



Target 25

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The objectives of the Target 25 program were to:

- Assess the value of an on-farm, team-building approach to knowledge transfer within the Australian pork industry; and
- Improve the reproductive efficiency of selected breeding herds through selection of a single trait and subsequent intensive targeting of its improvement.

Paul Hughes, SARDI, visited each farm to up a “Target 25 team” which consisted of himself, a state Target 25 coordinator and key breeding herd staff. During this first visit every aspect of day-to-day management of the breeding herd was reviewed and recorded and the team decided which traits were to be targeted – farrowing rate & litter size (total born) OR stillbirths & pre-weaning mortality.

On the basis of this review, the team members contributed ideas on how breeding herd performance can be improved. The changes considered here were primarily or exclusively to the detail of day-to-day activities rather than major structural changes. A ‘shopping list’ of the suggested changes, together with a very brief rationale for each, was then circulated within the team for feedback. A period of review followed to test changes in SOP’s and at the end of the trial period the team met and finalised the planned changes. During the ensuing 12-month experimental period, Paul Hughes visited the farm every three months to run a team meeting to ensure all was going to plan and to ensure the on-farm team didn’t drift from the planned changes.

A total of 21 piggeries joined the Target 25 program however for various reasons, twelve farms completed the full program. The actual changes suggested on each farm were different and tailored to the farm’s management strategy.

The data suggested an overall positive effect of the Target 25 program on farrowing rate and litter size (total born), although little benefit appeared to accrue from targeting stillbirth and pre-weaning mortality rate. The improvement seen in litter size at weaning appears to result from application of Target 25 on the nine farms targeting farrowing rate and litter size and not to any Target 25-related improvement in stillbirth or pre-weaning mortality rates on those farms targeting these traits.

It was concluded that Target 25 changes occurring on the farms reported here were not the sole causes of change in breeding herd performance. There were however several clear messages that emerged from this program:

- There is great variation in breeding herd performance between Australian herds;
- Most Australian breeding herds are performing well below their potential;
- Raising breeding herd performance is mainly a result of attention to known details rather than the application of new knowledge;

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- Using the Target 25 approach can work on all farms, but the improvements seen are obviously greater on those farms where the starting performance is poor;
- Adopting Target 25-type improvements requires the farm's ownership/management to believe the program will be of value; and
- Successfully improving breeding herd performance may not require the 'coal-face' staff to take ownership of the changes implemented.