



Target Farm Action

A monthly digest of practical advice for pig farmers from BPEX

A little birdie told me . . .

Wild birds can pose a major problem particularly to outdoor units and methods of control were the main item on the agenda at a meeting in Salisbury.

There was a lively discussion among the 30 present and hopefully it resulted in improvements to bird control in the area.

Birds present more of a problem to outdoor units during the winter months than at other times of the year since their natural food sources are in decline.

Outdoor pig units provide birds with a ready source of food, in the form of sow rolls, as well as uncovering worms as pigs root around.

BPEX KT Manager Helen Thoday led the first half of the meeting with information and guidance on the legal framework behind bird control, as well as highlighting the most problematic birds as far as feed loss and the spread of disease is concerned.

The second half of the evening was very much

led by those present. Producers discussed what methods of control and prevention they used (see inset), which seemed to be the most and least effective, as well as which birds are the biggest problem.

The group consensus was that rooks, gulls and ravens were the main problem. By the end of the evening everyone had picked up at least one new idea to try back on their unit, but the problem of birds becoming accustomed to control methods was raised.

Jennie Batt, a vet from Larkmead Vets, regularly visits pig units in the region and agreed that after a while birds become accustomed to the control methods used by farmers.

She said: "The essential part to bird prevention is that each action is changed on a regular basis", you need an armoury of methods that you can use as part of a control program, rotating the different techniques so that birds do not become immune to a particular control method, keep

Current control methods:

- Feeding by the fence line
- Reducing the space of the feed face
- Hawk falconry flights
- Gas bangers
- Distress call audio tapes
- Replacing the material feeder covers with tin
- Wet feeding
- Nails on posts
- Ad lib feeders
- Trough feeding
- Decoy birds
- Walking with an empty/mimic gun
- Good feed management eg minimising spillages

them 'on their toes'!

As a follow up Helen plans to co-ordinate a week of synchronised feeding, that is, she will encourage outdoor producers in the area to feed at the same time, to see whether this lessens the problem by reducing the choice for birds.

Slurry analysis is entering the space age

by Jessica Buss

British Grassland Society

Finding out the nutrient content of slurries and farm yard manures, so fertiliser applications can be accurately planned, should soon be easier, more reliable and hopefully cheaper.

Using technology now widely accepted for analysing forage and grain samples, it will soon be possible to scan a fresh manure sample and have the results within a few minutes, says Dr Ken Smith, ADAS Wolverhampton.

These new rapid tests should be available to farmers within two years and have particular relevance for pig farmers.

The slurry their animals produce is becoming more and more valuable as the price of chemicals rises.

Currently, when a sample of slurry or farm yard manure is sent to a lab, a small sample has to be taken and is usually dried and then processed for further chemical tests.

Ken said: "This is currently a slow and therefore costly process, taking up to two weeks for results to be received on farm.

"Costs range from £55 to £80, depending on the material and required analyses.

"These chemical tests are very accurate, but the sample analysed is small and it's difficult to be sure a sample collected from a tank or heap is representative".

Once a reliable calibration is developed, Near Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy or NIRS - which most labs already use for silages - has the potential to be just as accurate for most major nutrients

in manures, mainly because a larger sample can be assessed.

Ken said: "NIRS also uses a fresh sample, so lab preparation of samples is minimised."

It will provide dry matter (total solids), total nitrogen, mineral (ammonium) nitrogen, total phosphate, potassium, sulphur and organic matter.

Ken admits the potash levels will be less reliable, but this is less critical than nitrogen or phosphate and a rough guide on potassium should be acceptable when used in conjunction with soil analysis.

The LINK project to calibrate the NIRS machine, funded by Defra and industry partners including BPEX, is progressing, with a wide range of manure and slurry samples collected in the last year.

More than 1000 samples of cattle and pig manures and treated sewage were scanned by the machine and about 10-15% were selected for detailed chemical analysis and NIRS scanned at the same time to calibrate the machine.

Ken said: "In the coming year, we will need 1000 more samples to complete the calibration work and for validation checks to help improve the calibration.

"But this year, we hope to provide some feedback on the analysis for most samples submitted."

A second part of the project involves three years of studies to track the release of the manure nitrogen content from 30 different manures.



The experiments use large plots of ryegrass with three soil types.

The results will be related to NIRS scan data to develop predictions of nitrogen release.

Ken said: "Once the project is complete, we hope the costs of analysing manures should reduce."

While labs may need to invest in a new NIR machine, it should have multiple potential applications - including analysis of grain and forage samples.

Ken also thinks larger farmer co-operatives or consultancy groups may consider investing in an NIRS machine is worthwhile, making quick analysis of manure and other material easily accessible to many farmers.

Farmers and consultants who wish to supply cattle or pig slurry or manure samples for the project, or for further information, please contact Lizzie Sagoo (ADAS) on 01954 267666 or by e-mail lizzie.sagoo@adas.co.uk.

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