



## **Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust**

**A BPEX/Merial Award**



The recruitment, training and  
retention of quality staff  
in the pig industry

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# Index of Contents

1.0	<b>Introduction</b>	1
2.0	<b>Background</b>	2
2.1	Understanding the challenge	3
2.2	Responding to the challenge	7
3.0	<b>USA</b>	8
3.1	Case study 1 - Large scale pig producer	9
3.2	Case study 2 - Small scale pig producer	11
3.3	Case study 3 - National Pork Board	12
3.4	Case study 4 - The Hispanic workforce - the solution to a growing challenge?	13
3.5	Case study 5 - National Junior Swine Association	15
3.6	Case study 6 - Recruitment consultant	16
4.0	<b>Canada</b>	17
4.1	Case study 1 - Small scale pig producer	18
4.2	Case study 2 - Large scale pig producer	19
4.3	Case study 3 - Feed Mill	21
4.4	Case study 4 - Ontario Pork Industry Council	22
5.0	<b>Spain</b>	25
5.1	Case study 1 - Industry consultant	26
5.2	Case study 2 - Over 30 pigs per sow per year and less than 5% staff turnover	27
5.3	Case study 3 - Training centre	28
6.0	<b>Denmark</b>	30
6.1	Case study 1 - Training policy	31
7.0	<b>Conclusions</b>	32
8.0	<b>Recommendations</b>	34
9.0	<b>Postscript</b>	36
10.0	<b>Acknowledgments</b>	38

## DISCLAIMER

This is my own report and the conclusions or recommendations within it are not necessarily a reflection of the thoughts or opinions of BPEX, Merial, my employers Harper Adams University College or the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust.

***‘Choose a job you love and you will never work another day in your life’***

Confucius

## **1.0 Introduction**

Pigs are my passion! From the age of eight I have kept pigs and for the past twenty years pigs have kept me. Having gained my Agricultural and Environmental Science degree with honours in crop protection at Newcastle University I immediately put it to good use and established an outdoor pig unit in Shropshire. I grew the business eight fold in the following ten years. The pork market collapse of the late 1990’s forced a rethink, the pigs were sold and I started in my present role of Pig Unit Manager at Harper Adams University College.



The past decade has seen many Colleges and Universities downsize or close their pig units. At Harper Adams we have invested heavily in both physical and human resources to create a centre of excellence of teaching, research and reach out that is sustainable in the long term. My aim has always been to educate and inspire as wide an audience as possible in all aspects of pig production and the broader pig industry.

I strongly believe that the single most important asset of any agricultural business is the people who work within it. They are vital to achieve a sustainable and profitable industry.

This report aims to investigate the key factors that impact on successful recruitment, training and retention of a dedicated workforce.

## 2.0 Background

There are approximately 150,000 agriculture businesses in the United Kingdom. This represents 6% of all businesses<sup>1</sup>. Agriculture employs approximately 660,000 people with 31,000 being employed in the pig industry at production level. In the pig sector a further 110,000 people are employed in allied industries<sup>2</sup>.

### Workforce characteristics

The sector has an ageing workforce, older than any other industrial sector. 41% of people working in agriculture are over 50 years old. The average age of key decision makers is over 55 years old<sup>3</sup> and a DEFRA survey has shown almost half of these have no successors in place.

Workers are often highly skilled and experienced but due to traditional methods of qualification attainment they have a lower than average level of qualifications.

Migrant workers comprise 12% of total employment<sup>4</sup>. This figure has fallen over the last two years although still forms a significant proportion of the workforce, particularly for seasonal work.

### Skills needs and recruitment issues

The LANTRA 2009 Skills Assessment Report stated over 60% of staff vacancies in agriculture were hard to fill. Skills shortages account for 31% of all vacancies. With new recruits needed at all levels businesses that identify and address knowledge or skill gaps are more likely to display higher business performance.

Recent reports have estimated that between 60,000 and 120,000 new entrants will need to be attracted into agriculture in the next ten years.

### Why the shortage?

**A strong economy.** The UK's strong economy over the past two decades has continued to create jobs and fuel the demand for more workers.

**Low unemployment.** The UK has consistently had a low unemployment rate and, in 2009, the annual average unemployment rate was 7.8%<sup>5</sup>. This was in the top ten lowest rates in the EU 27.

**An ageing population.** Baby boomers, born between 1945 and 1966, are the age group in the UK with the largest number of people. As they retire the vast numbers may be difficult to replace.

**Competitive job market.** It is not only UK agriculture competing for talent in the job market. Increasingly workers have opportunities to take their valuable skills elsewhere, not only in the

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<sup>1</sup> ONS, Inter-Departmental Business Register(2008)

<sup>2</sup> ONS, Labour Force Survey(2008)

<sup>3</sup> ONS, Labour Force Survey(2008)

<sup>4</sup> ONS, Labour force survey(2008)

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat(2009)

UK. Growing use of the internet as a job search tool provides easy access to employment across the world.

**Loyalties.** Worker loyalty to their employer has lowered with current newcomers expecting to be working for more than one employer in their working career. The average person can expect to change their jobs 5-7 times in their life.(This range of figures can be attributed to collected data but there have never been statistics published about career change due to the different ways in which it may be interpreted)

**On the move.**

In a recent survey conducted by People 1<sup>st</sup> the headline findings showed that 45% of the UK workforce were considering a major career change, with 50% of the workforce not stimulated by their current job.

**Perceptions.**

The small percentage of the UK population working in agriculture has led to a disassociation between the general public and the source of their food. Mainstream perceptions of agriculture are largely based on hazy childhood memories, second hand information and the sensationalised media horror stories.

The effect for pig businesses is tough competition with other industries for a limited and precious resource – people.

## 2.1 Understanding the Challenge

### Employee Characteristics

It is important to know the demographic profile of potential employees to determine the correct strategies to develop to recruit and train them to obtain maximum results. This type of profiling is more commonly used by marketing groups or government studies. Generational profiling provides an insight into how characteristics are changing over time. The following descriptors are most frequently used.

