The view from the Farming Conference

Waitrose & Partners senior team sets out our agricultural agenda

Waitrose & Partners is going to focus on its five per cent market share and in doing what it does best – delivering great food and service to customers, MD Rob Collins told delegates at this year’s farming conference.

He clearly laid out the challenges facing all retailers in the current trading climate, but said he was confident that “Waitrose would deliver a strong second half performance”, and going forward would focus on two key areas - differentiation and ambition.”

Said Rob: “We’re not chasing scale and growth for growth’s sake. We’re making our difference count for more in a brutally competitive market. And we are doing it by being more Waitrose.

“That difference is anchored by the products we sell and, crucially, the service given by our Partners. This is shared by the entire John Lewis Partnership and is reflected in our new Partnership-wide rebranding”, he added.

Highlighting how we can expect to see the impact of consolidation in the industry, Rob said: “The giants will roar – although not necessarily always in ways that customers like. Amazon will continue to flex its muscles. And just last month Tesco launched its Jack’s discount chain aimed squarely at competing with Aldi and Lidl. We aren’t in that fight. We aren’t even interested in it. We are about fabulous products and outstanding service – and we are taking this to a whole new level.”

One of the cornerstones of our new era of outstanding product development is the new Food Innovation Studio at Waitrose & Partners Head Office in Bracknell, Berkshire. This is a combination of a food “brains trust” and the one of the best kitchens you can imagine. It will give a big boost to our ability to bring more inspiring, high quality products to our customers keeping us ahead of the pack, Rob said.

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Another innovation is the Waitrose & Partners vision that every Waitrose Partner is an ambassador for the food you produce for us. However, farmers too are valuable ambassadors, Rob said, with an important role of helping people connect directly to the food they buy. “Tell your amazing stories. Of the care with which you rear your animals. Of the time you take creating the perfect soils to grow your crops. Of the attention to detail to ensure your fruit and veg are as near to perfect as they can be”, he said.

But we must also ask that we carefully consider everything we do in the name of farming and ask if we can do it better? “Given the intensity of focus on livestock farming from those who would seek its end, we must all examine what we do and ask if we could farm better and with more compassion.”

The risks of a no deal BREXIT were not far from the minds of delegates and Rob explained the Waitrose & Partners view. He said that he and the wider Waitrose team had worked hard to explain to Government the undesirability of a ‘no deal’ scenario. But, said Rob, “we will stand with our farmers come what may.”

These comments echoed the words of Commercial Director Rupert Thomas earlier in the day, who had set out some of the difficult issues that BREXIT had brought to the surface, including strong evidence of a slowdown in investment during 2018 in the UK. However, Rupert added, “We are absolutely certain that despite all the challenges I’ve just outlined, there is profitable growth to be had by focused businesses.”

He explained that in his view, business opportunities exist for companies that are obsessive about value, quality and service. Smaller outfits are outperforming big brands by being nimble and having an ‘owner mindset’. Waitrose & Partners has that same mindset.”

Agility will be key he added, pointing out that as the world becomes ever more fragmented, specialised and complicated, and with the increased speed of change that affects everything we do, almost every decision a business makes will become outdated and need to be rethought.

He added: “The big tricks will be how quickly you can spot the changes you need to make and, as importantly, how willing you are to discard previous, possibly dearly held beliefs to make those changes.”

Detailing Waitrose & Partners commercial strategy, Rupert explained that we have six levers to influence customer and commercial behaviour: price, promotions, range, own label & innovation, quality and Corporate Social Responsibility.

He added: “We need to offer competitively priced produce. Not the cheapest, that’s different, but the best value. Value being a sweet spot combination of price and quality and we’re confident that we offer just that to our customers.”

Tor Harris, Waitrose & Partners Head of CSR, Health and Agriculture, took farmers through the reasons that responsibility for the Agriculture Team had moved from buying and into her area.

Tor explained that CSR is one of the areas where our ambition is most crisp. She said: “we’re going to lead the UK food market on CSR, which is more important than ever in enabling us to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace through ambitious commitments in each of our core areas – sustainable farming and fishing, packaging, waste and health and wellbeing.

She added that we’re working on even more striking ways of communicating these things and positioning the way we buy and sell food as force for good.”

Reactive...
Who else spoke?

The conference also heard from speakers including the outgoing Director, Category Trading, Fresh, Paul Walker, who retired after more than 30 years in the business.

Paul reflected on his year of being in charge of Fresh Food as a whole. He said: “What surprised me when I took over Fresh, was the sheer level of challenge to the livestock sector from media and NGOs and how much time our teams have to dedicate to dealing with such issues.”

Paul also thanked Farmers for their hard work and dedication to the business and congratulated his successor Jackie Wharton.

Another well received guest speaker was NFU Director General Terry Jones who gave a forceful presentation about the risks of a no deal BREXIT and the potential consequences for UK food and farming. Many in the room commented that this was one of the clearest explanations they had ever heard about the issues the country could face without a deal.

Farming Conference delegate feedback survey

The feedback from the Farming Conference was overwhelmingly positive. 96% of delegates rated the overall experience of the day as good, very good or outstanding. Delegates commented on how much the day has improved over the years. Reference was made to the good balance of interaction and information given. All speakers received very positive feedback, the breakout sessions were very useful and the day was described as a great networking opportunity. The choice of venue and food was also praised.

