

2014 WINNER: **JAMES MARSHALL**



A new policy paper was released on Thursday amid growing concerns in the pig industry regarding the government's approach to the threat of African swine fever.

The paper, entitled Disease Control Strategy for African and Classical Swine Fever in Great Britain, outlines the measures that the government will take to 'contain and eradicate any incursion into domestic pigs' if African swine fever (ASF) were identified in Great Britain.

However, many within the pig industry believe that the government is missing the point.

"Whilst it is reassuring that there is a plan in place," states journalist and pig breeder Liz Shankland, "it appears that most of the attention is focused on dealing with containing the disease once it gets here, not preventing its arrival."

With the UK carrying out significant volumes of trade with European nations, the country is at high risk of ASF entry through the import of contaminated pigs and transfer of contaminated pig faeces on livestock lorries.

The disease has already spread rapidly westwards throughout the year from Russia; most recently having been discovered in domestic pig herds in Poland.

In light of the government's inability to monitor trade traffic, pig producers believe they will be forced to take on greater responsibility in preventing the disease from coming onto farms.

"We, as an industry, have to protect ourselves and be absolutely bio-security orientated," states Mark Jagger, company representative for one of Britain's largest pig producers.

"You must have questioning of everybody who turns up on farm. Do they need to go on your premises? Where have they been in the last 48 hours? Are transport lorries clean and disinfected? If they aren't, don't even let them drop the tailgate."

Concerns are exacerbated by the memories of those who worked in the industry during the swine fever outbreak of 2000.

At that time Defra struggled to deal with the situation, fuelling doubts as to whether the government can cope if ASF is identified within the country; a point that Mr Jagger raised in a recent meeting with Defra officials.

"There is a village in Norfolk that holds over 200,000 pigs. If African swine fever hits that village what are they [Defra] going to do? How on earth do you slaughter that number of pigs? When I asked the question they simply said 'we will sort it out on the day'.

"You cannot sort out 200,000 bullets in a day".



2014 RUNNER-UP: **FIONA TURNBULL**



Lamb producers looking to lift margins from their flock can make small changes to ensure better returns.

That was the focus of a meeting of the Central Lamb Supply Chain Group held recently at Parks of Aldie Farm, Fossoway, Kinross with a follow on visit to Scotbeef, Bridge of Allan.

Group Facilitator, Raymond Crerar of SAC Consulting, reminded the group of over 30 attendees that whilst they can't influence price or effect market volatility, with an improved understanding of grazing and post weaning management they can reduce their costs and receive the best return from their lambs.

Finishing as many lambs as possible off grass from their flock of 930 ewes is an objective for the Parks of Aldie team, who aim to maximise production from grassland.

Rhidian Jones, SAC Sheep and Beef Specialist, told the group: "Weaned finishing lambs need to be given the best quality grass and clover on the farm to keep growth rates high and enable faster finishing. Lambs only growing at 100g per day will take three times longer and consume twice the dry matter of lambs growing at 300g per day."

Co-operative buying group Farm Stock (Scotland) handles the lambs at Parks of Aldie, which fulfill Scotbeef supermarket and export lamb contracts. Bryan Robb of Farm Stock specified the ideal carcass weight is 16–21kg and advised regular selection is the best way to meet the specification. Handling lambs to accurately assess finish will also ensure returns are optimised.

The group was given a demonstration, with Bryan commenting: "To grade your lambs, use your hand to feel right along the loin on both sides, whilst pushing down to assess the fat cover. As the season progresses handling the tail of the lamb is a good indicator whether it is ready or not."

The Aldie lambs had been weaned a fortnight earlier and turned on to a field of young grass. The Suffolk and Texel crosses had put on an average of 282g per day over the season. On arrival at Scotbeef, the group discovered the lambs had killed out very well, producing mainly U3L carcasses with a number of E and some R grades too.

Funded by Quality Meat Scotland, this unique opportunity to follow the final stage in the lamb production journey highlighted small tweaks to your system and attention to detail at this point can pay off for producers.