#### Baby Boomers

They are born between 1945 and 1966 and several common characteristics of the baby boomer generation are-

- **Work-Centric:** They are extremely hardworking and motivated by position, perks and prestige. They define themselves by their professional accomplishments and are prepared to sacrifice a great deal to advance their career. Baby Boomers may criticise younger generations for a lack of work ethic.
- **Independent:** This generation grew up in a time of reform and are confident and independent. They have questioned established systems and practices.
- **Goal-Orientated:** With increased educational and financial opportunities than previous generations, they are achievement orientated and career focussed.
- **Competitive:** They are clever, resourceful and strive to win. They believe in hierarchal structure and may struggle with workplace flexibility.

## Generation X

They are born between 1966 and 1980 and mark the period of birth decline after the baby boom and. On the whole they are more ethnically diverse and better educated than baby boomers, common characteristics include-

- **Individualistic:** Generation X came of age in a time of two income families and rising divorce rates. As a result they are independent and self sufficient and in the workplace value freedom and responsibility. Many have a disdain for authority and structured hours.
- **Technologically Adept:** They are the first generation to grow up with computers; technology is woven into their lives. They readily accept all new technology used in the workplace.
- **Flexible:** Many of this generation witnessed the tough economic times endured by their hard working parents in the 1980's and are therefore more willing to change jobs to get ahead and are less committed to just one employer.
- **Value Work/Life Balance:** Unlike previous generations, they work to live rather than live to work. They embrace the work hard, play hard mentality.

## Generation Y

They are born post 1980 and are the fastest growing segment of today's workforce. Below are a few common traits that define Generation Y-

- **Tech-Savvy:** They have grown up with technology and rely on it to perform their jobs better. They are plugged in 24/7 and prefer communicating through text and email rather than face to face contact.
- **Family-Centric:** They desire flexible working practices and a better work life balance. They have a different vision of workplace expectations and prioritise family over work.
- **Achievement Orientated:** They are confident, ambitious and achievement orientated. They have high expectations of their employers, seek new challenges and question authority. They want meaningful work and a solid learning curve.
- **Team Orientated:** They value teamwork and seek the input of others. Part of a 'no person left behind' generation, they are loyal, committed and want to be included and involved.
- **Attention Craving:** They crave attention in the forms of feedback and reassurance. They may benefit from mentors who can help guide and develop their careers.

It is clear that the characteristics of potential employees are different from previous generations. As employers compete for new talent, they cannot ignore the needs, desires and attitudes of this generation.

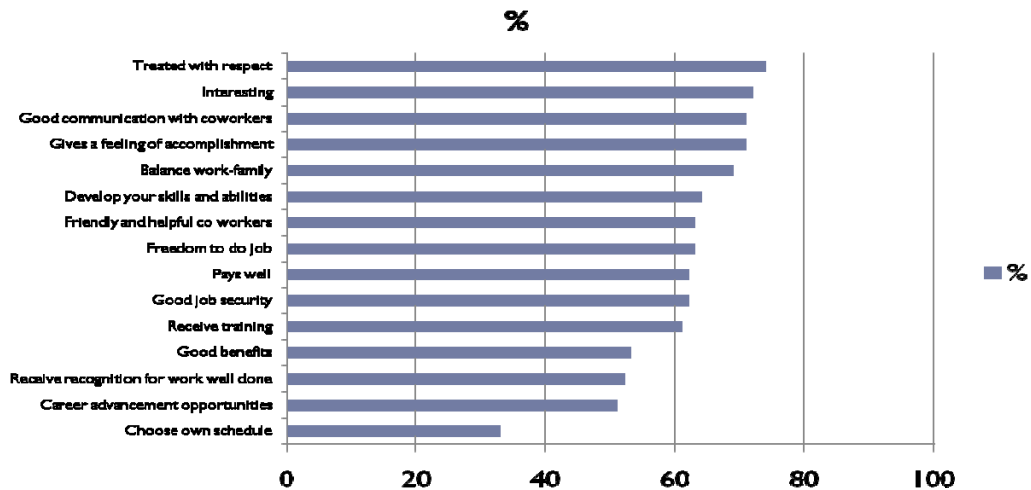
### Attraction – What are employees looking for?

As an industry we must position ourselves and our job offer to be attractive to job applicants. This requires a good understanding of what a potential employee is looking for in the role, the workplace and the employer.

#### “Show me the money?” Not necessarily...

There have been many surveys carried out to discover what employees are looking for in a job. Whilst pay and benefits are, of course, important they are not top of the list.

## What Workers Consider “very important” in a job



Source : CPRN-EKOS Changing Employment Relationships survey

It is very interesting that a higher value is being placed on criteria such as being treated with respect, doing interesting work, good communication and a feeling of accomplishment. This is good news for employers as these are all elements that add little or no cost to a business, therefore taking away the pressures of competing with other industries solely on pay and benefits.

### Become an Employer of Choice

Are you an ‘employer of choice’? If you are then job applicants seek you out. They have heard that your business is good place to work. They choose you before you choose them. You may have a waiting list of interested employees. That this should happen in agriculture may sound difficult to believe to some people, but it can. If you are an employer of choice your business is likely to offer some or all of the following-

- Training and development opportunities.
- A safe and healthy working environment.
- Positive employer-employee relationships.
- Reasonable job demands.
- Competitive pay and benefits.
- Employee communication and influence.
- Personally rewarding work.
- Job security.
- Thoughtful job design.

A study <sup>6</sup> involving 80,000 managers from 400 companies asked the question “What makes a great workplace?” each company was considered “great” if it demonstrated strengths in four key areas:

1. employee retention.
2. customer satisfaction.
3. productivity.
4. profitability.

