented.

The farm is now run by their sons, Stephen and Ian, with Stephen's daughter Jennifer being involved with the pigs.

The 200-sow herd is made up of Rattlerow Whit-eroc sows on which they use the Optimus boar.

They admit their previous farrowing accommodation left a lot to be desired as it was solid-floored with

straw, took a lot of labour and had high mortality.

The rest of the pigs are still on straw from weaning right through to bacon. They are marketed by Scot-lean to Gills of Wolverhampton.

Numbers coming through had not been good — a bit varied at times — due to the poor farrowing accommodation, so something had to be done.

And I must say it has been done in style with the four new Jetwash farrowing houses, which have been put up away from the former site.

### DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE

The difference is dramatic. So much so that 90-year-old Bert says they might have to invest in more follow-on accommodation.

Pre-weaning mortality is now under 10 percent and that is a massive improvement and improved growth

# DOWN, GROWTH RATES UP

farrowing houses have arrived in England



rates are already being seen.

## EXTRA WATER

Stephen insisted on having a hosepipe in each room so they sows could have extra water on tap so to speak and this has helped the sows to milk better.

It doesn't take long to pop round and fill troughs. Sows not getting enough water is a common sight on some farms.

I certainly wouldn't want to drink all my requirements through a straw. There is nothing wrong with nipple drinkers properly maintained, but how many are? Sows are having larger litters today and need to be able to drink more and more easily.

Stephen and Ian also insisted on having heat-pads as well as heat lamps, and a special plug on the ceiling above each sow for the lamps.

There is one heat-pad fastened to the wall in each room and this is actually the sensor for the others, and the system seems to be working well.

They rely on Paul Blanchard for their nutritional expertise

and they use his Target range from 10 kilos until ten days after weaning.

Piglets are left in the sow pen for two days after weaning and then move onto straw accommodation. After the ten days are up they go onto home-mixed rations right the way through, again nutritional advice supplied by Paul. Oats are a feature of their rations.

They have an interesting rotation on the farm — winter wheat, winter beans, winter wheat, winter barley and winter oats.

So they are virtually self-sufficient, and if they need extra cereals, they can buy in from the neighbours they do contracting work for at harvest.

They have been wet feeding but are moving back to

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*Pictured right (clockwise): Each room has a water supply so the sows can have extra water if needs be; creep troughs are designed to straddle two pens; there is a power socket above each sow.*



## PIG WORLD HOUSING



Above, from left: Stephen Hoyland, Mervyn Richardson of Jetwash, Jennifer Hoyland, Ian Hoyland and Cliff Richardson, of Jetwash. Below: Stephen Hoyland with his father and mother, Bert and Kathleen Hoyland.



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dry as that keeps the expensive straw much cleaner and there is less slurry about. So they have equipped themselves with Henderson plastic feeders.

On each of the new farrowing houses they have had what they call a 'letterbox' fitted on the outside back end, at the top of the integrated slurry storage under the sows.

The idea is that if a pipe comes off, or a nipple leaks, which could fill the storage to overflowing, at least the letterbox will discharge into the clean water system to which it is attached. The slurry outlet is separate under the ground.

I did ask them why they had gone for this type of housing and they said it was because they didn't need planning, and if they decide to pack up, the buildings will be worth something.

And of course there is the extra performance they get and the three hours' saving on labour. The houses are also a lot easier to clean.

Being so close to Nottingham, getting planning permission would not have been a foregone conclusion.

Neighbours used to complain about the smell of slurry. But then a developer appeared and wanted to build — and they decided they really loved the open space after all. Since then, there have been no complaints.

Herd health has improved through a vaccine programme suggested by their vet Frank Tobin. They do not cut tails and only clip teeth where necessary. — Sam Walton.

• More information is available from Jetwash Ltd at 353 49 43397003, [info@jetwash.ie](mailto:info@jetwash.ie).