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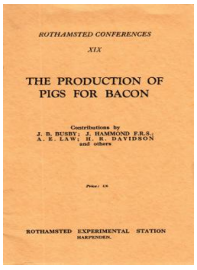
ROTHAMSTED RESEARCH

Rothamsted Conferences XIX

Full Table of Content


ROTHAMSTED CONFERENCES

XIX

THE PRODUCTION OF PIGS FOR BACON

Contributions by J. B. BURY; J. HAMMOND F.R.S.; A. E. LAW; H. R. DAVIDSON and others

ROTHAMSTED EXPERIMENTAL STATION HARPENDEN.

Discussion

Earl Radnor, C. Crowther, A. E. Marsh, V. C. Fishwick, J. H. Wilson and Others

Earl Radnor, C. Crowther, A. E. Marsh, V. C. Fishwick, J. H. Wilson and Others (1936) *Discussion ;* Rothamsted Conferences Xix, pp 26 - 28 **- DOI: https://doi.org/10.23637/ERADOC-1-206**

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DISCUSSION

Earl Radnor, in opening the discussion, said that he had been greatly helped by the bacon factory in problems of pig production. He stressed the point made by Mr. Law that management at the hands of the pigman was all important. Care and individual attention were quite essential to success. Breeding was a most important point. The Pig Industry Council were agreed that *strain within the breed* was more important than breed itself.

In regard to belly measurements he gathered that the meeting would like to abolish them altogether. He was not in favour of troublesome restrictions, but the curers would probably have strong views about this matter.

Belly measurements were not the whole story, however; he regarded weight of shoulder as a point that needed great attention. He suggested that bad management could give rise to a distended belly and a slack pig was much inferior to one having a level underline. Pigs having a straight underline were also more healthy. In dealing with Mr. Law's point that we must retain some shoulder to get constitution, he suggested that what was wanted was a shoulder that was well let in. This conformation gave lightness with constitution. To encourage eager feeding his pigs were kept on half rations one day a week. This made them clean up well for a week afterwards. The 10 minutes allowed by Mr. Law for the pigs to clear up appeared to be rather a short period; he preferred to give them 20 minutes.

Dr. C. Crowther, Harper Adams College, proposed to discuss only nutritional problems. He suggested that there was at present a great lack of information as to where to get the proper pigs. A comprehensive system of recording was wanted to enable us to obtain the type of pig required. There was also need for an intensive study of the pig diseases that played such havoc with production. Pig production was not simply a matter of scientific feeding; management was all important.

He stressed the advantage that the Danes possessed in separated milk. If we had the milk we could grow the pigs. He suggested that this matter was one for joint consideration by the Pigs and the Milk Boards. In his opinion we knew as much, if not more, than the Danes about feeding pigs without milk. In referring to Mr. Law's advocacy of fish meal, Dr. Crowther stated that he could obtain as good results, and cheaper, by using extracted soya meal, but he must have minerals, of which limestone and salt were the chief. Since soya meal is deficient in Vitamin A a handful of green stuff must be given, or where this is not available, a little cod liver oil. On this type of feeding the growth rate and the quality were quite satisfactory. A good average figure for the ratio of food to live weight gain was 3¾. In drafting the grading scheme the psychological factor

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had been neglected. It would have been better to begin with a relatively easy standard and gradually tighten up. The three main lines of research should be (1) the determination of the most economical growth rate—which need not necessarily be the quickest, (2) scientific study of quality problems, (3) disease.

Mr. A. E. Marsh, Brierley Hill, reminded the conference that the Danes produce only for one trade—the Wiltshire side. In England there are twelve trades, and in producing the bacon scheme the attempt had to be made to meet as far as possible all these various requirements. It would not do to force on the public an article to which they were not accustomed. Seventy per cent. of the pigs killed at Brierley Hill were grade A in the belly. The Midland trade wanted a good belly with a back that was not too fat. The Danes ignored belly for the London trade and paid great attention to length. The result was that English pigs were better bellied than the Danish. Many English pigs had the back fat thinner on the shoulder than on the loin. This was the exact inverse of the Danish measurements. He believed that the Danes were right in keeping their pigs warm and comfortable. English pigs laid fat on the shoulder to keep themselves warm !