The research resulted in identifying 12 criteria of a great workplace,  
Written from the perspective of an employee:

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the equipment I need to do my work well.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best, everyday.
4. In the last week, I have received recognition or praise.
5. My supervisor seems to care about me as a person
6. There is someone at work who encourages my personal development.
7. At work my opinion counts.
8. The purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates are committed to doing high quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

If any business would like to know how it rates in the eyes of its employees, it should ask its staff to evaluate it based on the above 12 criteria. Then, be prepared to act on what they learn.

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<sup>6</sup> Q12, Gallup survey(1999)



## 2.2 Responding to the Challenge

### Pig Industry Initiatives

Following the recommendations of Sir Donald Curry's report initiating a new vision for agriculture, the British Pig Executive (BPEX) produced a strategy for the British pig industry – The Road to Recovery.

Recognising that the success of all the different elements of the strategy was dependent upon a highly skilled, proficient, motivated and dynamic workforce; the Pig Industry Training Strategy was launched in 2005.

The objectives were-

1. Develop a skills and qualification structure that is relevant to industry needs and accessible at all levels and flexible in structure.
2. Provide and promote an attractive environment for a progressive career in the pig industry.
3. Promote skills development as being central to business improvement.

In the past five years the following have been developed to meet these objectives –

- Certificates of Competence.
- Pig Industry Professional Register(PIPR).
- Trainee of the Year Award.
- Nuffield Farming Scholarship Award.
- Professional Managers Development Scheme.
- Leadership Development Scheme.
- Stockman Development Scheme.
- Training Groups.
- Study Tours.
- Pig Clubs and Discussion Groups.

**The objectives of my study** were to understand the generic issues surrounding recruitment, training and retention of suitable staff and then investigate how other countries, with similar socio-economic backgrounds as the UK, were meeting the challenges of attracting, developing and retaining a high quality workforce for their pig industries. I wanted to know their target audiences for recruitment, the positive practices used and the measurable outcomes.

I visited sites in :

- USA
- Canada
- Spain
- Denmark

### 3.0 USA

#### U.S. Pig Industry



The US has nearly 6 million sows with eight states accounting for over 75% of production. The industry is one of contrasts, 50% of pig production in the hands of 20 ‘powerhouse’ producers with large units by British standards, through to thriving small scale operations on traditional mixed farms.

The workforce in the pig industry, as in the UK, is aging with 44% fewer staff less than 30 years old than 15 years ago. Recruitment issues vary greatly within different geographical areas depending largely upon the demand for labour from other industries. The distance to work location, the mainstream perception of a dirty physical job with long hours also has an impact.

Where a labour shortage occurs the gap is being filled by an immigrant, mainly Hispanic, workforce. They cannot grow and progress in their own country like they can in the US. The US is now the second largest Latin American country in the world.

If employers cannot compete in the labour market on salary alone the whole job package has to be attractive. The most forward thinking businesses have a wide range of incentives to maximize staff retention.

*See next page for examples of sites visited*

### 3.1 Case Study 1 – Large Scale Pig Producer



NPP, a relatively new 50,000 sow business in Nebraska, left the impression of a humble, well run, professional organisation that genuinely cares about human resources.

#### Overview

- The company formed in 2004 through the purchase of two bankrupt pig farming operations.
- There are 400 employees throughout Nebraska, South Dakota and Iowa..
- 80 farms, 2 feed mills, 4 truck washes and a boar stud.
- Have a strong focus on basic pig production 24/7.
- They try to hire and retain the best talent.

#### Organisational Structure

- Specialist finish crews- responsible for selection, loading and cleaning.
- Technicians.
- Farm Managers.
- Production supervisors – for breeding, nursery or finishing.
- Production directors – for breeding farms and nursery/finishing farms.

#### Employee Program

- Full range of group benefit plans.
- Production bonus program.
- Donation program – to local charities or community programs.
- Scholarship program.
- Pork Coupons – very popular with the barn staff.
- Referral bonus.
- Evaluation and feedback.

### Compensation Structure

- Pay for performance.
- Job duties and objectives.
- Implement formal employee evaluation process.
- Objective technical levels and criteria for advancement.

### Attracting Staff

- Word of mouth and referrals from current and former employees – represents over half of recruitment.
- Local advertisements.
- Fliers.
- Agricultural programmes – working with FFA (Future Farmers of America).
- Technical colleges.
- Website.

### Employee Referral Programme

- An employee refers someone they know to a current opening.
- They must both be employed one year after hiring.
- The employee receives a \$1,000 bonus.

### Interview and Job Offer

- Well structured interviews with pre planned questions, every candidate is asked the same questions.
- Carry out a job preview on farm – allows potential employees a chance to get a feel for the job, very important for those who have not been on a pig unit.
- If the candidates do not meet the right criteria, the process is started again.

NPP like to “Hire tough, manage easy” rather than “Hire easy, manage tough”.

### Training and Staff Development

- Quarterly leadership meetings.
- Twice yearly production meetings.
- Have a focus on safety.
- Have Standard Operating Procedures for most tasks.
- Continual Feedback and evaluation – twice yearly formal evaluation, 360 degree reviews, coaching forms and action plans.

### 3.2 Case study 2 – Small Scale Pig Producer



Kelly and Nina Biensen started Eden farms in 1998 and it has grown from the dream of supplying the best tasting pork to local restaurants to a company that sells product nationwide to some of America's top chefs. The creation of Eden Natural LLC in 2005 brought the benefits of ownership to all 28 producers of Eden Farms Berkshire Pork. It is now the largest supplier of pure bred Berkshire pork in America.



*"I have passion for small family farms. My goal is develop a market for them. A market that is consistent, that is sustainable and one that they can receive a fair profit every day of the year."*

Kelly Biensen

The whole ethos of the business is to produce the best tasting pork to sustain hard working families and a rural way of life. Kelly could easily produce all the pigs the business is currently marketing from one or two large farms but his desire to stick to his beliefs continues to inspire others with an ever growing waiting list of people wanting to join the company.



