Breeding 'smelless pigs'

By Joe Rea
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WHAT are the priorities of our under pressure Irish pig industry? Slaughtering pig prices, certainly. Good feed conversion, essential. High litter size, obvious. Yes these are all the priorities. But there is now a new priority. How to breed the smelless pig.

As we learn more about DNA and gene manipulation this must be possible. In view of a recent court ruling on pig odours the ''smelless pig'' is required.

The outcome of the legal case was that in order to reduce pig odour omissions to a level acceptable to the EPA pig de-stocking was required.

Now, one sees the need for the ''smelless pig''. How does the EPA measure pig odours? It appears that plastic bags are filled with air from the area in which piggeries are located. Then a sniffer panel, heads in bags, decides whether or not the odour level is acceptable. I joke not, this is the red hot science of the process.

Indeed there is also some Dutch technology in use to measure those deadly odours. How suitable is this for Irish conditions? Currently the Netherlands have a pig density of 724 per km square. The Irish figure is 34. Therefore, the Dutch have 22 times greater pig concentration. The flat Dutch landscape is totally different to Ireland. Yet, despite major differences in terrain and pig density we are now going down this road. More a cul de sac than a road.

Consequences for pig industry

Taking the cul de sac approach will have major consequences for our pig industry. Denmark, a proud world leader in pig production is now reaping the rewards of years of over prescription on the environmental front. Leading Danish market analyst, Karsten Flemin of Danske Slagterier (Danish slaughtering organisation), has predicted that live weaner exports from Denmark will increase by over 40% to 3.3m head between 2004 and 2005, the majority going to Germany. The reason for the sharp increase is twofold according to Flemin. Current high prices for slaughtering pigs in Germany are fuelling a demand among German farmers for piglets for fattening.

The second reason, more fundamental and with long term consequences for the Danish industry is that tight environmental controls are making finishing pigs a less attractive option for smaller producers who do not have the land to spread manure.

Why repeat the mistakes now hitting Denmark?

The accompanying graph shows the level of live pig exports from Denmark. In the month of February this year 300,000 live pigs, 85% weanlings were exported. This figure is 100,000 pigs more than the total number of Irish pigs slaughtered again in February 2005.

I am surprised that the work of the ''smell police'' in the pig sector has provoked so little reaction. This is surely an issue in any Government ''partnership'' talks. We must not go down the road of ''agri silence'' (this new phenomena I have identified) on this issue.

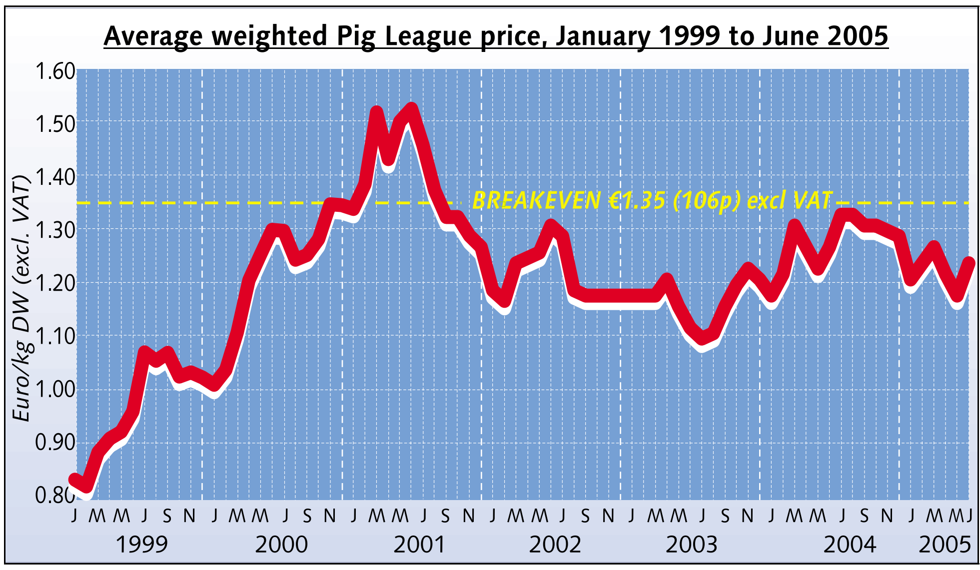
It is easy to say four or five pig farmers don't count. Remember some years ago pig farmers were the first to be affected with environmental rules. Consider where that has taken us today.