Standout moments:
- The fish breakout session
- The Farming Awards for recognition of farmers, producers and growers
- Tor Harris’ speeches and clarity of CSR priorities
The 10 key issues for farmers to address before Brexit

Keith Barriball, Director, TerraVictus Ltd

With detail around the final Brexit outcome still unknown Keith Barriball, TerraVictus Ltd, a renowned farm business analyst addressed the Livestock breakout session of the conference, giving his views on 10 key issues farmers ought to address before Brexit.

Mindset – Brexit will mean a ‘new dawn’ and change will happen so consider how you will take that into account with some fresh thinking as you plan or look ahead.

Understand the full portfolio of your resources available to you within your business – audit what you have and identify opportunities for the future. Understand the resources that limit production and where they are.

Focus on the Strategic Financial Structure of the Business – understand the strength of your business- ensuring a positive net cash flow from trading and the ability to generate a net margin surplus. What return on capital are you achieving? Is the net worth or value of the business growing consistently?

Strive for Excellence in all that you do – develop an improvement plan for your business and seek to aggregate Marginal Gains across all your business. Identify opportunities to reduce wastage and benchmark your performance against similar businesses or enterprises.

Be Proactive in Managing Performance – ensure you have disciplined processes, disciplined people and disciplined routines. Ensure you have access to real time management information to drive KPIs to ensure you are making decisions on sound evidence.

‘Get the Right People on the Bus’ – ensure you have the right people, in the right seats, driving in the right direction! Become an ‘Employer of Choice’. Develop your people into a mindset of Continuous Improvement.

Engage with your Customers – understand exactly what you are being asked to produce for the final consumer and deliver consistently to the contract specification. Collaborate and work together as a team where possible.

Manage the Risk and Volatility in your Business Model – focus on building resilience within your business and don’t create or exacerbate known risks. Use all available information to make reasonable risk based decisions. Take ‘three steps back’ before you commit if you have any doubts.

Governance and Communication – be disciplined and make time to look forward. Replace the Kitchen table with the Board table. Communicate the direction of travel clearly with your team.

Take Care of your Personal Wellbeing – make time to get away from the day to day management. Get refreshed and re-energised.

And Keith’s final words also bear repeating.

“When I hear someone say ‘I can’t.’ I know they won’t. When I hear someone say ‘How can I....?’ I know they will find a way.”

Minimising risk and producing sustainably in times of change

Brian Barnett, Chairman of WD Farmers

Brexit presents the challenge of change to us all. We know it is coming, but we don’t know exactly what it will look like. One thing is for certain - doing nothing is not an option.

We must know how our businesses are performing and be prepared to be measured against our peers. This enables best practice to be shared, driving improvements and increasing on farm efficiencies. The dairy group organise a range of learning opportunities throughout the year, drawing on industry experts and service providers. We work together in order to improve our businesses. Change is coming – so the best preparation for Brexit is to be the best we can be.
With more than 40 entries, this year’s awards were the most highly contested yet, with entries from across the Livestock and Fresh Produce sectors.

The judging panel consisted of Dr Alastair Leake – Director of Policy The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Brian Barnett – Waitrose Dairy Farmer and Chair WD Farmers and Tor Harris – Head of CSR Health & Agriculture Waitrose & Partners.

After much debate the judges made their decisions on the winners for each of the seven categories, the awards were presented by Rob Collins, Managing Director, Waitrose & Partners, at the Farming Conference in Telford.

Winners received a certificate and engraved sustainable oak award, whilst Highly Commended and Finalists also received certificates.

We would like to thank everyone for their applications, the difficulty the judges faced can be attributed to the incredibly high standard of entries – we look forward to next year’s awards.

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Inspiration & Leadership

Jeremy Linsell is a progressive, enthusiastic and inspiring grower who constantly pushes boundaries. Due to his successful management he has held many other roles in the top fruit industry where he consistently demonstrates leadership and inspiration especially with the 37 other farms in the supply chain. Roles include Fruition Director, various advisory roles and sitting on the AHDB and IFO panel. He has a background in land based training and uses this when deciding how to use environmental resources. He is always willing to share knowledge and loves to debate challenging subjects which inspire his colleagues and staff around him.

Highly Commended – Rob & Helen Mutimer, Dalehead Pigs
Congratulations also to Rob and Helen on winning the title of Pig Farmer of the Year at the 2018 Farmers Weekly Awards – a hatrick for the Waitrose pig supply chain.

The prestigious ceremony was held at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London, on Thursday, 4th October, where Rob and Helen received the award.

Innovation

Reducing plastic packaging is the focus for APS Produce and they have launched a 100% recyclable punnet using their tomato leaves as part of the Waitrose Duchy Tomato range. Leaves are removed during the growing phase to allow sunlight and air to get to the ripening fruit at the bottom of the plants. Up until now these leaves either went into composting or to an AD plant. Now the leaf fibre is extracted from the AD process and they have been able to convert this fibre into a pulp punnet that is 100% recyclable.

The current mix is up to 50% tomato fibre combined with recycled cardboard pulp and the ultimate goal is to produce a punnet that is 100% tomato fibre. They are the only tomato grower in the UK to have the ability to produce tomato fibre in this way. At the moment the punnet is being used for the Waitrose Duchy Cherry on the Vine and the plan is to roll out across the whole Waitrose Duchy tomato range which would save over 3.5 million plastic punnets per annum.

