

International symposium focuses on key issues around the world

Recently Topigs hosted an international symposium to commemorate the retirement of their long serving CEO Jan van Vugt. International Pig Topics was present and in this review looks at the key topics that were discussed.

The symposium opened with Jan's successor as CEO Topigs, Martin Bijl, reviewing the company's achievements. The company has 85% of the Dutch AI and breeding gilt market, leads in Europe and worldwide its 140,000 grandparent sows produce a million or so crossbred gilts a year. The company produces some six million doses of semen for AI a year.

Continuous improvement

Topigs are continuously improving their breeds using data from large pure line populations which are strategically placed around the world. Their breeding calculations are performed with the help of their Pigbase, which is the largest database of its kind.

Genetically, Topigs are improving their genetics along two fronts. Firstly, they use traditional breeding techniques in which they select animals on their own and their family's performance. Secondly, they are developing and using new technologies such as genomics.

Currently, the global pig breeding business is fragmented but certain developments should quickly change this.

These include the fact that producers are getting bigger and more professional and that the cost of investment in research and technology is ever increasing. Consolidation in the breeding world is inevitable.

Topigs sees its future as keeping focused on its core activities and continuing to invest in superior knowledge and innovations and in developing partnerships with other strong players in the sector.

Daan van Doorn, CEO of the Vion Group, gave an overview of his Group, which is based in Holland, and, in so doing, highlighted how pig genetics is core to their activities and why Vion has a 22.5% stake in the Pigtire Group who own Topigs.

Vion is active across five continents and operates internationally in the field of high quality food and ingredients for man and animals, recently acquiring the Grampian Group.

Vion has over 16,000 employees (excluding Grampian) and in 2007 achieved a turnover of €7.1 billion which makes Vion one of the world's larger food companies.

The company's activities fall into three core areas – ingredients, fresh meat and convenience foods – and Vion focus on three strategies to differentiate itself in the

food and ingredients market. These are product leadership through innovation, operational excellence through partnership and sustainability through good citizenship.

Brazilian overview

Plinio Barbarino, swine production manager of Seara Alimentos (Cargill Meats) in Brazil, then gave attendees an overview of his company which processes a million chickens and almost 6,000 pigs a day through its processing plants.

Since the 1970s the company has focused on exporting and in the early 2000s was the leader in a group of companies exporting pork to Russia and the main pork exporter from Brazil.

This differentiation served Seara well as now more than 80% of their pork and poultry is exported.

In recent times there have been interesting challenges and changes in Brazil including inflation under control, increased per capita consumption of meat in Brazil as incomes rise, higher production costs and the strength of the local currency.

Obviously animal health issues in 2005 hampered world trade in meat and so Seara responded by increasing its share of the

Continued on page 26

Guests take a break from the symposium.



A great networking opportunity!



Continued from page 25

domestic Brazilian market and by becoming the only company in Brazil that has a plant that is approved to export cooked pork to Japan.

On a lighter, but just as serious, note Anne Lise Kjaer delivered an inspirational paper after lunch that got everybody thinking.

She sees value sets shifting and self-empowerment as the new driver, with consumers wanting more ethical involvement in their purchases coupled to the rise of super-powers in the East that will increase the demand for oil, consumer goods and 'luxuries' such as meat.

She sees globalisation having to sit alongside a real desire for consumers to 'buy local' which means that authenticity, traceability and accountability will increase in importance.

Holistic vision

Recycling of agricultural waste to provide energy will enhance the farmer's standing in the eyes of the consumer and the consumer will want more information about the products he buys in order to make his purchases.

This is all part of a new holistic vision about health and wellness and tomorrow's consumers will want less stress, more balance and greater honesty in the food sector.

Anne sees tomorrow's consumers as

1 PREMIUM HUNTERS

who will want empowering culinary experiences.

1 ADVENTURE GATHERERS

who will enjoy convenience and sharing.

1 ECO GATHERERS

who will insist on authenticity and ethical products.

1 KARMA HUNTERS

who will enjoy engaging all five senses and new dimensions in dining.

Table 1. The four distinct consumer types of the future.

falling into four categories (see Table 1). In concluding, Anne warned that tomorrow's consumers will have higher expectations and more knowledge than ever before but this should provide a challenging golden opportunity for farmers.

The symposium was then rounded off by a presentation from Jan Merks, the Pigure Group's director of genetics and quality.

He stressed that in the future consumers will look for convenience foods that are ethical and that meaningful packaging and empowering experiences will be the basis for niche markets.

Leading meat and pork producers will comply with this by branding pork as socially and sustainably produced. Pork will become more and more a large scale produced commodity for food and not directly food itself.

A genetics company is the supplier of the

'seed' of the pork and must meet consumer expectations at a variety of levels.

To meet future needs Topigs will continuously invest in new technologies to further develop its genetic lines.

Balanced breeding

Balanced breeding will play its role in reducing the carbon footprint by improving FCR and reducing emissions, bettering animal welfare and improving intrinsic meat quality.

The company will also support the development of regional and empowering products and Topigs will develop appropriate unique genetic lines for this purpose like the one presently available for Parma ham.

All this will be done by excluding cloning and genetic modifications from the breeding programme. ■