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Doug Ross Overseas Travel & Study Award Fiona Kelk

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I. The Conference

The European Symposium of Porcine Health Management held in Edinburgh Scotland was a well attended veterinary conference. There were over 1000 delegates representing 38 countries.

There was an introduction giving the structure of the UK pig industry, it was interesting to learn that the UK industry has been stall free since 1999 excluding servicing units, so in this regard they are well ahead of Australia. There are 30,000 premises that house pigs including pets, while there are about 10,000 pig farmers. Around 40 % of sows are kept outdoors, while 97% of growing pigs are finished indoors.

On talking to some UK delegates they seemed to press upon me that the UK industry is very strict on welfare and the farmers pay the price as other European countries do not have as stringent requirements and are still able to sell into the same pork market. From a processing point of view only 3 companies slaughter 70 % of UK's pork. One interesting point made by the speaker was that the industry is using isotopes to identify the pork identity (country of origin) which helps keep processors honest about the inputs used, this could be put to use here to truly identify 'Aussie pork' in the supermarkets, maybe by incorporating Aussie in the slogan 'get some Aussie pork on your fork!'.

As it was a European conference not all presentations were relevant to Australian pig industry conditions, but it was a huge reminder of how important biosecurity at the farm but especially at the country border is. Australia's remoteness is a blessing in many ways and it is imperative that we continue to remain vigilant to the threats that imports/visitors pose.



Image 1: Edinburgh Castle – 3 minute walk from accommodation to the park where photo taken

2. On farm piggery visits

Whilst in Scotland (Southeast) we visited the village of Hawick, I had organised a morning visit to the local veterinary clinic. They mentioned that there was an outdoor farrowing piggery close to the village, although they were not the attending veterinarians for the piggery we were allowed to take photographs of the unit. The farm layout seemed to allow for efficient feeding of individual sows, while each sow had an area of approximately 30m x 90m including a hut (please see photos below). This was a great opportunity to compare the set up to the one other outdoor farrowing piggery I have visited in Temora, NSW.



Images 2 and 3: Outdoor farrowing piggery (Southeast Scotland)

Organising a piggery visit proved more difficult than I thought it would, after sending numerous emails to several pig only veterinary clinics, the replies were not forthcoming. As the conference ended prior to a banking holiday long weekend a lot of the larger pig practices had organised the piggery visits prior to and at least a week or so after the conference.

One of the delegates of the conference from Lincolnshire was kind enough to offer one of her clients as a piggery visit. The client of concern was a contract grower taking piglets at weaning and growing out to slaughter. He had recently carried out a full depopulation due to atrophic rhinitis which had come in with the supplied piglets (recently proven, the supplier of weaners has since changed).

This particular scenario was interesting in identifying the difficulties of communication and professionalism in the veterinary industry. The vets responsible for looking after this farm were trying to communicate with those vets responsible for the supplier farm to identify the disease issue that was been seen on farm, which was originally denied as an issue on the suppliers farm. An independent mutually acceptable unbiased veterinarian was asked to investigate the problem. The following photos are of the initial intake of weaners from the new supplier, they appeared to be a very consistent even bunch of piglets.





Air circulation did not appear to be as crucial as in Australia's hotter climate.



Images 3, 4 & 5: Initial intake of weaners from the new supplier



Image 6: An outdoor pen

Although most of the pigs are housed inside for their duration of stay on this farm, these outdoor pens are used for weaners once numbers return to normal levels. Interestingly the farmer obtains better growth rate figures from these outdoor pens than the comparable indoor ones even in colder times of the year.



Image 7: Outdoor Pens

At the end of our trip we spent a few days in London, I organise a visit to the Royal Veterinary College. My husband and I were given a personalised tour through the facilities by an Australian, Dr Jill Maddison, it was a treat to be able to see and compare university facilities.

When I was fortunate enough to be granted this award I was employed by Alan Sharrock, principal of Lachlan Valley Veterinary Clinic in Forbes, NSW. Since then I have moved to Murrumbateman, NSW to be closer to my mother as she was battling metastases from breast cancer (a battle she has since lost).

Upon returning from my overseas trip I have started employment at Yass Veterinary Hospital under the principal Stuart Williams. I still have my passion for pigs and have remained a member of the Australian Pig Veterinarians, a special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association.

3. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the supporters of The Doug Ross Travel Award and in particular Australian Pork Limited in giving me the opportunity to experience not only an international pig conference but also my first ever visit to the United Kingdom, it is a trip I will never forget and I have made a few lifelong contacts in the UK veterinary profession.