

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

Minutes of the meeting of the Farm Strategy Committee held on 2 February 2017 in the Boardroom.

Present: Dr D Llewellyn Chairman
Mr M Roach
Mr R Hooper
Dr J Donaldson
Mr C Ellis
Mr S Kirby
Professor P Mills
Dr A Wilcox

In attendance: Dr C E Baxter Clerk to the Governors
Mrs L Furey
Mr R Heath

Apologies: Mr C Bailey
Miss R Reeves

Members were reminded to update their entry in the Register of Interests as necessary.

16/11 Minutes

Approved: the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2016 (16/01-16/10), subject to correction of minute 16/02 to read 1p/litre rather than 0.1p/litre. **CEB**

16/12 Matters Arising

Received: a report from the University Secretary.

- Noted:
- i) that Rosie Reeves, Richard Heath and Scott Kirby continued to work together looking at developing methods for cross-charging between farm enterprises. The work had also included a review of the fixed asset register for the farm. The overall aim was to develop a model that would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee;
RR/SK
 - ii) that work was in hand to identify a suitable replacement for Karen Kerr in the IT team. Once the new member of staff was in place, further work to develop the farm information systems search engine would be undertaken;
 - iii) that the Farm Manager would discuss working hours with Colin Bailey in due course. In the meantime, work to restructure the current farm team was underway and was being completed as a key priority;
 - iv) that thanks were due to Colin Bailey for arranging the visit of Matt Simister from Tesco to the University. It was particularly pleasing that Mr Simister would be returning to the University with his agriculture team during April 2017. It was understood that Colin Bailey would be catching up with Matt Simister in due course and would feedback any further comments he made about his visit.

16/13 Risk Management

Received: a report from the University Secretary on the management of risks monitored by the Committee.

- Noted:
- i) that a new bund had now been created surrounding the former digestate storage tanks which had been used for farm slurry over the period since the closure of the AD plant;
 - ii) that further discussion had taken place with the commercial company with respect to the University having access to farmland. Although the company had now invited the University to submit a more formal proposal, it was understood that they had a number of other options which they were also considering. In addition to this, some vandalism had taken place on the property which was the subject of a current insurance claim;
 - iii) that the Vice-Chancellor had the opportunity to mention the University's requirement to access good quality farmland to the HEFCE Board during his presentation earlier in the week. Although HEFCE Board members had indicated that they understood the issue, they were unlikely to be able to assist in any direct way;
 - iv) that it was likely that BREXIT might lead to a number of changes in the price of land. Nevertheless, although land might become slightly cheaper, strategically its value would still be critical and it was understood that, from the University's perspective, acquisition of suitable land was a 50-100 year horizon and strategic value might outweigh market values by a significant margin depending upon the location and value of the land in question.

Agreed: that the remaining spoil which had not been needed for the bunded areas surrounding the slurry tanks needed to be cleared as soon as possible so that the land could be put back into use. **SK/PM**

16/14 **Farm Management Accounts (Grass and Arable)**

- Received:
- i) the Farm Management accounts (Grass and Arable) for the period to 31 December 2016;
 - ii) a progress report on the annual operating plans for the University Farm.

- Noted:
- i) that the farm was currently performing slightly ahead of budget in relation to planned income. Wheat sales had been secured at a better price than anticipated although stock values had fallen. However, the latter was likely to recover by the end of the year and the Committee noted that Halls would be undertaking the half-yearly stock review later in the week;
 - ii) that there had been a disposal of equipment leading to additional income of £48,000 during the period;
 - iii) that the milk price was looking slightly better although feed costs were increasingly coming under pressure due to the weaker pound. Some levelling off of prices had been seen and this would be monitored closely;
 - iv) that the Dairy Unit was continuing to perform well despite staff changes over recent months. There had been some challenges relating to fertility in the herd which was likely to relate to the fact that a number of trial animals were now coming through the system. It was also noted that the quality of maize currently being fed to the cattle had been very good and appeared to be helping support performance;

- v) that the Dairy Unit had been holding back a number of cows in anticipation of a larger group being needed for Agri-Epi work. In addition to this, there was a peak of calving due to the cycle of trial animals coming through the system. The farm had, therefore, needed to make a number of decisions with regard to the culling of cows to manage numbers appropriately;
- vi) that, in light of veterinary advice and Tesco contract requirements, a number of changes in treatment had been introduced together with new protocols. Staff had been trained on the new approaches. The Farm Manager also confirmed that a range of other training was being put in place and that regular sessions delivered by a range of people including the appointed veterinary surgeons were occurring on a regular basis;
- vii) that it was recognised that there was a need for the Dairy Unit to closely monitor cell count data as this had been erratic over recent months. Startvac had been reintroduced and a conservative approach was currently being taken to dry cow treatments. Further staff training had also been put in place. The new herd manager was being closely monitored by the Farm Manager and, in addition to this, the veterinary surgeons were taking an independent overview of the Unit's performance;
- viii) that the farm sheep had been performing well. The flock had been developing gradually and had now been split into breeding flock and a lamb/meat sales flock. Both flocks were proving useful for nutritional work and some very interesting results had been emerging from work undertaken by Dr Kate Phillips of the Animals Department;
- ix) that the flock was now Cignet recorded and this had also helped support research work;
- x) that a new piece of research would be starting shortly involving the Lleyn Commercial Breeders Group and Glasgow University. This would focus on worm burdens.