Highly Commended – Harry Hall Partnership, BerryWorld
**Future Proofing**

Joe Mallinson has demonstrated a clear commitment to the deer sector and has systematically future proofed his business by investing and adopting new practices. These include a plan to double his breeding herd within a decade, developing bespoke overwintering facilities to avoid pasture damage and extending the grazing season. He has adopted new technology by scanning and foetal ageing all breeding females, to allow grouping at calving time.

Reseeded red clover and grass leys are incorporated into the rotation to maximise conserved forage and grazed grass quality – over 90% of the feed is homegrown. This strategic approach ensures high quality, high health status breeding stock are available for other producers in the Waitrose venison supply chain, helping to increase production and efficiency. Joe hosted a supply chain event so the practices adopted at the farm were cascaded through the group, benefiting everyone.

**Highly Commended:**
Thomas Dickson, Moy Park
William Boers, Bakkavor

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**Partnership & Engagement**

Agofair & COOBANA are a cooperative founded in 1991 dedicated to the production and marketing of bananas. Currently there are over 250 members of the coop – 85% of which are indigenous - farming 550 ha – producing 100% Fairtrade bananas. The relationship started in 2016 with Primafruit and Waitrose after they were assessed under the Waitrose Farm Assessment system, supplying 1 container a fortnight. Due to the high quality of their bananas and their focus on production and environmental standards this grew rapidly into weekly supply and now supply 6 containers per week. They continue to work hard at sustaining the environment by reducing the amount of pesticides and fertilisers applied by using precision techniques. The continued partnership has enabled many of the workers at COOBANA to be provided with better housing, education both for children and adults, welfare and health provisions (COOBANA – The Panamanian Cooperative supplying Fairtrade bananas through Agofair to Primafuir Limited and ultimately Waitrose).

**Highly Commended:**
James Cole & Sue Lamb, Flamingo Horticulture
Guy King, Dalehead Pigs

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**Environmental Sustainability – Livestock**

Ashton & Ann Hawker operate a commercial farming business that has 36% of the farmed area dedicated to biodiversity and habitat management. This includes 36 kms of hedgerow, 12ha of nectar rich field margins, 14ha of wild bird seed mixes and the re-establishment of 11 ponds – all in line with the ambitions of the national pollinator strategy. The farm has a specific focus on delivering for yellow hammers, barn owls, lapwing and other ground nesting birds featuring 200 skylark plots and a significant increase in hare numbers.

They are sharing their efforts with others, building a wood cabin in one of the woods and hosting children from the local primary school every week for outdoor education and lessons.

Their work has not gone unnoticed being finalists in the 2018 FWAG Silver Lapwing Awards and Winners of the 2017 FWAG Barn Owl trophy.

**Highly Commended:**
Beckithie Farms Ltd, Dovecote Park
Environmental Sustainability – Fresh Produce

Stewart McIntyre is the conservation manager on a farm growing lettuce and celery for Waitrose in the summer months. His passion for wildlife and conservation has been key to driving commitment to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and he has been instrumental in the farm retaining their LEAF demonstration farm status. To achieve the vision of combining world class conservation with agriculture, he has increased the number of protected species and breeding success rates, recently being recognised for his efforts by the Red List Revival for the work completed in reintroducing farmland birds of conservational concern back to the farm - 43 species on the amber and red conservation list have been spotted on the land. Bespoke habitats have been created to support biodiversity with a dedicated minimum of 10% of farmed land area.

This features over 50ha of wild bird mixes, including feed and brassica mixes providing food and habitats for declining species and a further 50ha of floristically enhanced features. This year he has also built three wetland areas, including a 3ha reed-bed and two, 2ha sites for breeding waders. These areas have been enhanced to provide a food source for chicks and nesting sites.

Young Farmer

Matthew Crooke farms at the family’s mixed sheep, beef and arable enterprise, developing the sheep system since his return from university. The sheep are split into two flocks - one early lambing flock focused on using fast finishing genetics and the second March lambing flock to deliver mid-season lambs which includes producing Abervale lambs entirely off forage - the catalyst for which was his participation in the WFP Sustainable Forage Protein Project, which allowed easy access to the top forage consulting minds in the UK. The flock are out wintered on kale and the high yielding, high protein crop has allowed Matthew to minimise costly housing time for lambing. Red and white clover leys are included in the arable rotation to improve soil structure and fixing valuable nitrogen. Deep rooting chicory is added to longer term leys to mitigate the risk of drought and also has the added benefit of reducing reliance on anthelmintics.

Matthew hosted an open day to show their learnings and findings from the Sustainable Forage Protein Project and featured in Waitrose Weekend magazine, promoting alternatives to soya in animal feed. He has also been an increasingly valuable contributor to the Abervale forage fed producer group meetings.

Highly Commended:
Rupert Simpson, Worldwide Fruit
Joe Howard, Dovecote Park
Alan Palmer, Moy Park
Alex Saunders & Tom Blanchard, Dalehead Pigs
Some of you will have heard me present at the Waitrose & Partners Farming Conference back in October. It was a truly inspiring day and I hope those of you that were able to attend found it useful and enjoyable.

Many congratulations to the winners of our Waitrose & Partners Farming Awards – I was fortunate enough to be on the judging panel and it was fantastic to see such a high standard of entries.

At the conference I talked about some of the changes we’d made to how we manage Agriculture. As of August I took on responsibility for Agriculture as well as Health and John Gregson, Duncan Sinclair, Jeremy Langley and Eleanor Brook joined my existing CSR team along with our colleagues in nutrition.