### 3.3 Case study 3 – National Pork Board



- National Pork Board, a body funded through check off dollars from every pig slaughtered.
- Mission to generate added value to the U.S. pork production industry.
- The main emphasis is on research and consumer information programmes.
- They have an employee care toolkit aimed at producers who are not large enough to have their own human resources department. The four key components are –

#### 1) Human Resources Kit

This covers basic HR activities, performance management techniques, with user guides and templates. The main selling point appears to be protecting the farm from legal risks.

#### 2) On the Job Training

This is using standard operating procedures (SOP's), planned training activity and regular performance feedback tools and practices to fit any operation.

#### 3) Standard Operating Procedures

These are used as job aids to build a more effective and motivated workforce. They currently have 59 SOP's available in English and Spanish.

#### 4) Teach Farm Managers to Manage Employees

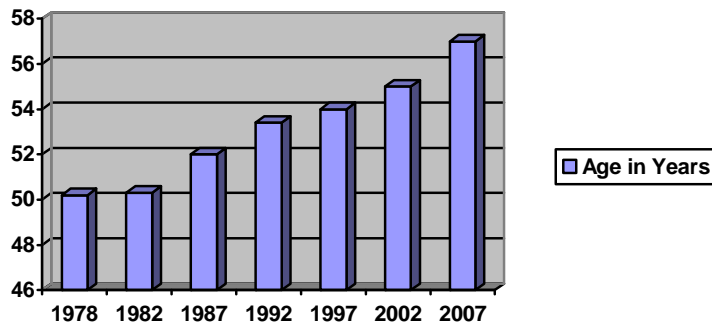
This includes workforce communication, conflict resolution and performance management. The aim is to establish an appropriate 'Barn Culture'.

A new 80 day induction programme is being trialled, with the main aim to get the new employee to do the job well then move onto a certification component i.e. start on the how and then move onto the why. Many of the barn staff I spoke to felt when they started their job they were 'thrown in at the deep end'.

### 3.4 Case study 4 – The Hispanic workforce.....a solution to a growing challenge?

The pig industry in the US faces similar issues as the UK industry with the average age of workers rising year on year.

Fig. 2 Average Age of Principal Operator



Source: USDA 2007

The number of workers in the pig industry aged 25-30 has dropped from 26.7% in 1990 to 14.8% in 2005<sup>7</sup>. The labour options are mature workers, young workers, differently able workers or an immigrant workforce. There has been a change in demographics of the US population with an increase, according to the US Census Bureau, of the Hispanic population from 9.6 million in 1970 to 47.8 million in 2010. This has led to one in every three workers entering the workforce now being Hispanic<sup>8</sup>.

I met with Orlando Gil, a former pig unit manager, who started the business Training Connections- Translation Services. His remit is, in his words, “Helping bridge the gap with the Latino workforce in the agricultural industry.”

I learnt that the US is now the second largest Latin American ‘Country’ in the world.

Reason why Hispanics move to the US

- Opportunities – the American dream.
- Economics – to escape poverty and have a better lifestyle.
- Family in the US.
- The political situation of their home country.

Will they stay? Orlando thinks-

- 1<sup>st</sup> generation, may go back to die in their country of origin.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, some may go back to see “what’s the big deal!”
- 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, and beyond why would they want to go back?

<sup>7</sup> National Pork Board Survey (2005)

<sup>8</sup> Pew Hispanic Center (2008)

One of the obvious challenges is fluency in the English language. Data from the Pew Hispanic Center would suggest within one generation most are fluent.

- 1<sup>st</sup> generation – 23%.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> generation – 88%.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> generation – 94%.

The Hispanic labour force offers both opportunities in the present and the future, therefore successful employers will

- Overcome the language barrier- most pig businesses I visited operate in English and Spanish. All National Pork Board training material is also in both languages.
- Learn about the culture and share their own.
- Clearly communicate expectations of the employees and the company's vision.
- Help Hispanic employees integrate to the team, company and the community.
- Be active in their communities and be an advocate for their employees.



### 3.5 Case study 5 – National Junior Swine Association



- National Junior Swine Association has over 21,000 members all less than 21 years of age.
- They all have interests in the Duroc, Hampshire, Landrace or Yorkshire breeds.
- Shows, with educational contests as well as pig contests, conferences and scholarships all feature in the calendar of events.
- An increasing number of members are from non agricultural backgrounds.
- Most 'commercial' pig producers I met discounted these young people as hobby farmers.

Personally I could see a huge pool of potential pig industry recruits all passionate about one thing – pigs.

*see next page for Case Study 3.6*

### 3.6 Case Study 5- Recruitment Consultant

Dave Allen, the managing director of Rich Connell Agri-Search Inc, runs a job placement firm specialising in all aspects of the agriculture industry in Arthur, Illinois. He will recruit, screen, interview, check references and recommend qualified candidates for positions in agri-business.



He tries hard to pinpoint the right people to work on pig units; he says “too often employers have settled for ‘bodies’ to fill the barns.”

#### Issues

- Less ‘farm kids’ so harder to find animal compassionate people.
- Large farms are like a factory and treat staff like robots.
- Salaries are typically \$10,000/year lower than competitor industries in Illinois.
- People become isolated, breeding low productivity.
- Industry fails in promoting the big picture.