Mr. Marsh said that producers must support the bacon scheme if it was to continue, and the quotas should be strictly enforced. His factories were at present killing at much less than capacity. Belly was not so vital except in the Midland trade. Only 50 to 60 per cent. of English bacon was Wiltshire, but we must watch the interests of other curers.

Mr. V. C. Fishwick, Wye. One reason for the inadequate numbers of pigs entering the factories was the form of contract. It was exceedingly difficult to contract fully for the second half of the contracting period. Some modification was required and he suggested monthly deliveries for the last 6 months. He could not agree that elaborate housing was necessary for pigs over the greater part of this country. The pigs must, of course, be warm and dry with no draughts. As a result of his trials he had come to the conclusion that breed made more difference than feeding to the fatness of carcase, although the quality of the fat is influenced by food. If the type is right, a Grade A pig is no more expensive to produce than one of lower quality. He agreed with Earl Radnor as to the advantage of an occasional fast : he gave his on Sunday afternoons.

Mr. Busby. In answer to Mr. Fishwick's point on the difficulty of supplying pigs in the second half of the contract period, stated that since the Board of Trade fixed their Quota regulations on a one-year basis the contract had to be framed on the same basis.

Mr. J. E. Sidgwick, Essex, said that 70 per cent. of his pigs were grade A in the belly but were too fat on the back. A 4 lb. conversion factor was not good enough for him. He kept his pigs on concrete from start to finish and as a supplementary foodstuff gave them a turf to chew.

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Mr. J. H. Wilson, Diss, said that he contracted for 1,000 pigs a year and confirmed Mr. Marsh's figure that about 70 per cent. had grade A bellies, but in a recent consignment he had only 3 grade A pigs out of 200. Since only about half English pigs went for the Wiltshire trade he suggested that there might be two contracts, one for the Wiltshire and another for the Midland trade, the latter requiring thick bellies but being more lenient with back fat. In regard to feeding, his view was that a high percentage of protein at the end of the feeding period gave leaner pigs and improved grading results.

Dr. Hammond agreed with Mr. Wilson and said that New Zealand produced some pigs very thick in the lean. These were kept on grass and skimmed milk and had a protein supplement (meat meal) instead of a carbohydrate one.

Dr. Crowther warned the audience of the danger of hurrying on pigs too fast and laying on too much back fat. He considered it was wasteful to feed high protein rations at the end of the feeding period.

Mr. Law produced some bacon for Mr. Busby to judge. When Mr. Busby had pronounced one sample to be impossible, a second very poor, and a third much better but still not good, he was informed that it was all Danish. Mr. Busby replied that he had seen some very poor pigs in Denmark, and warned English producers against turning out stuff like that displayed which would make British bacon unsaleable.

Mr. H. Mitchell, Harlow, asked why length which was regarded as being so important by breeders received no attention in the grading. He had recently entered 20 pigs and they differed in length by as much as 9 inches. He mentioned that in order to make up a consignment he included a " waster " and got Grade A for it.

Earl Radnor answering the last speaker said that length was indirectly taken into account in the grading.

Chairman's Concluding Remarks. Mr. Fox mentioned a few farmer's experiments that he had conducted on his own farm. In the last month of feeding he had fed less than the actual food requirement and given it in a dry form. The pigs were active and kept down the back fat.

Another point being tested was to feed only maintenance rations as the pig approached factory weight. Referring to the shorter contract Mr. Fox pointed out its danger, namely that if pork and fat pig prices were good, pigs would tend to be sent to the open market, and the factories would be on short supply. He went on to state that the Board would be only too glad to examine suggestions for a shorter contract that were fair to all concerned.

Sir Merrick Burrell in passing a vote of thanks to the Chairman and speakers assured the meeting that the importance of the study of pig diseases is recognised by the Agricultural Research Council and active work is proceeding. Owing to the previous neglect of the subject results must not be expected too quickly.

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