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Sow Housing Options for 2017 Meeting the Challenge

Final Report
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Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation
On Behalf of the Queensland Pig Consultancy Group

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Contents

1.	Project Summary	3
2.	Background	3
3.	Objectives	4
4.	Activities Undertaken	4
5.	Results	4
6.	Implications	6
7.	Recommendations	7

Table of Tables

Table 1: Seminar Evaluation of the Sow Housing Options Seminar and Trade Display	5
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Table of Figures

Figure 1: Location of the businesses represented at the Sow Housing Options Seminar and Trade Display	5
Figure 2: Sectors represented at the Sow Housing Options Seminar and Trade Display	5

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1. Project Summary

A seminar and trade exhibition, Sow Housing Options for 2017 was organised by the Queensland Pig Consultancy Group (QPCG) to address the challenges facing the industry in meeting the requirements of the Model Code of Practice and the industry's voluntary decision to phase out gestation stalls by 2017. The event was held in Toowoomba on Friday 8 April 2011.

One hundred and thirty six delegates from Qld, NSW, SA, VIC, Canada and the USA representing a range of industry sectors attended the conference to listen to the 6 speakers who shared their knowledge of group housing systems. The trade exhibition attracted 7 companies or agents of companies who demonstrated equipment suitable for managing sows in group housing situations. The exhibitors showed electronic sow feeding systems from Denmark, USA, UK and the Netherlands.

In evaluating the event, delegates were asked to rate aspects of the conference as excellent, good, fair or below average. The program was well received by the delegates and the trade representatives. The evaluation summary showed that 66% of delegates gave the event an overall rating of excellent and 34% a rating of good.

The seminar presentations will be communicated by DEEDI, on behalf of the QPCG in May. An email link will be sent to delegates to enable them to access, view and download the presentations from the host site. The conference was reported in the Rural Weekly.

2. Background

At the APL 2010 AGM, the Australian pork industry voted for the phasing out of gestation stalls by 2017 subject to certain conditions. Irrespective of those conditions being met, legislation dictates that the industry must phase out gestation stalls for all but six weeks by 2017.

The implementation of group housing systems has a high priority in APL's research and development strategy. Currently work is being funded at a number of sites including Rivalea (Dr Paul Hemsworth and Dr Rebecca Morrison) in NSW and at the Animal Welfare Science Centre, University of Melbourne (Dr Paul Hemsworth) and at CHM facilities in Queensland.

Producers have a limited time in which to make decisions on how to meet the industry's voluntary stance or the legislation in 2017 and have limited information at hand on which to make sound capital investment decisions. The purpose of the seminar was to invite early adopters of group housing and consultants with knowledge of the available systems to share experiences with producers and their advisors.

3. Objectives

This project set out to:

- Inform producers and consultants of the merit of various group housing systems for sows
- Enable producers to share the experiences of early adopters
- Allow producers to see examples of feeding arrangements and building layouts for group housed sows promoted by manufacturers and their agents.

4. Activities Undertaken

The QPCG held a seminar on April 8, 2011 at the Chapel in Toowoomba. The program ran from 9.00 am to 5.00pm. A team of speakers shared their knowledge and experiences of group housing systems gained from their own units or by visiting commercial and research facilities in North America and Europe. Speakers and topics included:

Speaker	Topic
John Riley, IAS Management Services	Accepting the Decision
Laurie Brosnan, Farm Manager for BettaPork	Making the Decision to Retrofit
James Hurley, Farm Manager for Tong Park, Warra	Two Systems in Action
Kenton Shaw, General Manager - Production at Rivalea	The Rivalea Experience
Steve Chick, Operations Manager for Cameron Pastoral Company	Learning from our International Competitors
Graeme Pope, Principal Industry Consultant, Rural Solutions, SA	A Southern Perspective

Representatives of equipment manufacturers suitable for group housing of sows displayed their products. The display area provided a one-stop opportunity for producers planning to adopt group housing to update their knowledge. The industry press attended and reported the proceedings to the industry members unable to attend.

5. Results

One hundred and thirty six delegates from Qld, NSW, SA, VIC, Canada and the USA (Fig 1) representing a range of industry sectors attended the conference to listen to the six speakers who shared their knowledge of group housing systems.

The producer sector (57% of delegates) were responsible for approximately 85% of the breeding sows in Queensland, the commercial sector represented 36% and the university, extension, regulation, processor and others represented the remaining 7 % (Fig 2).

The trade exhibition attracted 7 companies or agents of companies, namely B & M Slots, Mundigo, Nedap Velos, QNPH PigTek, Stockyard Industries, Vaucluse and Vereykyen Brothers who demonstrated equipment suitable for managing sows in group housing situations. The exhibitors showed electronic sow feeding systems from Denmark, USA, UK and the Netherlands.