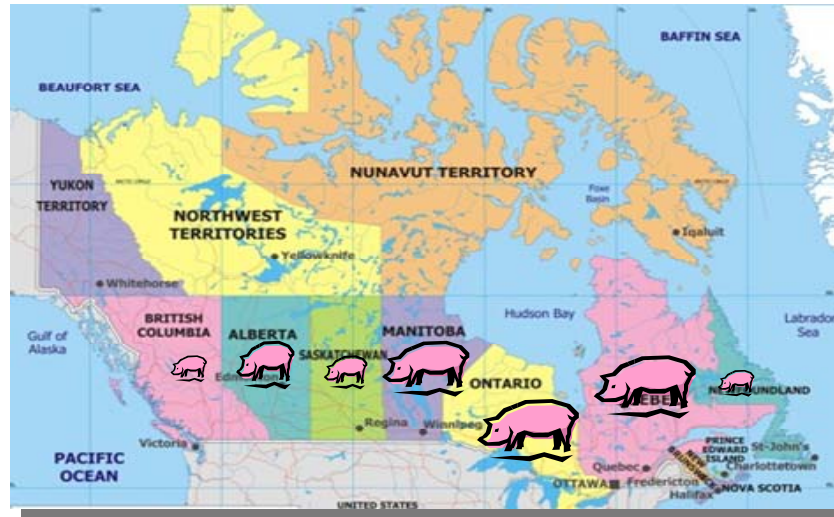
#### Solutions

- Sell the business as a place that helps propagate growth.
- Show them the big picture and how they fit in.
- Encourage them to be part of a team.
- Ask the question- ‘What would you most like to achieve?’ and help them to achieve this.
- Have rewards in addition to basic salary, offer pork, flexible working, schedule time off and holidays with regard to the person’s culture, faith, family commitments and offer language lessons to immigrant workers.
- Value employees input to make the working life better.
- Regular meetings bringing everyone together to explain what to do and where the business is going and why.
- Take staff ‘out of the barn’ and train them and highlight the career progression opportunities.

Dave tries to recruit people who are not just after a pay cheque but can see the value of the intangible rewards.

## 4.0 Canada

### Canadian Pig Industry



The Canadian pig industry has 1.3 million sows, down 5% on the previous year. Pig Inventories have been in decline for three years. High feed costs, low slaughter prices and the implementation of Country of Origin Labelling (COOL) legislation in the U.S. have led to farm restructuring and farm closures in Canada. The price paid for pigs is closely linked to the U.S. price and as the Canadian dollar has strengthened against the U.S. dollar this has further impacted on profitability.

Every producer I spoke to whatever their business size has an understandable obsession with costs of production. When discussing staffing and its impact on cost of production, opinions vary. One school of thought believes there is no way pig businesses could pay wages and offer benefits comparable to other industries. The other believes in order to recruit and retain the right individuals the package has to be attractive.

*See next page for examples of sites visited*

#### 4.1 Case study1 – Small Scale Pig Producer



Stonaleen farms stood out on my visit as a well run pig and arable family farm, similar in size as many farms in the UK at 400 sows. It has many of the same issues as the UK, low prices for pigmeat, high feed costs and very little to reinvest in new equipment and buildings. Stewart Skinner is constantly looking for ways to improve performance and profitability and prepared to try new ideas and adapt. He is completing his Masters and is very much a pig industry activist.

His approach includes-

- A move to batch farrowing. Using ideas from travelling to European pig farms.
- Loose housing sows. This is very different to the vast majority of sows in Canada which are kept in stalls.
- Direct Marketing. He adds value by using a Mennonite abattoir and butcher. The Mennonite colonies traditional lifestyle and methods of production and processing are synonymous with quality and command a premium.
- Working with an abattoir to change to become approved for export to the EU.
- Using key performance indicators to drive performance. Achieving over 25 pigs weaned/sow and 750g/day growth in finishers.
- Carrying out on farm trials for new or improved nutritional and health products.
- Developing his only member of staff, a tool maker by trade, into an excellent pig unit manager and rewarding him with a highly competitive package to retain him.



## 4.2 Case study2 – Large Scale Pig Producer

Largie barn is a 2,700 sow unit part of the Sunwold group, a joint venture of 5,500 sows in Ontario, between UK based Yorkwold and Canadian based Sunterra. The unit has tremendous physical performance producing over 27 weaners per sow per year, which are sent to Iowa in the US to be finished.



There are eight barn staff one maintenance person and an excellent manager, Marsha. The staff come from a wide range of backgrounds including purchasing management, paramedic, lab technician and school leaver. They range from 20 to 57 years old with one to five years service.

### Recruitment

- Local newspaper.
- Online jobsites.
- Word of mouth.
- Looking for - soft skills, receptive to training, attitude, personality, will they fit?



*contd overleaf*

## Benefits

- Wages from \$11/hour upwards.
- Two weeks paid leave.
- Health benefits and five days paid sick leave.
- Gift certificates. Given if a member of staff has done something over and above their standard duties.



## Why do they stay?

- An excellent manager.
- Maintains an atmosphere for staff to grow.
- Respects staff and works alongside them daily.
- Allows responsibility and accountability.
- Teamwork.
- Flexibility.
- Weekly meetings.
- Celebrate birthdays with cake and have potluck lunches.
- Team building socials such as bowling.

### 4.3 Case study 3 – Feed Mill

Molesworth Farm Supply Ltd is a livestock feed manufacturing facility in south west Ontario. Thirty years ago, Molesworth was a small and simple grist mill operation. Today it uses high-tech processes to blend and process grain for commercial livestock production with 47 employees. It gives the impression of a well run professional operation, immaculate mill and feed lorries, staff uniforms, a good local reputation and exceptionally low staff turnover rate. The managing director's biggest issue is the increase in average age of the employees and the fact most will retire within five years of each other.



#### Recruitment

- Word of mouth. Molesworth has a waiting list of potential employees as they have a very good reputation in the feed manufacturing and distribution industry.
- Mainly candidates with an agricultural background.
- Looking for experience and the right attitude.

#### Main factors for staff retention

- Openness and good communications. Quarterly staff meetings.
- Commend staff when they do a good job. Staff are engaged with the business.
- Mindful of employees' lifestyles. They are a 'family friendly' employer who take an interest in employees' families and understand the need to keep the spouses happy!
- Bonus paid on company profitability.
- \$100 bill in an envelope on the first weekend in July.
- Supply work clothing.

