

Media Release



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NPA welcomes constructive discussions as pig sector stands at ‘critical point’

The NPA has welcomed Defra’s support in addressing the ‘perfect storm’ of events that have left the pig sector in its most critical state for decades, but has warned there is still much to do to avert a crisis.

Defra Farming Minister Victoria Prentis chaired a roundtable event on Tuesday afternoon, which was also attended by Secretary of State George Eustice, senior Defra officials and representatives from the NPA, processors, retailers, AHDB and the Devolved Administrations.

The roundtable was held at the request of NPA chairman Richard Lister to discuss the series of events that has seen thousands of pigs build up on farms due mainly to a combination of COVID-19 problems in pork plants and export disruption since early January.

“This was a very constructive meeting and we are very grateful for how seriously both Ministers and the department are taking this,” NPA chief executive Zoe Davies said.

“They were fully aware of the issues and we were able to raise our concerns and discuss what could be done at Departmental level, but also right across the supply chain in terms of sourcing more British pork to prevent what could turn into a very serious situation for the pig sector.

“Of course, we now need to turn these positive discussions into action, but we were very encouraged by what both Defra and retailers had to offer.”

Mr Lister, who farms pigs in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, began by outlining the ‘unique set of circumstances which have created the current perfect storm we face’.

He explained how COVID-19 problems in processing plant, coupled with a lack of China re-certification for several abattoirs and Brexit issues, have created a backlog of in excess of 100,000 pigs on farm.

“The net effect of this has been that many more pigs need to be cared for and provided with increasingly expensive feed and straw, resulting in rapidly declining cashflows and mounting losses for producers. The backlog is growing and pig farming is at its most critical state for 20 years,” he told the meeting.

It is estimated that, on average, UK producers are losing around £20 on each pig they produce

“Whilst we have farm contingency plans in place to cope with short term difficulties in moving livestock, these plans cannot be sustainable in the face of continuing and further backlogs,” Mr Lister said.

These comments were reinforced by the striking findings of a recent NPA members survey illustrating the problems producers are facing:

- 86% of producers reported having pigs ‘rolled’ by processors, held over to a later date, therefore having to keep them on farm for longer than would usually be the case.
- 44% said this was a regular occurrence.
- 88% of producers are already or expect to be in a loss-making situation soon
- 84% said this situation was having a negative impact on mental health.

The processors, represented by British Meat Processors Association (BMPA) pigmeat committee Chairman Andrew Saunders, outlined the issues they had faced related to Brexit and COVID, but stressed that regaining access to China was the single most effective way to resolve the current issues.

Dr Davies agreed that China was important for some, but said that this would take time, which was something that we did not have. She reiterated that we needed to find alternative solutions and fast. Recognising the need, Defra Ministers encouraged processors to look for interim alternatives.

“Retailers present were also supportive and said that demand for British pork was currently strong, so if processors could provide the product, they would sell it,” Dr Davies said.

“Whilst the biggest demand was for bacon, which is something that British pig farmers cannot produce enough of, one helpfully suggested that we ask AHDB to look at national carcass balance to see which cuts could benefit from further promotion.”

Mr Lister added: “This is a really important first step – and we are really grateful for Defra’s on-going support.

“This is a complex issue to which we knew there would be no single solution or we would have resolved it by now.

“There is clearly plenty still to be addressed, but the key message we took from this constructive meeting is simple: we will only find real solutions if all parties - producers, processors, retailers, trade bodies and Government - are prepared to put self-interest aside and work together for the good of the Great British Pig Industry.”

Notes to editors

- The NPA wrote to Mr Eustice in January to bring to his attention the unprecedented challenges the industry is facing. You can view the letter [HERE](#)
- The NPA issued a press release in January highlighting the problems pork exporters were facing as a result of new Brexit checks. You can view it [HERE](#)
- The issues raised by the NPA have been widely reported in the regional, national and international media.

More information

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