Herd & Flock Health Planning for Smaller Pig and Poultry Units

FACT SHEET
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Herd and flock health planning for smaller pig and poultry units

Having healthy pigs or chickens will lead to the following benefits for your farm business:

- improved farm profits – unhealthy or diseased stock will never perform to their potential
- better stock health and welfare
- improved sustainability

Animal Health Planning (AHP) is one of the most effective ways of maintaining health and improving the performance of your herd or flock.

Whether you are a small scale keeper of pigs or poultry, many of the tips in this factsheet will be of relevance to you in safeguarding the health of your herd or flock.

If you are an organic farmer and are in any doubt about health planning and the disease treatment options available to you, speak to your vet for guidance and also your organic scheme manager.

What is a pig/poultry health plan?

A pig/poultry herd/flock health plan is a formalised document that outlines the key areas of health risk to your business and notes preventative measures (such as biosecurity arrangements, vaccination programmes and medication programmes), sets targets and outlines what actions need to be taken for achieving those targets. It may also serve as a SOP (standard operational procedure) in the case of deteriorating herd or flock health.

**HOW DOES IT WORK?**

AHP is based on the following key principles:

- **Evaluation** (assess performance and risks)
- **Mitigation** (prevent or at least manage risk)
- **Responding** (make changes and set targets)
- **Monitoring** (collect and use actual records effectively)
- **Re-evaluation**

The Health Plan should be drawn up in conjunction with your vet, it will help you to identify and set priorities you want for your farm. In particular, identify which disease or risk to tackle, set out proposed actions to counter those risks and set achievable targets that can be reviewed and re-set if necessary.

**WHO NEEDS ONE?**

An Animal Health Plan is usually required if you are a member of an assurance scheme such as Red Tractor Farm Assurance Pigs Scheme (formerly known as Assured British Pigs), Assured Chicken Production (ACP), The BEIC Lion Code, Quality British Turkey, Freedom Foods (RSPCA monitored) Scheme.

Absence of a documented health plan generally means a non-compliance with the schemes' requirements.

**DOCUMENTING THE NORMAL AND THE ABNORMAL**

It is essential to record key herd or flock enterprise details within the AHP.

For poultry, this would include the number of birds, age, breed etc. Also, those key performance areas that change daily need to be noted down, such as egg numbers, daily liveweight gain, dead birds, culls and so on.

For pigs, typically it might include performance records including farrowing rate, litter size, alive, dead, mummified, average daily weight gain, feed conversion ratio, records of mortality and stillbirths.

It is inevitable that at some point in the operation of the business, the recorded data will veer away from the "normal". Within the AHP there needs to be a clear marker as to when intervention is required. In many instances, this will be the starting point for a veterinary investigation and the vet’s knowledge and experience of a farm will be instrumental in determining where the norm lies for each parameter and at what point action needs to be taken.

**WHO iS iT For?**

The health plan is primarily for the producer but, as the health plan is normally written and developed with a vet, it does allow an incoming vet to get a quick guide to the health status of that herd/flock. Also, by documenting health planning it enables your customers to assess the health and welfare measures adopted on your farm. A documented AHP may serve to demonstrate compliance with the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Wales) Regulations 2007.

For more information on AHP visit the Menter website: [www.menterbusnes.co.uk/farmingconnect](http://www.menterbusnes.co.uk/farmingconnect)
IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS, IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS, UPDATING AND MONITORING

In the event of any health or welfare problems, an investigation should be made into the cause seeking advice from your vet. Once an alteration has been made to the plan to combat the problem, such as additional vaccination or tighter biosecurity, the impact of that change should be monitored.

Continual re-evaluation and updating of a health plan will allow you to see if a farm is ultimately delivering the health, welfare and performance levels required. Where there is a shortcoming, an investigation needs to be undertaken to identify the problem and offer a solution. This should be ongoing as new threats and challenges will continue to arise and impact on your farm.

DISEASE RECORDING OR RECORDING OF PARTICULAR CONDITIONS

Maintaining performance and health records is an essential element of the AHP process as they allow the most significant problems to be identified for priority attention.