## 4.4 Case study 4 – Ontario Pork Industry Council



The Ontario Pork Industry Council is a not-for-profit organization whose goal is to improve the viability and sustainability of Ontario's pork industry. To strengthen the industry, OPIC brings together all stakeholders within the pork supply chain. Together, OPIC's members clarify direction and focus on shared issues facing the industry. OPIC then coordinates action in response to these issues.

One of the issues identified is human resource management. The ability to attract, motivate and retain labour is an issue from farm level through to the allied industries. The reasons identified are almost identical to the ones I have discussed in the background to my report.

In 2007 it embarked on the Careers Project.

There are three main components to the project –

1. To conduct a needs assessment and generated a comprehensive report which include the impact of current demographic trends on the available labour pool.
2. To develop a career promotion campaign.
3. To develop and deliver a management training program to build the HR management capacity of managers.

### **Needs Assessment**

Four surveys were undertaken for this project. Pig farm employers, pig farm employees, input suppliers and potential employees were asked to participate. The highlights are –

#### Pig Farm Employers Survey Results

- They spend \$440/employee on training per year.
- Employee turnover was 39%.
- They rated top three training needs as herd health, breeding and piglet management.
- They believe they need to improve most in communication, HR management and allowing employees to give input into the farm operation.
- They believe that appreciation for a job well done, compensation and having an interesting and satisfying job as the three most important factors to make a job appealing.



### Pig Farm Employee Survey Results

- The three most important factors to make a job appealing are: appreciation or recognition for a job well done, having a job that is interesting and satisfying and compensation.
- Improvements that need to be made to their current jobs are: compensation, number of hours worked, appreciation/recognition and relationships with co-workers.
- The most common way employers show appreciation for their work are flexible hours, free pork and clothing.
- Over 75% believe there is no opportunity for advancement where they currently work.

### Input Suppliers Survey Results

- Employee turnover rate is 31%.
- They feel they should improve communication, training opportunities and appreciation/recognition for a job well done.
- They believe the most appealing aspects of the job are: interesting and satisfying, compensation, communication and relationship with other employees.
- The three top labour concerns are: availability of people, keeping staff and motivating staff.

### Potential Employee Survey Results

- They considered a realistic work day to be 7-8 hours.
- Over half expected every weekend off.
- Only 27% felt fairly or very informed about careers in agriculture.
- Over half said they had considered agriculture as a career mainly because they enjoy the rural lifestyle.
- Those who hadn't considered a career in agriculture said the reasons were: no experience, not aware of possible jobs or did not grow up on a farm.

### The recommendations that came out of the report are

- 1) Human resource management policies needed.
- 2) A competitive compensation package is crucial.
- 3) Make a job interesting.
- 4) Show appreciation or recognition.
- 5) Employee involvement.
- 6) Expected hours of work should be clear.
- 7) Good scheduling of weekend and holiday work.
- 8) Paid vacation time.
- 9) Promotion or added responsibility.
- 10) Promotion of careers in agriculture.
- 11) Promotion of particular attributes of agricultural careers.
- 12) Social interaction at the workplace of co-workers.
- 13) Other- This includes any way to show employees they are valued Eg. Providing lunch, giving tickets to special event, bringing in snacks etc.

*continued overleaf*

## **Careers promotion**

OPIC have developed several tools to aid in Careers promotion

1. Pork Industry Careers promotional video, 'Ontario's Pork Industry Wants You!' ([www.opic.on.ca/Video/OPIC\\_Medium.wmv](http://www.opic.on.ca/Video/OPIC_Medium.wmv)) with associated promotional materials, badges fridge magnets etc.
2. A brochure 'The Ontario Pork Industry. So many options for a great career' ([www.opic.on.ca/User/Docs/OPICBrochureNoCrop.pdf](http://www.opic.on.ca/User/Docs/OPICBrochureNoCrop.pdf)).
3. A full time HR Project Coordinator to allow for the delivery of training and promotion of pork industry careers.
4. Supporting a Young Ambassador Program which the Ontario Farm animal Council Operate.

Thousand of rural and urban young people have now been educated about pork industry careers using these tools. Information has been supplied to over 600 secondary schools and thousands of students have been spoken to at industry and public events.

## **HR Management training**

OPIC have developed the following human resources training modules-

- Best practices in performance management.
- Hire the best, first time.
- Retention – the battle to keep talent.
- Discipline and dismissal – how to maintain your all star team.
- Family dynamics on the farm.

They have also produced a HR manual/tool kit CD and a list of web links to help locate HR and training information. The HR toolkit is a simple quick reference guide for handling HR matters. It serves as a framework to manage some of the basic aspects of managing HR needs and is easily adapted to use in any operation.

The project is widely considered to have been successful in the short term. I think the longer term success will depend upon further training programs based on the findings of the needs assessment and a continued education program.

## 5.0 Spain

### Spanish Pig Industry



Spain has the largest sow herd in Europe, at 2.7 million and, on the face of it has no major advantage over other European countries for having such a sizeable herd. The sow herd has grown by 140% since joining the EU. EU funding, cheap land and labour, cheap imported feed and 66kg of pig meat consumption per capita have been the drivers.

The bulk of production, 75%, is horizontally integrated. Large companies own the sows, pay the feed bills, vet bills and market the pigs. The farmer provides buildings, labour, water and is responsible for slurry disposal. The processing sector is very disjointed and ripe for consolidation, with the largest 10 abattoirs only killing 30% of the total pigs.

*see overleaf for examples of sites visited*

## 5.1 Case study1 – Industry Consultant



One of the most impressive individuals I met was Miquel Collel, a pig industry consultant. He is achieving outstanding results with human resources, reducing staff turnover in one case from 120% to 0%.

How does he achieve top results?

- He spends time talking to and observing staff on farm and reviews production data to assess strengths and weaknesses before creating recruitment, training and retention plans.
- He finds out what motivates each employee and tailors incentive plans accordingly.
- He strongly believes in ‘paying the best the best and the poorest the poorest’.
- Bonuses should be a significant part of the compensation package, on average 30%, paid only once or twice yearly, any more often then it is just part of the salary.
- There should be agreed objectives and the parameters should be wider than just physical and financial performance. These may include, promptness, number of days worked in a year, energy use, scoring areas under an individuals responsibility for cleanliness or state of repair.