This team is now positioned in a new ‘Strategy & Change’ function within Commercial and we’re really excited about the opportunity that gives us to create a more joined up strategy across CSR, Agriculture and Health – areas that are increasingly interconnected – and to implement that consistently across our business through our trading teams.

I also talked about how privileged I felt to be taking on responsibility for Agriculture – and it’s not a responsibility I take lightly. I’m married to a tenant arable farmer and spent several years running The Prince’s Rural Action Programme and Countryside Fund so I do have some understanding of the challenges you face as farmers.

I know that the decisions we make in Waitrose HQ can have a significant impact on your businesses and at the conference I made a guarantee that we will always be thinking about how the decisions we make could affect you and doing our best to make sure that is in a positive way - after all, we win together.

I hope winter is short and kind to you all and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the coming year.
Worker Welfare and Ethical Trade update

Sam Ludlow Taylor, Ethical Trade Manager, Waitrose & Partners

At the heart of all supply chains are people, without whom none of us would be able to sustain our businesses. We are already seeing an increasing challenge with labour shortages in the UK meaning that a good workforce is getting harder to come by, and this is only likely to become more difficult in the coming months and years. With this in mind, putting people first and having the best employment practices and worker/management relationships are going to be more and more important to attract the best people.

At Waitrose & Partners, we are dedicated to ensuring that those working within all of our supply chains do so with high standards of working conditions. Luke Jones and myself make up the Ethical Trade Team and oversee the company’s Worker Welfare and Ethical Trade Programme. This is based on our Responsible Sourcing Code of Practice and covers all supply chains within our business: livestock, fresh produce, ambient goods and meal solutions to name but a few.

By combining awareness raising/training, increasing transparency, self-assessments, and in some areas (such as processing plants) verification audits, we aim to raise standards in areas such as Health & Safety, HR practices, recruitment practices and reduce the risk of modern slavery in our supply chains.

One example of this is the Worker Welfare Programme which has succeeded in raising awareness of responsible employment through a guidance document and associated self-assessment to those farmers in the meat, poultry, milk and egg supply chains. A key outcome of this process has been to provide access to an independent confidential reporting line to all of those people working within these supply chains enabling individuals to raise concerns, particularly in areas where employees are indirectly recruited or provided through labour agencies. This mechanism allows vulnerable people the security to report concerns and seek help where they need it, which is a great outcome.

We hope to continue to build on this success and will be issuing the updated guidance pack and self-assessment questions to these farmers in the early part of 2019.
A bitterly cold November day saw us mark the 25th anniversary of our beloved British Blacktail hen. Joined by a collection of our significant partners in industry, we hosted a party in the Tile Barn at The Leckford Estate on behalf of our long-standing farmers.

We were delighted to welcome nearly one hundred people, representing close to sixty farms. In a packed agenda, keynote speakers shared insights into several aspects of the value chain, all core to our mutual success, before a hearty hog roast and a fascinating tour of the Estate itself. Capping a memorable day, guests left with a commemorative bottle of Leckford Sparkling Wine.

Tailored specifically toward our exclusive breed of hen, presentations included analysis of the continued growth of free range and organic eggs by Stonegate, before Waitrose & Partners Agriculture Manager, Duncan Sinclair, provided a detailed account of activity within the supermarket, including the latest on the store rebranding and partner restructuring that sees Agriculture incorporated within the Corporate Social Responsibility team.

Global leader in breed development, Hendrix Genetics, highlighted progress being made in the science behind the robust Blacktail, selected specifically for life in the great outdoors. Renowned poultry nutritionist Steve Pritchard of Premier Nutrition explained the importance of promoting early feed consumption, high fibre content and presentation of correct grist size in meeting the birds’ physiological and psychological needs. Finally, Stonegate lead vet Peter Cargill of Wyatt Poultry Vet. Services gave a timely update on global disease challenges and shone fresh light on the absolute need to maintain the highest possible standards of biosecurity.

We’re grateful to all of those who made the journey to a chilly Leckford, many of whom had caught flights to be present, and to our speakers who ensured everyone took good value from a long day out. It was a fitting celebration of the fantastic work that our community of farmers have achieved over the past 25 years. It’s a durable partnership of which we’re very proud, and we look forward to more milestones ahead.
The 2018 Field Staff Day welcomed 50 attendees to the Leckford Estate and began with a welcome from Duncan Sinclair, Agriculture Manager.

The topics covered in the morning session included updates from the LSG sub-groups. This began with Howard Revell from Dalehead Pigs who covered Responsible Animal Health. Chris Ramsey from Stonegate then gave an update on Responsible Sourcing, covering all things from alternative protein sources to UK grown soya, as well as the forage protein project.

Andrew Booth from WD Farmers told us about an ongoing project into the next generation of animal welfare indicators. Rebecca Inch from Dalehead Pigs told us more about the Next Generation group, introducing the members from each livestock supply chain, discussing the new training academy for young farmers and other ongoing projects. Following this Duncan discussed how the REP index collection is progressing, then we heard from Authenticate, who provide the software for the new online REP format, before Sarah McCruden from Müller gave her top tips for completing REP on farm. This included pre-populating some of the data prior to the visit, and the feed self-sufficiency calculator she has prepared.

After lunch, we had a tour of the Leckford Estate by tractor and trailer led by Farm Manager Andrew Ferguson. We saw the variety of the Leckford Estate, from fruit trees, to the dairy that supplies Waitrose essential milk, to the vineyard growing grapes for Leckford Sparkling Wine.