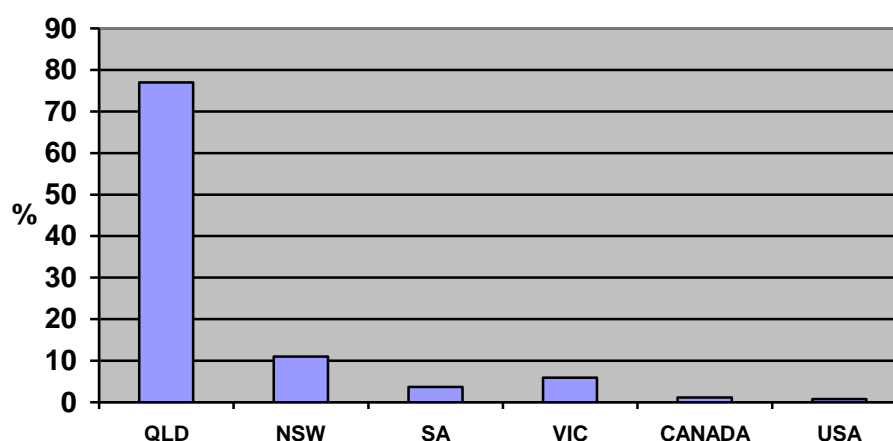


Figure 1: Location of the businesses represented at the Sow Housing Options Seminar and Trade Display

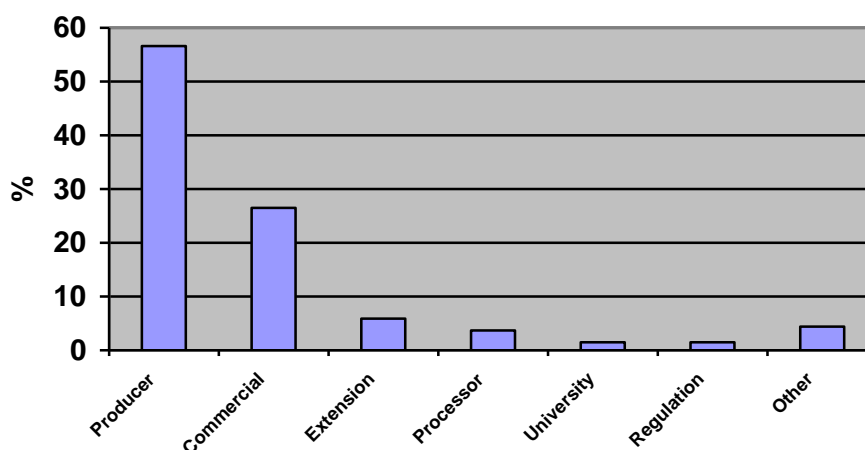


Figure 2: Sectors represented at the Sow Housing Options Seminar and Trade Display

In evaluating the event delegates were asked to rate aspects of the conference as excellent, good, fair or below average. The evaluation indicated that the program was well received by the delegates and the trade representatives. An evaluation summary (Table 1) showed that 66% of the respondents rated the event as excellent and 34% rated the event good.

Table 1: Seminar Evaluation of the Sow Housing Options Seminar and Trade Display

	Response (%)			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Below Average
Program Content	65	35	-	-
Speaker Presentations	72	28	-	-
Trade Show	43	57	-	-
Venue	81	19	-	-
Catering	54	43	3	-
Overall	66	34	-	-

Producer respondents indicated that 51% were at the beginning of assessing sow housing options before attending the seminar, 38% stated they were at the mid-point and 11% of producers present stated that they were in the final stages of assessing sow housing options.

Ninety two percent of producers stated that the seminar gave them the confidence to progress sow housing options further and 8 % stated that it added to the confusion.

Fifty five percent of all respondents stated that they found the discussions with both producers and trade exhibitors helpful, 43% stated that they found discussions with other producers helpful and 2% stated that they found discussions with just the trade representatives helpful.

Fifty seven percent of respondents stated that they would like to see QPCG cover the management of group housing systems including mating and related welfare issues in future seminars.

Some of the written comments made by those attending included:

“Great day. Discussion by producers really clarified questions I had about conversion and likelihood of production level changes. Very encouraging news.”

“Real world examples allow an excellent forum for producers to be able to make the decisions required to stay in the industry.”

“Great talking to other producers about what works/doesn't work for them.”

“Best day out ever for pig industry future”

“It gave me a lot to think about. “

The evaluation form and verbal feedback confirmed that the objectives were achieved.

The presentations from the seminar will be communicated to industry by DEEDI, on behalf of the QPCG in early May via a series of on-line "Slidecasts". A Slidecast links the PowerPoint presentation and audio file of each speaker. The Slidecast series is to be hosted in an on-line library but the files will be hidden from public view (i.e. anyone surfing the net cannot access the files). Only industry participants who receive a link via an email will be able to access, view and download the presentations from the host site.

The conference was reported in the Rural Weekly.

6. Implications

The pig industry in Australia is facing a major capital investment program to phase out gestation stalls by 2017. The seminar and supporting trade display provided producers with an opportunity to compare the merit of a number of group housing systems and discuss in detail sow feeding options in group housing systems. The trade representatives were able to show examples of systems in commercial use in Australia and overseas and discussed the capital requirements of adapting existing buildings and erecting new buildings to meet the requirements of the Model Code of Practice and the industry's voluntary decision to phase out gestation stalls by 2017 welfare code for gestating sows.

The event enabled producer's and key influencers including members of the QPCG to be better equipped to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various group housing systems.

The program was recorded and will be released by DEEDI, on behalf of the QPCG in early May. The conference was reported in the Rural Weekly.

7. Recommendations

It was evident from the seminar that an early clarification of the industry's two resolutions on the voluntary phasing out of gestation stalls by 2017 is a high priority.

The feedback from this conference indicates that producers are thirsty for information on group housing of sows. They are aware that they have to make a substantial capital investment to meet the Model Code of Practice and require further information.

The success of the conference in no small part was due to the fact that speakers were drawing on practical experiences of group housed systems in their presentations.

In developing its future program, the QPCG will take note of the delegates' comments on the need for more information on the management of group housing systems including mating and related welfare issues in future seminars.