Recruitment

- He likes to employ motivated people, preferably already employed.
- He does not use job centres but advertises on job sites, and local and national press.
- He will use ‘X-factor’ style auditions to create the most suitable team. A recent recruitment drive to staff a new 6,000 sow unit saw 60 suitable applicants compete in a week long assessment exercise for the 30 available jobs. This was funded through a government grant.

The success of his consultancy business has led to his services being in demand not only in Spain but all across Europe.

## 5.2 Case study 2 – Over 30 pigs per sow per year and less than 5% staff turnover



Gescaser Farm facts –

- 2,000 sows.
- Consistently achieving over 30 pigs weaned per sow per year.
- Immaculate unit.
- Almost no staff turnover, a mix of Spanish and European immigrant workforce.
- Early adopter of new technologies.

Antoni Casane, the owner, operates a very professional pig farming business. He regularly wins national awards for productivity which he attributes to the skills of the team of staff on the unit. He is no doubt a very good manager of people as well as pigs.

Factors contributing to the success –

- Employing people with the right attitude.
- Good people skills.
- Incentives to maintain high production levels.
- In house training based on needs assessment.
- Clean, safe working environment .
- Modern buildings and labour saving equipment.



### 5.3 Case study3 – Training Centre

Sus Scrofa training farm was meant to be one of my main visits. By the time I travelled to Spain it had closed. The centre was founded by Barcelo Josep, an industry consultant, a decade ago. He gifted the farm and set up a non profit making foundation to educate pig farm employees. Funding came from the Government, allied industries and farmers. Barcelo died suddenly last year and the centre has since closed. This was, as far as I am aware, the only centre of its kind in Spain. It had a good reputation for delivering high quality teaching which is now lost, and training has become sporadic and disjointed.

Most training is now delivered either through large integrators, veterinary groups or universities.

Examples:

#### Integrator

Vall Companys is the largest pig producer in Spain with 165,000 sows and is vertically integrated. It owns feed mills, AI centres, abattoirs, food processing and transport. The objectives are to guarantee quality, food safety and traceability. Due to its size the company has its own in house HR department and training programs using models produced by UK consultants.

#### University

Lleida University has always been highly regarded for its pig teaching. It offers courses up to masters level. In recent years however the majority of the students are overseas students from South America not Spain. During my visit the final touches were being made to a research and teaching farm albeit very small by commercial standards.



#### Vet

Carles Cassanovas, a vet, who has previously worked at Sus Scrofa now works as an industry consultant producing tailor made on farm training courses. He specialises in dry

sow and farrowing management training for farm staff. He also advises farmers and vets on batch farrowing and has produced his own 3 week then 2 week batch system weaning at three weeks old to maximise output and use of current pig facilities. He is a regular contributor of articles and papers for the website created by Barcelo Josep – [www.3tres3.com](http://www.3tres3.com) (English language version – [www.pig333.com](http://www.pig333.com) ) a one stop shop for management, nutrition and health information.

## 6.0 Denmark



Denmark has a herd of 1.4 million sows, exporting 1.9 million tonnes of pig meat each year. I have visited several times in the last few years and I am always impressed by how neat and tidy all the pig units are. The levels of investment and attention to detail in the construction process produce environments where both pigs and staff can flourish. Historically the co-operative structure of the industry and supportive lenders have given producers confidence to invest. However the recent lack of profitability in the cooperatives increased legislative demands and a decrease in land values in certain areas in Denmark has limited investment and curbed expansion. The one thing that has not changed is the professional manner in which all the units I have visited are managed.

Units provide a framework for well organised and comfortable conditions. Employee handbooks provide both general and job specific information. Due to an increasing immigrant workforce the language used on units is the language of business, English.

The farms I have visited tended to try to raise their profile in the local community.

*see overleaf for example of a site visited*



## 6.1 Case study1 – Training Facility



One impressive company visited was Dan-Pig. This operates as an international consultancy company and also has significant pig production interests in both Denmark and Russia. The aim is to support and optimize pig production and projects around the world, based on the best know how of Danish pig production coupled with latest knowledge. The company's training facility is based around a 2,000 sow unit performing at the highest levels consistently producing over 30 pigs per sow per year. Trainees may spend from as little as one day to 12 months on the unit.



## 7.0 Conclusions

From the outset my belief has been that people are the most important asset of any business. Throughout my travels this belief has been reinforced. Whether it is a small family farm or large business with multiple layers of management the key to success is a stable, motivated workforce who engage with the business and have common goals and aspirations. While in the USA I heard countless examples of pig units being built with the most up to date technology and labour saving systems but had failed commercially not through economic pressures of high input costs or low output values but through human resource issues. This was at both barn staff level with lack of 'buy in' from staff due to poor induction, integration and on going support and also at management level with poor supervisors and managers unable to 'walk the talk'.

On the flip side I witnessed where people management is carried out well even units that are not 'state of the art' can produce tremendous results.

### Recruitment

Every workplace is different. It is important to know and define values, goals and practices that describe your business. If you make this clear and what you are looking for clear then your recruitment efforts should be more successful. Use the individual characteristics of your business as a selling point. Thoughtful job design is important. Compared with other parts of the world the UK has some advantages which at first glance do not appear obvious.

For example-

- We have relatively small herd sizes therefore staff tend to have more variety in their daily routine.
- We do not castrate piglets, a mundane and time consuming job.
- We have a high proportion of our units operating batch systems which adds further variation to weekly tasks.
- 

These may be small points but all help create a more interesting job, one of the most important factors in staff surveys.

A comprehensive recruitment plan, careful attention to selection and ongoing commitment to retention will benefit your business through less time, energy and money replacing staff.

