

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

FARM STRATEGY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Farm Strategy Committee held on 15 October 2020 at 10.00 via MS Teams.

Present: Dr D Llewellyn Chairman
Mr C Bailey
Mr J Blackshaw-Crosby
Dr J Donaldson
Mrs L Furey
Mr R Hooper
Mr S Kirby
Mrs C Snell
Dr A Wilcox

In attendance: Dr C E Baxter Clerk to the Governors
Mr R Heath
Mrs S Vinall Minute Secretary

Apologies:

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

20/01 Minutes

Approved: the minutes of the Farm Strategy Committee Meeting held on 17 October 2019 (19/01/19/09)

20/02 Matters Arising

Received: a report from the University Secretary.

- Noted
- i) that Andy Wilcox would discuss any research related requirements for the paddock area of the Agri Epi Smart Dairy with Mark Rutter; **AW**
 - ii) that off-site slurry storage discussions were still ongoing and the Committee would be updated as progress is made; **RH/SK**

20/03 Risk Management

Considered: a report from the University Secretary on risk items monitored by the Committee.

- Noted:
- i) that Farm staff continued to be briefed on biosecurity requirements;
 - ii) that Vet led training for Dairy Unit staff continues to take place on a regular basis together with similar procedures operating in the Pig, Beef and Sheep Units including Home Office Competency checks. Specific arrangements had been made to support key worker rotas in light of Covid-19 to minimise the risk of staff becoming unwell at the same time;
 - iii) that appropriate Health & Safety arrangements continued to be managed.

20/04 Farm Strategy

- Received: an oral update from the Vice-Chancellor on work being undertaken on the future shape and function of the Farm;
- Noted:
- i) that a review on the performance and management of Farm resources to provide an overarching view of the future direction of the Farm was in hand. An initial draft paper had been prepared by the Farm Manager and reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor and Colin Bailey, who had recently agreed to take on the role of Lead Governor for the Farm;
 - ii) that Colin Bailey and Scott Kirby would have further discussions to fully understand the issues and challenges set out in the paper, along with any other factors or considerations that emerge during their discussions and would report back to the Committee; **CB/SK**
 - iii) that the Vice-Chancellor and Andy Wilcox would meet with a view to starting a similar review of the livestock section that is managed by the Agriculture and Environment Department; **DGL/AW**
 - iv) that it was agreed that establishing clear objectives for the farming activities of the University, including all livestock areas, however they are managed, remained essential. Objectives needed to include a focus on how to effectively deliver and demonstrate effective carbon management. Animal wellbeing, data use and new technologies were also primary areas of focus. It was further acknowledged that an appropriate balance needed to be achieved between research and educational benefit, sustainability, demonstration of best practice and/or innovative practice (which may have costs associated with it) and profitability;
 - v) that Darren Roberts was currently addressing the long-standing Farm data access issues as a priority. Dr Wilcox would discuss with Mrs Furey; **AW/LF**

20/05 Farm Management Accounts (Grass and Arable)

- Considered:
- i) the Farm Management accounts (Grass and Arable) for the period to 31st July 2020;
 - ii) the Farm Management accounts (Grass and Arable) for the period to 30th September 2020;
 - iii) a progress report on the Annual Operating Plans for the University Farm: Dairy Unit, Young Stock/Sheep and Arable Enterprises.
- Noted:
- i) that the July 2020 Farm accounts reported a loss of £118k versus a budgeted contribution for the year to date of £8k, excluding costs to support academic activity of £45k;
 - ii) that commercial income was £210K below budget;
 - iii) that milk income was adverse by £146k, driven by lower milk prices and the withdrawal of the Tesco contract;
 - iv) that crop sales overall were £129k, driven by lower yields as a result of a wet winter with both wheat (£102k below target) and barley (£28k below target) impacted as a result;
 - v) that the annual stock take had taken place in July with values confirmed by Halls. The value of the stock was £34k higher than at the start of the year;
 - vi) that commercial wages and salaries were £43k below budget after carrying vacancies throughout the year;