Before the day ended, John Gregson gave a summary of the Waitrose & Partners rebrand, it was exciting to see the new vision for the Waitrose brand that is in line with everything the LSG are working towards.

Feedback from the fieldsteam day was overwhelmingly positive with an average rating of 7.7/10 from attendees. The split between the formal presentations and Leckford farm tour was welcomed, as was the wide variety of topics covered during the day – although this could be further tested. Another step forward would be to mix up delegates more, encouraging more discussion between supply chains.
Each of our livestock supply chains have produced a case study showcasing the responsible use of antibiotics within their supply chain. Three are shown here, marking the start of a new series in Farmlink to celebrate the good practice and progress made by our farmers and producers.

BQP Antibiotic Reduction Case Study: Rob and Helen Mutimer

Rob and Helen Mutimer manage a family run business producing high quality outdoor bred pigs in East Anglia. A keen eye for detail and a passion for livestock health and welfare has driven significant reductions in the antibiotic use on their farms. This has been achieved by a holistic review of all the management practices on the farm, to ensure that the reductions made are balanced with maintaining the health and welfare of the individual animal.

Rob and Helen have always been advocates of prudent antibiotic use but following the UK pig industry’s drives to reduce the national usage in 2016 they have been looking at ways in which they could further reduce, replace and refine medicines use on farm. This has led to a reduction in antibiotic use of almost 80% in terms of their mg/kg (deadweight).

This success has come from continual appraisal of the farming methods and a clear focus on three key areas:

1. The air quality within the stock sheds – good quality clean air ensures good respiratory health of the pigs.
2. Constant and vigilant biosecurity – an area often discussed but not always implemented.
3. The health of the sows and their piglets from the breeding farm – maximising the health of the breeding stock, boosts the health of piglets through colostral transfer.

Air Quality

The quality of air affects livestock much in the same way that it affects us, therefore a stuffy poor ventilated building is likely to result in the development and propagation of respiratory disease. The buildings on the Mutimer’s farm are naturally ventilated, which is like the majority of pig buildings in the UK. This means that for the older pigs, which are housed, the ability to understand the air flow and monitor changing weather conditions is vital in reducing respiratory health issues. Following investigations, such as wind testing, and investment in permanent monitoring equipment in the sheds

The monitoring of the airspace has reduced drafts within these sheds but maintained the flow of air resulting in healthier pigs and a reduction in the incidence of disease, which in turn has led to a reduction in antibiotic use.

Vigilant biosecurity

Biosecurity is a well-known term, but often not well exercised in practice. Rob and Helen imposed more robust biosecurity across the business after some previous experience of disease outbreaks on their units. Their past experience has led to a more stringent approach to controlling the movement of vehicles, people, livestock and equipment on and off their unit. This is important as they have a closed herd, meaning they are
not bringing pigs into their herd from other farms, which may have a different health status from their own.

Vehicles onto the site must have a wheel wash and disinfectant applied before they enter the farm as well as staff requiring 48 hours “pig free” before coming onto their farm after visiting other pig farms. Sheds and equipment will also be washed, disinfected and dried before any pigs come from the breeding farm onto the finishing unit.

A proactive and sustained approach to reducing the risk of disease entering the unit by good management and cleanliness has been another factor which has helped reduce antibiotic use.

**Pig Health**

While maintaining pig health may sound like a relatively simple task, it involves monitoring and regular check-ups of all animals to ensure that the approach to managing the health of the herd is correct. Monitoring can help to inform what vaccines need to be used on site as well as informing if a new disease is detected. Prompt investigation of a health problem can make a big difference in the outcome of a disease outbreak, as it allows early treatment and smaller quantities of medicine to be used.

Piglet health is another key aspect of pig health as piglets who have a good start in life, with good colostrum from the sow are more likely to be healthy and robust as they grow. This is where the Mutimer’s put a lot of focus ensuring that management of the outdoor herds is a key priority. Another aspect of piglet health is vaccination, piglets need to be immunised to ensure that they have protection against some of the most prevalent pig diseases.

Rob and Helen have invested in equipment to help with vaccinating young pigs in a way which minimises the stress on the pig and helps the staff by a more ergonomic position to vaccinate. Pig health from an early age is an important foundation in ensuring that antibiotic use on farm remains low. This requires excellent management on the breeding farm to ensure the piglets get a good start and ongoing disease monitoring. Investing in the development of the handling equipment means that the pigs can be inoculated with minimal stress and more accuracy.

It is clear from the approach on this farm that there is no panacea to reducing antibiotics, but also that reduction of antibiotics needs to be done judiciously by improving overall pig health at the same time.

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**Gressingham: Achieving reduced antibiotic usage in Poultry Production Systems**

Instances of reported cases of antimicrobial resistance and their effects on the human population continues to cause concern on a global scale. It is reported in the media that most of this is down to over-prescription of antibiotics by the medical profession.

However, livestock farming cannot be excluded from the debate since many of the antibiotics historically used are common to human medicine. Government has recognised the role that farming can play and to this end the 2018 RUMA report has set a cross livestock average antibiotic usage target of 50 mg/pcu.

