

PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE PIG CARCASE (GRADING) REGULATIONS 1994

Regulatory Appraisal

Pig carcase classification is covered by Council Regulation 3220/84 (EEC) and Commission Regulation 2967/85, which determines the community scale for carcase classification and the general conditions of how this should be achieved. In essence, this means that Member States must have authorised methods of determining estimated lean meat percentages in pig carcasses. The UK has a number of authorised methods for the estimation of lean meat percentage of a carcase. All new methods must be approved for use by the Commission. This involves comparison of the new method with existing methods in a procedure that involves carcase dissection and statistical analysis of a representative sample of pigs in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Autofom machine represents one such new method and the industry hope that, if adopted in the UK, it will enhance producer efficiency, improve feedback to producers on carcase quality and ultimately lead to improved competitiveness.

The potential use of Autofom is embedded in The British Pig Executive's strategy for the British pig industry "The Road to Recovery". The strategy was launched in May 2002 with three specific objectives in mind: improving competitiveness throughout the supply chain; defending and adding value to the pork and pork products markets and building alliances to develop the British market. As part of the BPEX Action Plan to deliver the strategy, BPEX is committed to facilitate the introduction and uptake of new carcase grading and measurement tools such as Autofom. Since the launch of the strategy, BPEX charged the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) to begin trials on the use of the new machinery which is already in operation in Denmark, Germany, Spain and Poland.

Last December the MLC submitted a protocol for a dissection trial to be used to establish equations for authorisation of the Autofom for carcase classification in GB. This was submitted to the European Commission last December and they gave their approval for the trial to start. The Meat and Livestock Commission submitted their report of the trials to Defra, who in July forwarded them on to the EC. On 17 September the report and a draft Commission decision authorising Autofom to be used in GB as well as cancelling the authorisation for using SFK- Ultra Fom which is no longer used by industry, was approved by the Pigmear Management Committee, following detailed consultation with national experts in other Member States. The Commission published its decision on 20th October.

Autofom is a non-invasive and fully automatic ultrasonic scanning machine that provides a detailed estimation of individual pig carcase composition. As the Autofom generates a significant amount of data for each carcase, the potential exists to feed this back to the individual producer and his breeding

stock supplier. The information can then be used to inform the producers' breeding strategy and help them more efficiently produce a pig that matches the market requirement. The data generated can also help in the more accurate matching of primal cuts from the carcass to the requirements of specific markets. Autofom, therefore, has the potential to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of pig production.

The amendments to the Pig Carcass (Grading) Regulations 1994 are routine. Although the EC Pigmear Management Committee have approved the draft Commission Decision, the GB 1994 Regulations need to be amended before Autofom can be used anywhere in the UK. The extent of the amendments are limited to the interpretation by inclusion of the Commission Decision.

Defra have informed the UK industry of the proposed amendments to the Regulations and they are in favour of the new equipment. We have consulted Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales and they are totally in favour of what is proposed. It is perceived as beneficial to Welsh industry. There have been no objections to the proposal with some positively in favour. Once these new regulations come into force Defra will lead on informing key stakeholders.

Cost Implications

The proposed amendment to the 1994 Regulations fulfils the legal requirement to enable the UK member state to adopt new carcass grading and measurement tools such as Autofom. The changes to the Regulations do not make the use of Autofom obligatory, it is just an additional option. Although costs of installation will be met by industry the new equipment will have a beneficial impact on business. The new technology will not be compulsory but will be an additional option.

It is not possible to estimate likely costs. The decision to be made will be commercially driven and is likely to involve an assessment of the rate of return for the industry against the investment to purchase Autofom. It will be a decision for each individual stakeholder.