

A review of enrichment provision in the European supply base of a major UK retailer: analysis of compliance trends following the introduction of agricultural code of practice requirements.

FG Roberts¹, AJ Lucas¹ and R Mason²

¹Integra Food Secure Ltd., Hanborough Business Park, Long Hanborough, Oxfordshire, OX29 8SJ

²Tesco Stores (UK) Ltd., Tesco House, Delamare Road, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, EN8 9SL

fiona@foodsecure.co.uk

Introduction

Tesco Stores (UK) Ltd. has historically endeavoured to meet customer expectations with regard to animal welfare for their own branded products by requiring that all approved companies within the global supply base are inspected by Integra Food Secure Ltd, an independent, ISO 17020 accredited, inspection body.

The benefits as a whole being that Integra are a small, welfare-focused team working with Tesco to drive improvements through the supply chain and shape standards. Inspections also fulfill a sampling function in terms of determining the extent to which national assurance scheme standards (which are pre-requisite for Tesco supply) are audited in a consistent and reproducible manner.

Council Directive 2008/120/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs represented a significant advancement in approach to environmental management, specifically enrichment provision. It recognised that a range of behaviours in pigs, such as rooting and chewing, are not purely motivated by hunger but by drives that produce a range of exploratory behaviours and in the specific case of sows a very strong pre-partum nesting instinct.

As a consequence pig producers had to provide pigs at all production stages, including sows, with permanent access to environmental enrichment materials in “a sufficient quantity... to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities”.



Figure 1: Straw bedding can fulfill all enrichment requirements

Objectives and Inspection Outcomes

As a legislative requirement compliance with 2008/120/EC was implicit in the Tesco Code of Practice from 2008. Persistent levels of non-compliance, however, (44% in January 2010) were of concern during inspections. Anecdotally producers reported that the use of behavioural outcomes i.e. ‘investigation and manipulation’, rather than specifying enrichment types was resulting in confusion at a farm, advisory and inspection level. This in turn led to the inclusion of a stand-alone inspection clause in the Tesco Standard in 2010, which clearly stipulated that chains used in isolation (historically, a commonly used enrichment device) were no longer acceptable. Clearer guidance was also provided, derived from research evidence on the properties of ‘acceptable’ enrichment.



Figure 2: Supply chain client inspection

Following amendment of the Tesco Agricultural Standard for Pigs a total of 607 pig farm inspections were completed across the UK and EU between January 2010 and December 2014. Findings initially demonstrated continued confusion regarding what was acceptable enrichment media (not least following independent assurance scheme inspection where non-malleable objects were still being assessed as appropriate). In the intervening period, however, there has been a decrease in non-compliance within the supply base to 25% to the end of 2013 and 17% to the end of 2014 (Figure.3).

This was accompanied by qualitative benefits i.e. demonstrable improvement in range and type of provision, enhanced understanding at a farm level and increased communication from processors to their supply base (generated as corrective action) to ensure a raised awareness.

Preliminary data reviewed also suggests quantitative improvements in outcomes seen that are typically associated with re-directed behaviours where enrichment is poor (e.g. tail biting and fight damage assessed at point of slaughter).

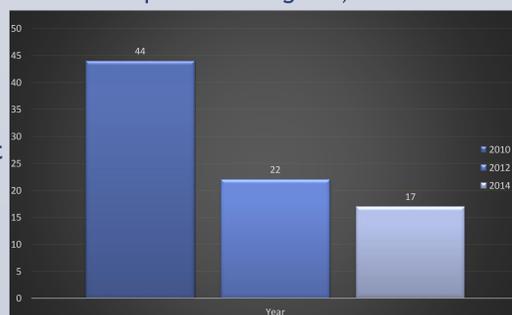


Figure 3: Percentage of Inspected Farms non-compliant for Enrichment Provision between 2010 and 2014.

Retailer Conclusions

“As part of the Tesco supply chain we have stipulated that all of our farms must meet the Tesco Agriculture Standards for pigs across all of our products and categories. Within our standards we stipulate that all pigs must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of malleable/destructible material; this specific inclusion being deemed necessary because of persistently poor levels of compliance following legislative changes.

Since we introduced this in 2010 we have seen producers, across all the EU countries that we source from, embracing this standard and seeing the benefit within their systems. During visits on farm you see a large variety of different and increasingly innovative items used including straw, plastic pipe, wooden poles, molasses balls and compounded straw pellets.

Producers have risen to the challenge of providing materials that are suitable for the constraints of housing systems and the activity levels of the pigs themselves. This means embedding an understanding that enrichment must be suitable at each life stage from weaners (Figure 4) to finishers.



Figure 4: Weaners manipulating one of a number of plastic, compressible ‘diaphragms’ suspended in each pen.

Speciality Parma pigs and group house sows represent a particular challenge due to age and size (Figure 5). Similarly, recognition of materials that best serve the specific nesting behaviours of sows has been an increasing priority and areas where the supply chain is showing innovation e.g. use of jute sacking affixed to farrowing crates.



Figure 5: Group house sows utilising hay racks

Promoting this investigative behaviour of pigs, is a key welfare parameter and allows us to help meet our customer expectations on pig welfare”

Ruth Mason - Tesco Agriculture Manager (Pigs) March 2015

Conclusions

Legislative requirements may not provide sufficient impetus alone to drive change in a timely manner. Retail requirements coupled with a robust inspection procedure (that can benchmark within and across a range on international farm assurance schemes) can be a significant factor in effecting change within a supply base

Acknowledgements

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