

CONFERENCE PAPER

PROFIT FROM WELFARE

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Based on considerable experience in production of welfare-friendly pork, this paper considers the arguments for enhanced-welfare intensive livestock systems. Such systems are not only beneficial from an ethical point of view, but, particularly if marketing is effective, can also be highly profitable investments.

Key words

Animal welfare; outdoor pigs; free range; eggs; poultry

Background

Dingley Dell Pork is a family owned outdoor pig business near Woodbridge in Suffolk. Dingley Dell Pork is run by Mark and Paul Hayward. They farm 650 sows outdoors with both rearing and finishing also outdoors. The farm is a member of the RSPCA's Freedom Food scheme.

In the early 1990s Mark and Paul Hayward took the decision to stop keeping indoor pigs and to move outdoors. All decisions on the style of production were to be based on animal welfare and improving taste. In the late 1990s, due to poor pig returns, the Haywards decided to launch their Dingley Dell brand. By working with processors and manufacturers, supply chains were set up to provide Dingley Dell to different markets. Today Dingley Dell supplies pork and pork products to caterers, butchers and supermarkets on both a regional and national basis.

Profit from welfare.

Let's look first at the basic facts of who we are and what we do:

Question 1. What are we as livestock farmers doing?

We are part of supply chain providing a meal. It could be at home, or in a restaurant or pub.

Question 2. What do we want the consumer to do?

Simply, really enjoy their meal and come back again.

Question 3. How can we enhance the enjoyment of their meal?

We can produce the best possible eating quality of our pork or pork product, from farm to factory to plate. We can use the best tasting breeds, we can work with the right supply chains. We can produce the best possible taste. This is always going to be our main concern.

We can make the consumers feel good about themselves by feeding them Welfare Friendly meat. Not just 'pork' on the menu – Dingley Dell Pork.

We can further this feel-good experience by providing a story or provenance. This could be 'local' or 'regional' or 'low food miles'.

If we achieve all three of the above we can turn the meal into the best possible eating experience for our consumer, who will in turn come back to our products. Welfare alone cannot achieve all of this but it is an integral part of the experience.

Let's examine these issues more closely.

Taste. If it doesn't taste good or we can't repeat that good meal every time we lose. We need to maintain the best tasting pork; we need the right breeding programme, nutrition and environment. Sometimes the influence of provenance and welfare will enhance our sense of taste. It will create an expectation because the food is welfare friendly or local the consumer will expect it to taste better. Taste is still paramount. Generally welfare-friendly or local meat sits at a price point above the standard commodity, therefore as farmers we must deliver on taste as well as welfare or provenance. If we are going to deliver a premium product we must ensure that it is premium on every possible level.

Welfare. Why do people buy in to animal welfare? Why do they buy welfare-enhanced or free range eggs and chicken? Because it makes them feel good; they care how their food is raised, it's ethical, and they don't support the battery and broiler systems. The terms 'free range' and 'welfare-enhanced' are positive statements, the term 'battery' very much a negative. It's very easy with poultry to understand the difference between eggs from 'free range hens' and 'caged birds' and generally from a point of sale view it is clear because the product is well labelled. So how does this apply to pork? There are no negative terms like 'battery' or 'caged', it's just 'pork', so we need to accentuate the positive of the pork in the packet to capitalise on the large number of consumers who are clearly prepared to buy free range chickens or eggs, and who therefore must be the targets for welfare friendly pork. We need either strong, recognisable branding of selected farms (or groups of farms) and their values, or we need a clearly visible term for our pork ... or both. In terms of welfare and what is out there already in the market place, this is where Freedom Food accreditation comes into its own. An endorsement for the UK's leading animal welfare charity has got to be an imperative. There cannot be many people in the UK who do not know the RSPCA brand name and its values.

Provenance. It is not enough to label the pork according to the country it was produced in; it needs to be identifiable by region, or county or better still by a farm or group of farms. By using the brand 'Dingley Dell' we are able to attach our values and ethics to the product. The Dingley Dell approach to animal welfare can be encapsulated on the packaging, point of sale material or via our website.

To summarise, we know from the ever-growing consumption of free range eggs and poultry that there is a substantial market for welfare-conscious

consumers and we have to tap into this with all of the unique selling points at our disposal. The current market for enhanced-welfare poultry is 10% to 12% of total production (800 million birds in the UK). The current market for free range/enhanced-welfare eggs is 90% of all eggs sold in a shell. Our potential market for free range/enhanced-welfare pork is considerable and, as yet, relatively untapped.

Price

Price is crucial to our success. In order to really profit from welfare, price at the retail point will govern what percentage of the market is available to the welfare producer. With Dingley Dell, we wish to take our product to as many people as possible, and to as diverse a market as possible. We want our consumers to eat Dingley Dell pork when they are out having a meal and when they have bought the meat from a retailer for their Sunday roast. The market for meat goes from organic at one end to the basic product at the other and there is a large area of 'middle ground' for local/regional/welfare products here.

Connecting to the consumer

This is the buzz-word in agriculture, and in my opinion there has never been a more appropriate time to achieve this. The media is saturated with issues surrounding food, celebrity chefs abound on TV and the way we perceive and value our food is rapidly changing. The passion we, as farmers, hold for what we do must be translated through to what is sold. The more farmer owned products with welfare/provenance stories taken through to the end point, the better for our industry. We must encourage chefs, butchers and the public to engage with us, understand what we do and share our passion. We must invite our end markets and supply chains onto our farms to enthuse them about our production methods and our willingness to produce what the consumer wants. We must seek to understand the consumer and react to the changing environment. We must change with the times.

Acknowledgement

Figures about welfare-friendly eggs and poultry are courtesy of Freedom Foods.

About the author

Mark Hayward is an outdoor pork producer from Suffolk. In partnership with his brother, Paul, they farm 700 outdoor sows, producing 15,000 finished pigs a year. The farm is part of the RSPCA's Freedom Food scheme and all the animals are born, reared and grown outdoors. The pigs are marketed under the Dingley Dell brand which can be found in butcher's shops, supermarkets and via the catering trade. The brand also extends into a range of prepacked pork sausages and sliced ham.