Gressingham Foods Duck production systems have historically been low users of antibiotics (2017 figures Ducks, 3.7mg/pcu ). However, a closer inspection of the data has revealed that some farms perform better than others. To this end a case study was conducted on one of our company owned and managed duck farms. The farm has a combination of new state of the art poultry buildings and older wooden buildings. Historically the farm had more disease niggles than occurred on comparable farms of a similar size and or quality of housing. Clearly a review of our existing stringent biosecurity procedures was needed to:

a. identify the production system weaknesses and
b. to produce a robust revised system which would address the problem. It also had to be economically and ergonomically efficient and
c. ensure the well-being of the livestock.
After consultation with all stakeholders we came up with three simple improvements to refine the efficiency of our biosecurity regime. They were as follows:

- to relocate the staff facilities, farms office and car parking area to a position outside the bio-secure Livestock area.
- to control vehicular and staff access to the livestock area. All trades persons vehicles being left outside the livestock area.
- to repair the broken concrete and drains adjacent to the poultry buildings

These changes have significantly improved the appearance of the site. They have ensured that all personnel entering the site are controlled, booted and suited in appropriate PPE and no unauthorised vehicles enter the site. Vehicles entering or leaving the site are thoroughly disinfected at the entry gate, whilst staff pass through disinfectant foot dips on entry and departure. These simple changes have already had an impact on the incidence of disease challenge. At the time of writing no recorded use of antibiotics has been reported since April 2017. This approach has been simple and cost effective to implement. It has produced a radical change in the mindset of the team.

Our goal was not to NEVER use antibiotics but to only use them responsibly and as a last resort to prevent the livestock suffering.

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Moy Park case study: Kevin Corrigan

In May 2016, the UK’s O’Neill Commission, in producing its final review of antimicrobial resistance, outlined the scale of the challenges posed by the over-use of antimicrobials and recommended reducing unnecessary use where possible.

Long before this Moy Park and its farmers recognised there was a need for clarity, action and transparency with consumers on the use of antibiotics within agriculture. It is for this reason farmers in conjunction with Moy Park have been working on a long-term project to reduce the level of antibiotic usage within its supply chain.

Kevin Corrigan is a farmer that is testament to that project and applying its principles fully. Kevin has been supplying chickens to Moy Park and Waitrose for over 10 years. Originally starting out with a 2-shed farm, now a 4-shed farm, Kevin supplies just over 600k Higher Welfare chickens to Waitrose every year. Prior to turning his attentions to antibiotic reduction, Kevin was toward the top end of the usage league table within the Moy Park supply chain. In 2010, Kevin was having to treat 3 in 4 flocks of chickens that he grew, and his overall usage was one of the highest in the group.

There were several factors influencing this high usage. Chick quality, water quality, intercrop hygiene and biosecurity on farm would all need to be improved if Kevin, and indeed Moy Park, were to use less Antibiotics.

By working with our agriculture team in Moy Park and our veterinary partners St. David’s, Kevin has been able to create an environment for the chickens that means the need for antibiotic usage is greatly reduced. One of the most critical focuses being mindset. The Field Rep working with Kevin challenged his mindset and provided training and helped his understanding to ensure that challenges to bird health were able to be reduced through things like a focus on a water hygiene and with that, the likelihood of those birds needing antibiotics reduced. Kevin was challenged to look at his farm and see where he could improve.

Kevin focused on his biosecurity, his hygiene at intercrop and during crop as well as his water hygiene. He invested in these aspects of his farm, installing a double barrier system now across all Waitrose farms, as well as a water hygiene system ensuring the water supply remains clean. These investments have seen Kevin move from being one of the highest users of antibiotic to one of the lowest, going from treating 75% of flocks in 2010 to treating just 4% (one flock) in 2017.

Kevin however is not complacent, and knows that any blip in hygiene, chick quality or even nutritionally may cause him to require antibiotics. However, Kevin, like the majority of Moy Park, farmers now have the mindset which asks the question ‘What can I do to prevent the need to use Antibiotics?’ rather than accepting the need to use antibiotics on a regular basis.
The challenge of farming with drought – year after year!

By Richard Lawson, New Zealand venison and wagyu producer

Farming in Central Hawkes Bay New Zealand, drought is a year after year occurrence. Hotter, dryer summers seem to be standard now, when do you stop saying it’s a drought every year and call it the new summer?

Our first commitment and passion is for deer, but we also have cattle, sheep and land to grow extra winter feed – this provides flexibility when facing drought.

We have a diverse land area with summer safe and winter warm blocks. We look ahead at how feed is budgeted and how stock are growing.

Breeding stock are the key priority, as well as keeping track of key dates for each year.

It is ok to ask for help from neighbours and friends. Keep in touch with your trusted team, including your bank manager, accountant, farm advisor… attend discussion groups with fellow farmers whenever possible and seek out rural support networks.

“Don’t fight mother nature, work with it, farm to the strengths of the land you have.”
Next Generation group continue to support the LSG

By Rebecca Inch, Supply Chain Development Manager, Dalehead Pigs

Now in its fourth year, the LSG Next Generation sub-group is going strong, with Rebecca Inch, Dalehead Pigs as Chairwoman and Alex Coles, Dalehead Lamb as Vice Chairwoman. There are currently 14 members of the group, across the different livestock supply chains.

Our recent activity:

Training Academy

In the summer, all of our NG members took part in a trial-run training academy, consisting of two workshops – Project Management and Leading & Managing. Both two-day sessions were completed with a visit to a Waitrose farmer.

The team visited Coombe Farm’s organic dairy and Steve Hart’s outdoor pig breeding farm. For the second workshop, we were also accompanied by an after-dinner speaker, in the form of Paul Walker, Waitrose’s former Director Category Trading Fresh.