16/15 **Pig Unit**

- Considered:
- i) the Pig Unit accounts for the period to 31 December 2016;
 - ii) a progress report on the annual operating plan for the Pig Unit.
- Noted:
- i) that the Pig Unit was currently ahead of budget due to strong performance and improvements in the pork price. Project income however remained slightly behind expectation and in addition to this the Unit was currently retaining some funds which would be needed to pay for capital developments. The Pig Unit Manager had worked with members of finance to reforecast the budget;
 - ii) that the University had recognised that recent issues relating to the failure of the generator when works were being undertaken to the electrical substation had led to problems to the Pig Unit. Thanks were due to Richard Hooper and his team for working with the Estates Department to try and address these issues as soon as possible. Further steps were now being put in place for such an emergency situation and a dedicated generator would be sourced in due course;

- iii) that the Unit had continued to buy feed forward as far as possible and was currently covered until April/May 2017. After this, it was recognised that costs were likely to increase due to the weaker pound and a number of other factors;
- iv) that JSR Genetics had developed a new genetic group which had been performing well in the Netherlands. However, JSR wished to have these animals on the ground in the UK so that UK based data would be available to the wider industry. In light of this, JSR had agreed to provide animals at cost and they would also support any downtime costs involved to having a replacement herd across the whole of the Pig Unit;
- v) that the Unit had commitments involving the current stock for the period until November 2017 but would, in agreement with JSR, run a parallel herd off site so that the new stock would be being put in place and performance tested until such time as they could be relocated to the University;
- vi) that it was hoped that the new stock would improve the health status of the Unit and that this would, in turn, lead to a further boost in performance and reduction in vet costs. Risks remained however in relation to how long the Unit might stay disease-free. Every effort would be made to increase bio-security and a very thorough deep clean of the current Unit would be taking place before the new stock came on site;
- vii) that the plans to develop new weaner vans would be delayed and Finance would be updated; **RH**
- viii) that a key design feature in the new weaner van arrangements would be to improve vermin proofing now that bird access had been addressed;
- ix) that CAE would continue to talk to Stephen Mansbridge about developing PhD research proposals. It was hoped that CAE might be able to discuss use of the Silcock Foundation funding for pig work; **CAE**
- x) that it was further recognised that the Pig Unit would be able to engage positively with Agri-Epi particularly in relation to the use of technology and that there would be opportunities to apply for AHDB funding in due course;
- xi) that the proposed development to the Pig Unit would need to be discussed with the Home Office Inspector especially as the Home Office stipulations for stock densities did not reflect a commercial pig unit and therefore a variance of the arrangements would need to be agreed. The Home Office Inspector had been contacted with a view to seeking her comments on the proposals.

16/17 **Animal Production Welfare and Veterinary Science/Crop and Environmental Science Departments - Operating Plans 2016/17**

Received: a progress report on the Annual Operating Plans for the APWVS Sheep Unit APWVS Beef Unit and CERC.

Noted: i) that the APWVS Sheep Unit continued to support teaching, together with five PhD students and honours research projects. It was

recognised that it would be helpful for the Unit to progress its plans in relation to publications including in the farming press; **CAE**

- ii) that the Beef Unit was supporting a number of undergraduate projects in particular and Simon Marsh continued to be very successful in getting articles in the farming press. The new Chair in Beef Production, jointly funded by ABP had been advertised. Interviews would take place shortly;
- iii) that, as noted earlier in the meeting, the development of the Farm Information System search engine would be welcome;
- iv) that some staff within the Crop and Environment Sciences Department had raised a query about the acquisition of Gatekeeper software. This had been reviewed and there were concerns about the size of the company although it was understood that it was now owned by Farmers Weekly and, therefore, might have a more secure business model. It was further noted that the software was seen as the industry standard and that there might be an opportunity to explore whether the software providers would be interested in developing the package for educational use.

Agreed: that LF/SK and AW would discuss 'Gatekeeper' further and would approach representatives at the Farmers Weekly to explore whether they might be willing negotiate special arrangements for educational use. **AW/LF/SK**

16/18 **Research Projects**

- Noted:
- i) that the Pig Unit had secured a JSR contract for £75k in relation to the new genetic stock as reported earlier in the meeting;
 - ii) that a bid to the AHDB Knowledge Exchange programme involving Nottingham, Warwick, Rothampsted and HA focusing on beef had recently been submitted;
 - iii) that it would be important for CAE and SK to meet with DGL and PM as soon as possible to agree the revised plan for adapting the current beef facility using CIEL funding. **CAE**

16/19 **Any Other Business**

First Foxhole

- Noted:
- i) that, unfortunately, First Foxhole field had been badly affected by contract work to install the green energy system. A pit would be dug to identify the extent of the damaged soil structure. The contractors had already been alerted to this issue;
 - ii) that the unexpected problems with power caused by contractors earlier in the week had led to a number of challenges for CERC and thanks were expressed to all staff for their understanding. This incident had also led to a further review of whether or not all samples being currently retained in freezers were really needed;
 - iii) that AW was working hard with colleagues on the 'Access to Agriculture' programme. This aimed to encourage people who had not had the opportunity to secure sufficient work experience prior to starting a course at Harper Adams to complete their work experience during their first and second year of studies. It was hoped that this would assist with widening access and might lead to opportunities for

further students to work within the APWVS Units as well as on the wider University farm. A number of expressions of interest in this special programme had already been received;

- iv) that CERC had achieved a very positive outcome from a recent DEFRA audit and had been invited to bid for a national list of trials.

16/20 **Date of Next Meeting:**

Noted: that the date of the next meeting had been moved to 24 May 2017 at 10.00am.