- vii) that livestock feed was £54k higher than the budget which had offset additional forage costs of £41k;
- viii) that following improved animal health, supported by a change in Veterinary Practice, Vet and med costs were £34k below the planned budget;
- ix) that as a result of staff vacancies, contracting costs were £20k higher than planned;
- x) that repairs & renewals and machinery and vehicle repairs were £24k higher due to increased maintenance required for the milking parlour and slurry pumps;
- xi) that the result for the YTD to September 2020 reported a contribution of £56k versus a budgeted loss of £5k, excluding costs to support academic activity of £8k;
- xii) that commercial income was £47k below budget;
- xiii) that milk income was adverse by £28k driven by lower milk prices than those that had been planned and lower numbers in the dairy herd;
- xiv) that recharges to University Departments were £13k below budget largely as a result of timing;
- xv) that commercial other operating expenses were 107k below budget;
- xvi) that livestock feed was £41k below budget as a result of lower volumes than planned for the period to date;
- xvii) that repairs and renewals were £24k below budget, costs incurred to date included essential repairs and routine maintenance. It was anticipated that costs will be incurred later in the year and, at this point, the overall budget was not expected to deliver savings;
- xviii) that vacancies remained towards the end of the 2019/20 financial year. However, offers had been made for positions with expected start dates during the first quarter;
- xix) that dairy conception rates had declined slightly from 31% to 29% reducing the percentage of cows in calf by 100 days from 41% to 37%, however, the percentage of cows eligible for service which conceived remained at 17%;
- xx) that following a review of fertility protocols, all cows now begin a pre-sync programme at day 50 where they receive an injection of prostaglandin and again in a further 14 days if not serviced. This has resulted in an improvement of submission rates and ensured that all cows were seen by the Vet for pregnancy diagnosis rather than treatment. This approach has reduced consultation costs. The results to date had been encouraging with conception rates improving to 33%. For the previous 6 weeks sexed semen had been solely used to breed replacements which would speed up the rate of genetic advancement and create a more uniform herd;
- xxi) that the culling rate figure had increased since the last report from 24% to 31% due to the need to decrease production by 3% with immediate effect in April due to the pandemic;
- xxii) that herd health remained fairly consistent over the last year despite a spike in milk fever cases in the early part of the year. Mastitis cases had reduced slightly in part due to regular sampling to ensure the correct treatment is applied;

- xxii) that there had been a reduction in lameness over the past few months due to regular foot bathing and engagement of a new foot trimmer;
- xxiv) that production had continued to increase with a yield/cow/day of 31.7l for August against 28.6l in the same period last year. With the exception of May, when production had to be cut as a COVID measure, production had exceeded 30l per cow per day;
- xxv) that the next dairy cow feed trial was due to start in November;
- xxvi) that a number of tutorials had been arranged to take place in the Dairy and it was anticipated that there would be a large increase in the number of student practicals requiring cows with the establishment of the Vet School;
- xxvii) that the average yield in the Precision Dairy Unit had dropped to 30l per cow due to an increase in the number of heifers as a proportion of the herd. Such animals were naturally producing lower peak yields than more mature cows;
- xxviii) that the introduction of more intense foot bath protocols for the SMART Dairy had reduced the incidence of digital dermatitis in the herd. However, the period of lockdown coincided with work to replace rubber matting on the feed fences and had resulted in a number of weeks where cows were confined to one area which not been helpful. This issue was now resolved;
- xxix) that there had been an increased rate of culling over the past year as older cows with Johnes came to the end of the cycle, however, a greater understanding of selecting the right heifers for the system should result in a reduction in culling rates back to a normal level;
- xxx) that health continues to be very good with the installation of herd navigator allowing for daily testing resulting in a more rapid response to mastitis cases;
- xxxi) that there had been a slight rise in cell count during the summer months, however this remained significantly lower than in 2019;

20/06 Pig Unit

Received:

- i) the Pig Unit accounts for the period to 31 July 2020
- ii) the Pig Unit accounts for the period to 30 September 2020
- iii) the Pig Unit update:
- iv) a progress report on the annual operating plan for the Pig Unit.

