

THE VOICE OF THE BRITISH PIG INDUSTRY

PIGWORLD

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A photograph of a man, Colin Standerwick, wearing a green jacket with an ACMC logo, leaning on a metal railing in a pig pen. The background shows several pig stalls with pigs inside.

The best...

...from the best

Colin Standerwick is Service Manager of the 600 sow High Health ACMC Nucleus/Multiplication unit in the South West of England and he is very impressed with the performance of the ACMC Meidam Gilts.

"Apart from superb manageability due to their gentle nature they have all the conformation and production attributes essential for producing first class ACMC AC1 gilts" says Colin. "Professional pig producers will experience the best of both worlds with outstanding commercial performance from high health animals that also respond well to varying management regimes. We have also achieved conception percentages in the upper nineties using semen from the ACMC Gene Bank which has consistently been delivered, bang on time, via Royal Mail. ACMC are great to work with and make you feel like one of the family. Nothing is too much trouble".

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MORE GROWTH FROM LESS FEED**

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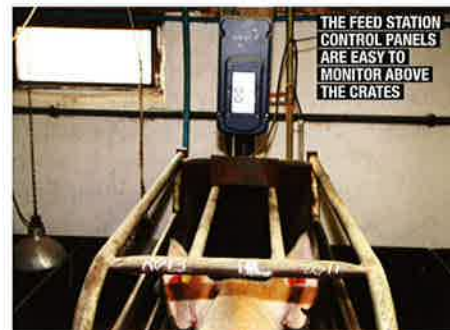
BELOW: PHIL STEPHENSON (LEFT) WITH PAUL LEETHAM



IMPROVED MILKING AND HIGHER WEANER WEIGHTS ARE AMONG THE BENEFITS PAUL EXPECTS FROM THE GESTAL SYSTEM

Feeding system fits like a glove

Never backward at trying things out in the pig industry, Phil Stephenson of Grove Farm, Melbourne, near York, was an early adopter of the Gestal lactating sow feeding system. **Sam Walton** visited his unit recently to see how the electronic sow feeders are performing



THE FEED STATION CONTROL PANELS ARE EASY TO MONITOR ABOVE THE CRATES

Phil Stephenson is a farmer who likes to do his homework on whatever developments take his interest; if it looks like it'll be of benefit, he'll go ahead and try it. He regards improvements as investments rather than as costs.

He's always been like this, and when Pig World has visited over the years, there's always been something new to see. He also takes an overview of the whole industry, which is one reason why he's involved with, and puts so much effort into, the NPA and various other committees.

When he came to think about feeding his suckling sows in early 2012, the new Gestal system being imported from Canada and marketed by AM Warkup appealed to him. He studied the figures available and considered the other benefits that were claimed to

include: being able to get more feed into his sows over a longer feeding period; improved milking; better weaner weights; sows in better condition at weaning; more settled sows; less stress for both sows and stockman; the ability to put sows on a feed curve; and the ability to monitor intake closely and easily – all of which would help towards the bottom line.

He then sent his farrowing house manager, Paul Leatham, to spend a day with the Hall family at Pickering, who were the first producers to install the North American system in this country. His brief was to see first-hand how the units operated; what the Hall family had learnt from using the system; and to find out if there were any pitfalls.

Paul was very impressed, so much so that 119 Gestal individual feeders have now been installed at Grove Farm. The system was put

in place by farm staff, helped by the fact that it's easy to integrate the Gestal units into an existing feed line.

The farrowing accommodation at Grove Farm consists of seven rooms in a continuous row, as well as a Finrone container, and the new system fits like a glove. Paul is in his element, absolutely loves it and thinks it's fantastic. It has enabled him to do so much more in monitoring feed intake and assessing exactly what each sow is capable of eating, so there's absolutely no waste.

The sows are currently fed four times a day, starting at 6.30am, half-an-hour after Paul arrives. They're fed again at 11am, 2.30pm and have a late feed at 8pm. The first and last feeds each give the sows 30% of their daily ration, with the two intermediate feeds each supplying 20%. ▶



Paul has set the system to drop 100g when each feed cycle starts just to let the sows know the feed is available. A minute later, the rest of the scheduled feed for that period is available and the sows get that by nosing a small magnetic button. No sow can get more than her allotted amount before the next feeding period, and if she hasn't eaten her full allocation one-hour before the next scheduled slot, she won't get any more food until the next feeding period starts.

I visited Grove Farm at 9am and all but one sow had eaten their first allowance. Various lights on the Gestal units inform the stockman if the allowance has been eaten, or if there is still some to go. All this information is also available on a computer screen in the pig unit office, but it's just as easy to walk down the farrowing area and look at the status lights.

If Paul thinks a sow wants a bit more, or a bit less, it's easy enough to change the allocation either on the feeder unit itself or on the office computer. He looks at each sow chart every morning and has a feed graph that reveals exactly what they're capable of eating.

Paul sets the rations at 120% of the allotted feed curve to start with, which is a clear indicator as to each sow being on the correct curve. The feed curves are instantly adjustable up or down. By monitoring the system, they can see how appetite varies between gilts and

successive litters.

They both appreciate the help they've received from Gestal's team in Canada, which also has access to the Grove Farm system. They provide 24-hour support if any problems arise, and Phil or Paul will get a transatlantic telephone call if a problem is spotted in Canada that doesn't appear to have been picked up on the farm.

After six months of using the Gestal feeders, Phil and Paul think they're probably 85% of the way to knowing exactly how to use them,

“While Phil is delighted with the results from the Gestal feeders, he continues to look at other ways of improving the unit for the benefit of his staff

and they're fairly confident that in another six months they'll be 99% of the way there.


One thing that's been done at Grove Farm as a result of the new feeders having been fitted is to provide an extra nipple drinker in the troughs to ensure that water will not be a limiting factor in feed intake. That actually means each sow now has three drinkers, although the third happened by accident.

Several of the pipes to the nipple near the back of the crate had rusted away, so they shortened it and sited the nipple at the front of the crate where they realised the sow could actually use it when she was lying down. This proved so successful that the Grove Farm team altered every one. That's the sort of attention to detail that's commonplace on this unit.

Phil feels that the Gestal system allows his team to provide a higher level of stockmanship, but it probably also requires a lot more expertise from the stockmen – which is no problem here thanks to Paul's dedication to his role.

As Paul starts at 6am, he normally goes home at 3pm. Prior to installing the Gestal system the 8pm feed meant a member of staff had to come back to the unit to do it, but now it happens automatically – although I know Phil pops back in now and then to see if all is OK. So far there

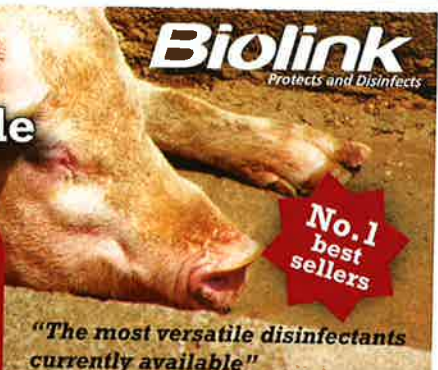
have been no problems.

I know Phil is delighted with the results from the Gestal feeders, but he continues to look at other ways of improving the unit for the benefit of his staff, the business and the stock. Two recently added windmills are already helping with the electricity bill, and a biomass heating system might be on the cards – but we'll leave that for another visit. 



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