They also allow the effectiveness of any control measures to be determined. Informed decisions can then be made on whether further or different measures are adopted into the animal health plan.

It is also important to record their frequency, for example, how many in a three month, six month, or 12 month period?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

It is important to keep your AHP up to date – this is done most easily by including information from some or all of the following sources:

- Your own production records
- Vet reports
- Health investigation documents, such as laboratory or slaughterhouse reports
- Slaughterhouse condemnation reports
- Medicines Record Book

When post-mortem examinations, laboratory work or veterinary visits have been undertaken, they should be added to the health plan. It is then possible to cross reference the recording of abnormal performance parameters with a possible diagnosis.

Similarly, for poultry, the Meat Hygiene Service factory reject sheet can be an important source of information on health problems existing on the farm. For example, birds rejected for emaciation problems can be correlated with disease problems that occurred on site. Armed with this data an alteration can be made to the health plan to reduce the chance of a similar problem occurring in the next flock.

TREATMENT PLAN

You should have a treatment plan for your herd or flock and ensure that you are using medicines correctly and safely. When disease dictates that a herd or flock would benefit from medication, this should be recorded in the medicines book and added to the AHP.

Further guidance can be found in Veterinary Medicines Guidance Note 14 – Record Keeping Requirements for Veterinary Medicinal Products - available on the Veterinary Medicines Directorate Website www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/pdf/vmg/vmgnote14.pdf

VACCINATION PROGRAMME

Vaccination programmes, as opposed to reliance on antibiotics for treating disease, form an important part of proactive health management.

Vaccination schedules should be incorporated into the AHP. When the health status changes or vaccines come onto, or disappear off the market, the AHP schedule can change and this should be documented.

When disease problems that occurred on site. Armed with this data an alteration can be made to the health plan to reduce the chance of a similar problem occurring in the next flock.

Key biosecurity issues common to both pigs and poultry include the following:

- Visitors - Restrict access to pig and poultry houses to essential visitors only. Maintain a visitors book and provide visitors with effective protective clothing. Footwear must be dipped, before/after entering livestock buildings, with Defra approved disinfectants.
- Farm deliveries and collections are easier to control and provide a record of non-staff who to contact, where not to go, what not to do.
- Quarantine facilities for introduction of new or different measures are adopted into the animal health plan.

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DISEASE RISK AND PREVENTION (BIOSECURITY)

Biosecurity is a set of practical measures that a pig or poultry keeper, large-scale or small-scale, can take to limit the introduction and spread of infectious disease. This is important both within a farm and from one farm to another; or from elsewhere, for example market/abattoir/processing plant. Reducing the spread of disease will help to maintain the health of the farm, reduce the costs of disease and maintain productivity. It will also reduce the risk of disease exposure to any members of the public who visit your farm - this is particularly important if you hold open days or farm visits.

Stockowners need to consider the disease risks to the health and welfare of all animals within their care. The Animal Health Plan should document key risks and set out which of these are a priority for your unit, what actions need to be taken and what targets might be appropriate. For example, this might cover issues such as employing contractors, helping neighbours, attending livestock auctions, agricultural shows and visiting any facility where animals are kept.

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Legal methods of disposing of fallen stock are:

- Authorised collection of dead pigs and poultry, including afterbirths and stillborn piglets via the National Fallen Stock Scheme
- Delivery to an approved knackerman
- Approved on-site incinerator
- Delivery to an approved renderer.
The rules and exemptions can be complex so please refer to the Welsh Government website for further details of the exact requirements. www.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/ahw/animalbyproducts

Improved biosecurity throughout the livestock industry will help to reduce the overall disease burden in Wales through reducing risk to individual farms and by safeguarding the healthy reputation of Welsh livestock and associated products.

For further detailed information on Animal Health Planning available from the Welsh Government, please refer to the following link www.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/ahw/animalhealthandwelfarestrategy/animalhealthplanningpi/ahpcollectinginfoisakeytosuccess/

Through the Farming Connect Whole Farm Plan, there is 80% funding available to eligible businesses towards the cost of Animal Health Planning. Please get in touch.

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