A good recruitment plan will take into account all of the following:

- Know your business.
- Know your recruitment needs.
- Know what you already have.
- Know the work.
- Know the labour market.
- Know your talent sources.
- Know your options.

Whilst these may seem quite obvious they are important points to which you need to find answers before you post your ad.

## **Training and Retention**

Staff retention doesn't just happen. It takes forethought to try and create an environment where somebody would want to come and stay. This also requires a plan and the recruitment plan is an important part of the retention plan. Each informs and impacts on the other.

Elements of the retention plan are:

- Know why they came (or not!).
- Know why they stay.
- Know why they leave.
- Anticipate turnover triggers.
- Know your options.
- Measure and evaluate.

Positive practices that will be part of the retention plan should include:

- Orientation and Integration.
- Training and development.
- Compensation and benefits.
- Recognition and rewards.
- Performance management.
- Work life balance.
- Employee communication and participation.
- Manager training and accountability.
- Saying goodbye.

The pig industry training and development opportunities that are available in the UK are the envy of all the countries I visited. Industry leaders were very aware of what the UK is doing and the certificates of competence and professional register were of particular interest.

The most successful businesses I visited carried out the above positives practices really well albeit differently. One of the most important things I learned wherever I went was that little things matter to employees, often perceived as inconsequential by managers or owners.

## 8.0 Recommendations

*“If We Change Nothing..... Nothing Changes. “*

### **Recruitment**

- We must as an industry, both pig and agriculture, sell ourselves to as wide an audience as possible. There are great career opportunities in a vitally important industry producing the food we eat. In the pig industry, due to its structure, there is scope for career progression not only in production but also in the allied industries. We need to follow the example of Canada and educate in schools and colleges. I appreciate there are already organisations doing this but a more coordinated approach on a larger scale would have more impact. We also need to use methods of communication young people can associate with such as You Tube, Facebook etc. Continuing to nurture the positive relationship that has been developed with the media in recent years is vital to sending out all the positive messages about our industry. The media like something different so we need to be innovative and quirky in attracting their attention to capture the imagination. The industry ‘stand by your ham’ version of the ‘stand by your man’ song created huge public interest.
- If we are trying to sell ourselves as a professional industry then human resource management policies are needed on farms to provide clarity for both employer and employee. A HR toolkit similar to the ones produced in Canada and the U.S. would provide a framework for each producer to then tailor to his/her own requirements. This fits perfectly with BPEX strategy and should attract funding to develop and deliver a kit to levy paying businesses at little or no cost.

### **Training and Retention**

- It is important to engage with the industry to highlight the benefits the early adopters have seen in their businesses from the different training and development programmes that are in place. It is imperative that, as an industry, we continue to lead the way in the development of ‘the new professionalism’ outlined in the Agri Skills Forum strategy for agriculture and horticulture. This is a key part in making our industry a career of choice.
- At an individual business level do not get hung up on having to pay high wages. From my travels I have seen that high wages will attract people but will not keep them for long if other factors in the workplace are not favourable. It is a case of considering what might be meaningful to them, I have highlighted some of the benefits used in different businesses I have seen, most of them do not actually cost that much. Be creative, you will soon find out what works for both you and your employees, never underestimate the power of cake!
- Manage performance of staff through effective and fair evaluation. Outline the business's goals and operational strategies and how an individual’s daily work relates to these. Assessments should occur on a regular basis and then provide ongoing feedback in a way that recognises good performance and provides constructive suggestions where improvement is needed.
- Within the industry many managers are promoted to the position because they have been good stockmen. The skills to effectively manage a business are different to those needed

to effectively manage livestock. In any business the manager sets the tone, all the positive practices and policies are lost if the manager does not understand how to communicate with or respect employees. More manager training is needed, not only in business management but in people management. The pig industry professional managers development scheme is a great opportunity but is currently only available to a few people each year and takes eighteen months to complete. More widespread 'bite sized' training sessions would reach a larger percentage of unit managers.

- The pig industry should not shy away from becoming an employer of choice. We can deliver all the criteria necessary to become a great workplace. In an increasingly competitive labour market it is not merely an option but an absolute requirement.

## 9.0 Postscript

I have found the whole Nuffield experience so far so much more than travelling the world, fact-finding for my chosen topic. It has opened my eyes to the fact that wherever you are in the world many of the issues facing agriculture and the pleasures gained from the lifestyle are very similar. I was initially disappointed with the fact that I had not had any major ground breaking discoveries in my chosen area, but on reflection have realised, as I stated in my conclusions, that it is often the little things that really matter. I have probably learnt as much about areas not relating to my study topic as I travelled around the countries I visited, which will never be worthy of print but will remain with me for the rest of my life.

I have, upon my return, tried to make some changes to improve the environment in the workplace. I have great staff working with me and I have always been conscious that parts of their role are mundane, uninteresting work. One job widely disliked across the world is pressure washing to clean down buildings and equipment. It is however an essential element of hygiene management to maintain healthy pig herds. Whilst in Denmark I found some farms had automated the washing process with a robot washer. I was impressed enough to become the first farm in the UK to import one of these washers from Sweden. It now takes away most of the drudgery of cleaning and allows technicians more time to do what they do well, look after pigs and run research trials.



I have also changed the feed system on two new trial pig finishing buildings we are building to allow automated accurate weighing and delivery of different feed types to any pen. This takes away the need to manually handle and weigh feed for trials, which is currently the case.

I have recommended the development and distribution of a HR toolkit for farmers in my study. I have been working with BPEX about this as a potential project using my findings to provide some of the material needed. The plan is to roll out a HR toolkit applicable to the UK situation in spring 2011.

I am involved with early stage meetings to create a pig industry web portal. The idea is to provide a point of access to jobs, training and careers in the whole of the pig sector. The portal will be aimed at all young people whatever their background and will also be an excellent shop window for the industry to the wider world. As part of the project I have agreed to be an e-mentor for new recruits to the pig industry.

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