Noted:

- i) that the Pig Unit accounts to 31 July 2020 showed a contribution before slurry management charges of £108k for the full year. Slurry charges were £12k from Cedar Energy and £41k recharged from the Farm resulting in a net contribution of £54k;
- ii) that income for the year was ahead of budget by £111k as both sow and pork sale prices continued to increase throughout the year in addition to improved weights;
- iii) that stock values had been reviewed by Halls Auctioneers and remained consistent with market valuations;
- iv) that other operating expenditure for year to date was £64k over budget, driven by higher feed costs as a result of price fluctuations in trade conditions, despite this, margins had held well at 12%, a year on year increase of 2%;
- v) that slurry management charges of £41k were incurred from the Farm due to on-going repairs and maintenance of the main pump. Finance colleagues would work with the Farm Manager to consider whether there is a business

case for investing in a better system that needs less maintenance;

RH/SK

- vi) that physical performance of the herd continued to improve with the weight of pigs higher than ever from 15% fewer breeding females. In total, 5,862 pigs had been sold versus the budgeted 5,562;
- vii) that the Pig Unit accounts to 30th September 2020 showed a contribution before slurry management charges of £19k which was £4k ahead of budget;
- viii) that pork sales for the current year to date were £30k behind budget predominantly due to timing in addition to fluctuating prices;
- ix) that general repairs and maintenance were £9k below budget with minor works likely to be undertaken later in the year;
- x) that livestock feed was £21k lower than budget offsetting the lower pork sales;
- xi) that physical performance in both breeding and feeding herds was exceeding expectations. The Glasser's disease issues previously reported had eased but not yet disappeared entirely as hoped. At the last health screening the herd remained negative to Enzootic Pneumonia and PRRS;
- xii) that antimicrobials continued to be used 'as little as possible but as much as necessary' and remained at a low level when compared to industry benchmarks;

20/07 Animal Production Welfare and Veterinary Science/Crop and Environmental Science Departments - Operating Plans 2020/21

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

- Noted:
- i) that the Sheep Unit had once again been well used by students for both teaching and Honours Research Projects (HRPs) in particular with a further 32 hours scheduled from Vet School teaching;
 - ii) that the unit was currently supporting 7 HRPs;
 - iii) that a number of research trials continued;
 - iv) that 1.84 lambs were born per ewe and 1.64 lambs per ewe reared;
 - v) that there had been a 3.7% increased level of mastitis which was being investigated;
 - vi) that lamb mortality was 6.4%;
 - vii) that the average lamb price was £86.70;
 - viii) that due to the shift from an intensive 12-month beef system to an 18-month semi-extensive system the beef unit surplus had been reduced.;
 - ix) that performance figures were slightly lower than the previous year due to the inclusion of high protein forages in the diet;
 - x) that the Beef Unit had provided resources for 5 HRP students and continued to be used for tutorials;
 - xi) that land area for trials/experiments had been agreed with Chris Ruffley for winter crops and the Black Britch field had been returned to the Farm following the end of a trial;

- xii) that CERC had lost approximately 50-60% of its commercial work in April due to the pandemic and it was hoped that further work would be secured to achieve financial targets;
- xiii) that CERC are now using both GPS and a new drill to establish teaching and commercial teaching plots;
- xiv) that 5 research projects totalling £250,000 plus VAT were taking place in the Poultry Unit;
- xv) that 8 refereed papers had been published;
- xvi) that 16 conference papers had been published;
- xvii) that 6 PhD students were linked to the Unit together with 3 HRP students;

20/08 **Any Other Business**

Noted: that a new Home Office Inspector had recently been appointed.

20/09 **Date of Next Meeting:** 21 May 2020 at 10.00am