After a successful trial-run, these workshops are to be rolled out to selected young and up and coming farmers and are designed to:

- Advance skills that enable the progression within a business;
- Focus on the key aspects of managing people;
- Identify key actions to implement successful growth of a business;
- Meet new people within the Waitrose supply chain and share ideas to assist with personal and business development.

Once details are finalised we will be looking for young farmers from each of the livestock supply chains to apply to be part of the course.

Waitrose & Partners Farming Conference

At this year’s Farming Conference, the NG team hosted a stand, where we promoted all the great livestock messages that have been advertised within Waitrose this year – including Waitrose Weekend and Food articles, social media coverage and banners on the Waitrose website. A key focus for Waitrose going forward is highlighting differentiation, which for livestock supply chains starts on farm and ends with delivering excellent meat, milk, or eggs into store.

We also held a competition, to guess the weight of the feed bucket. After lots of guesses from a variety of conference delegates, Waitrose’s very own Paul Walker gave the closest guess of 5.35kg (just 0.1kg out) to win.
Soils in the Supply Chain

By Matthew Orman, Director, Sustainable Soils Alliance

As the majority of farmers know, healthy soils are key to the achievement of healthy crops and higher yields. It is a fact that for decades has passed politicians by, however, and soil has not received the attention it needs in comparison with other environmental indicators – air and water.

The advent of Brexit means things are changing, however, and soil is now enjoying long overdue attention via the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, Farming Bill and in the speeches of Ministers Gove and Eustice. All acknowledge soil’s crucial role not just in putting food on our tables but in flood prevention and as a store of carbon in our fight against climate change.

But what should a healthy soils policy consist of? It is a complex question – and one that partly explains why soils have been neglected for so long. For a start there are over 1,800 British soils with a range of different profile types. Their health can be judged according to physical, chemical and biological characteristics, according to the crops grown and the techniques used to manage it. This means a one size fits all approach to measuring and monitoring soil – let alone remediating it would not be appropriate.

This is where the Sustainable Soils Alliance steps in. We are a new organisation committed to increasing political and public awareness of healthy soils, to convening the numerous active, expert organisations and coordinating their efforts.

A good example of our work is a project underway with the horticulture supply chain where we are convening retailers and suppliers to share best practise and establish a manageable, coherent approach to soil stewardship – one that is aligned both across the industry and with government thinking.

If you’d like to learn more, please get in touch via our website at sustainablesoils.org.
SUREROOT Project case study – seed mix trials help mitigate the risks of climate change

Mark and Jacqui Jones-Davies alongside their son Will, farm 500 acres near Brecon.

The farm keeps 800 Suffolk cross mule ewes producing Abervale lambs alongside 100 head of beef cows and 300 beef cattle. Most of the farm is ploughable with 200 acres in arable and on a rolling rotation, with 300 acres grown as grass.

Mark grows spring beans, maize, spring barley, fodder beet, winter oats, winter barley and wheat. Mark says “It is a target for the farm to be as self-sufficient as possible with the majority of the livestock’s diet being grown on farm”.

Mark has been involved with the SUREROOT project since 2014. SUREROOT is a BBSRC funded project to develop new varieties of clover and grass that will improve resilience to flooding and drought whilst maintaining agronomic productivity and quality.

Extreme weather events like floods and droughts are becoming more prevalent. Certain Festuclium (ryegrass x fescue species hybrids) have been shown to reduce surface runoff by increasing soil porosity and by using water more efficiently.

Eight farms all supplying Waitrose were selected to represent a range of soil types, geographical regions and livestock sectors (dairy, beef, sheep, pigs and poultry).

For phase 1 of the project two 1ha areas of Festuclium (cv AberNiche) and hybrid ryegrass (cv AberEve) were established on each farm. Farmers and researchers recorded root biomass, water infiltration and forage composition.

For phase 2 of the project on Mark’s farm, a 3ha field was split in half for sowing. All of the field was sown with AberChoice perennial ryegrass, with half of the field sown with the white clover variety AberLasting and the other half with white clover variety AberAce. As well as stolons, AberLasting has rhizomes below ground resulting in a more resilient plant with a larger, deeper root system to cope with extreme weather conditions.

The summer of 2018 has been declared by the Met Office as the joint hottest on record. These drought conditions can be seen by the rainfall data collated on the farm (above).

Mark said “This summer has been incredibly challenging and has emphasised the need for swards that are resilient to changing weather patterns”.

When sowing pastures on the farm, Mark uses medium to late heading varieties (the majority of these are Aberystwyth varieties). The AberLasting and AberAce trial is still ongoing, however some initial results found that comparing the two pasture leys found that for the same period of time AberLasting had a quicker recovery from the drought conditions and had a higher lamb carrying capacity.

The project concludes in 2019.
Each year, Waitrose & Partners sponsor a studentship in conjunction with the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society. This provides a financial award and with this, the opportunity for a student to extend their studies to obtain a BSc degree. David Rees was the 2017 winner and chose to walk our dairy and lamb supply chains. David tells us about his tour.

Royal Welsh Scholarship student heads to the south west for supply chain tour

By David Rees

A two day tour of several Waitrose & Partners producers and processors throughout the South West was a wonderful experience to help better appreciate the supply chains that we are all so dependent upon.

Rob Windridge of Dovecote Park took us to Shepton Mallet, where Mark Emery specialises in rearing TB restricted calves from Waitrose dairy farms. With over 1200 calves on site the level of efficiency was remarkable. The attention to detail and grasp on their cost of production was a real insight into farming at such a scale.

At Coombe Farm, Andy King explained the organic milk supply group, with the performance benchmarking used across the pool and the support and guidance provided. This openness between farms is a wonderful tactic to highlight areas for improvement, whilst allowing the transfer of knowledge and insight.

This was evident on the farm visit, which highlighted how large scale farming can be integrated into the local environment, with its organic status, countless accreditations and education of local children on farm.

A tour of Muller’s Bridgwater bottling site with Sarah McCruden was a first for me. Any naivety I had concerning the scale of these units was soon corrected. The mesmerising conveyors of bottles and levels of output were hard to fathom and has given me a new perspective, when often the tanker feels like the end of the journey.

After a short drive, we visited Brian Miller who showed us the wonderful facilities on his farm. Again, the simplicity and efficiency at which a large unit was run was encouraging, with Brian’s deep knowledge of the industry evident.

Dylan Laws of Dalehead lamb introduced us to Graham Langford, a pedigree Dorset producer. With lambing well underway, he showed us his high genetic merit flock, with an energy and enthusiasm that many could only hope for. His use of performance recording and investment in ground breaking research projects was a true inspiration.

It was wonderful to see the strong relationships between producer and processor. I believe this integration is integral to the successes of each farm visited and highlighted to me the importance of transparency, to better understand and meet product specifications.
New features at the Meat Service Counter aim to drive sales

By Andy Boulton, Buyer Service Counters – Meat and Fish

The Fish and Meat counters are #1 and #2 destinations for choosing to shop at Waitrose, as voted by our customers. We hope the use of new resources and guidelines will attract more customers to the meat counter and in doing so drive sales forward.

We have given partners updated guidance on display standards, and at the same time given more resource to make exciting displays.

Partners can now use fresh herbs to garnish rather than old fashioned plastic. We have issued marble trays to create ‘hot spots’ for promotions or featured products. Products can be garnished with rubs, to offer solutions for customers and they now have butters to use for display and to giveaway when customers purchase meat from the counter.

We are encouraging a greater level of butchery, so that partners can adapt products, such as a leg of lamb, to the time of week. Selling it as a joint for the weekend, steak or kebabs in hot weather or diced for mid week casseroles.

The photos show these new features at the meat counter - people, product, abundance, new marble trays, herbs and butters.
On Monday 19th November 2018, Pig World hosted the 5th annual National Pig Awards at the Lancaster London Hotel. Waitrose & Partners were delighted to have 14 finalists, spread over eight of the 13 categories and Duncan Sinclair, Agriculture Manager and Fran Westerman pork buyer went along on the night to help celebrate the success.

Three of the farmers came away with the top prizes:

Rebecca Gladwin – Young Pig Farmer (right)
John Dunning – Finisher of the Year (below)
Reg Hood (Norfolk Free Range) – Unit Manager of the Year (bottom right)
Student number five – half way there!

Shortly after publication of the last issue of Farmlink in September, I celebrated my 21st birthday at home in Lincolnshire with family and friends. However, after a weekend of partying it was soon back to reality as I completed my first day of Helping Hands apple picking at Leckford with the CSR and Health teams.

Being involved in the run up to the Farming Conference was an incredible experience. From helping with the Farming Awards and gathering of speaker presentations to the Next Generation stand, everything came together to form a very successful conference. I was certainly relieved once the awards and certificates were presented, as up until that point they had been my responsibility! It was great to see them handed over to such deserving category winners.

Back in the office we have moved desks and my discount card arrived, officially signalling the start of my time as a partner. I had the challenge of putting together the RWAS supply chain tour – which thanks to all those who kindly agreed to host us - was a great success. It was good to spend more time out on farm, and seeing Dorset lambs thriving and the bottling process at Muller were my personal highlights. I’ve also been to see some of our turkeys and geese in Norfolk, and attended the WDF AGM and one of the calf quality workshops - all aiding my understanding of the Waitrose livestock supply chains.

I also kicked off the recruitment for my successor with a short talk at Harper Forum, followed by Nottingham University where Anna Swinson (WD Farmers Placement Student) and I talked to students about our roles. Duncan and I attended Harper Adams and Cirencester university placement fairs, and in the first week of December, student number six was appointed. Another reminder at how quickly my year is going!

Whilst back at Harper, I was presented with the Dyke Yaxley Prize for achieving the highest mark on the Business Finance module last year - it was lovely to be back at Harper to meet and thank Dyke Yaxley for their support.

Attending the Welsh Winter Fair with the Dalehead Lamb team signalled the start of the Christmas period as we served countless mince pies to producers. I spent Christmas at home, helping in branch on Christmas Eve handing over entertaining orders and turkeys to customers. I managed to fit in a skiing trip with young farmers before returning to Bracknell. Now, it’s back to reality and after a busy week in the office catching up on things, I am looking forward to being out and about as my placement continues.
CSR, Health and Agriculture highlighted in Waitrose & Partners rebrand

As part of the ' & Partners' rebrand, unveiled in September, four members of the CSR, Health and Agriculture team have featured in adverts, on posters in branches and on the new-look website.

Nyika Brain
Partner and International Development Manager for the Waitrose & Partners Foundation

Moira Howie
Partner and Nutrition & Health Manager

Jeremy Ryland Langley
Partner and Aquaculture & Fisheries Manager

Duncan Sinclair
Partner and Agriculture Manager