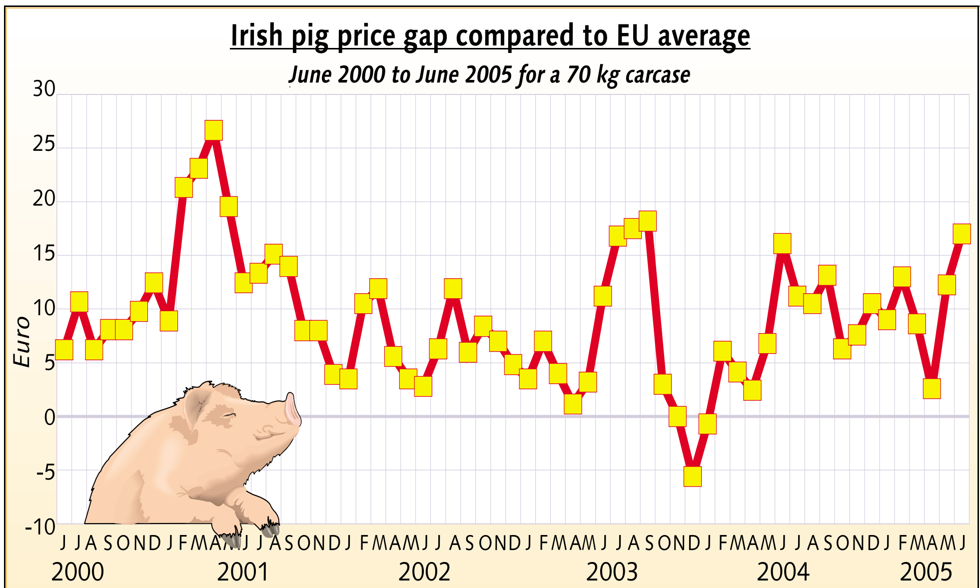
Think of the possibilities if the ''smell police'' got going in other farming areas. Just imagine if this smell policy was aided and abetted by some enterprising legal eagles. In fact the legal smell specialist could be a far more lucrative business than those engaged in ambulance chasing projects.

June 2005 Pigmeat Price League Table

Factory	June 05 per kg/DN	May 05 per kg/DN	Jan '98 per kg/DN	June 05 price as % of Jan 98 price	Est. share of national kill in each factory
Division No.1 €1.24 and over					
Dawn	1.25	1.18	1.17	107%	16%
McCarren'	1.24	1.20	-	-	8%
Division No.2 uner €1.24					
Roscrea*	1.23	1.18	1.13	109%	12%
Edenderry*	1.23	1.18	1.13	109%	12%
Weighted avg.	1.24	1.18			
Northern price					
Cookstown	1.34	1.30			
Grants	1.33	1.30			
Cullylacky	1.33	1.29			
Pork prices					
Coyle	1.25	1.21			
Salter	1.25	1.21			
Corbally	1.25	1.20			

*Glanbia price includes $2 per pig withheld for 12 weeks, paid out if pigs continue to be supplied
*Glanbia price is also based on CAT (1) bonus for volume and continuity





Based on Bord Bia Monitor week ending 25 June 2005

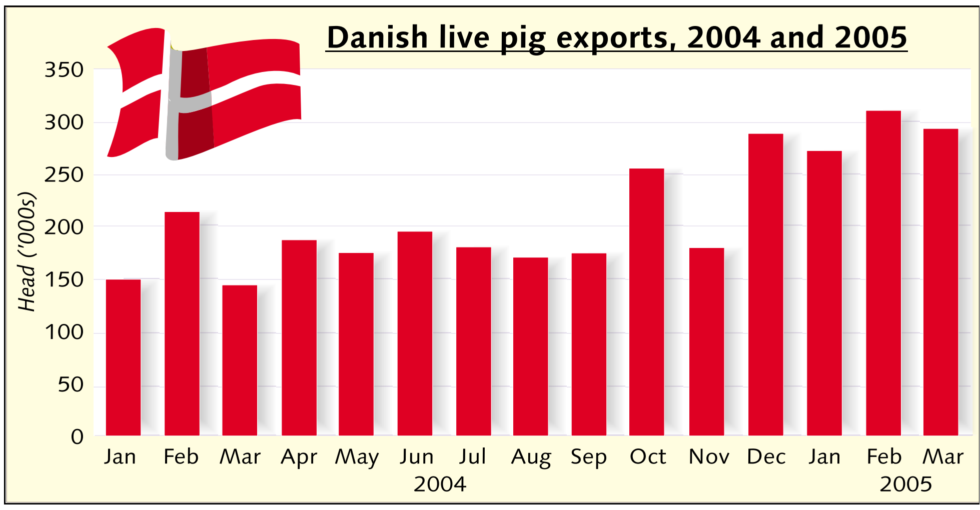
€17 June price gap

THE average weighted June price is €1.24. This is a significant increase compared to the May level of €1.18. However, we are still way off the pace when it comes to the EU average. The price gap between our June weighted average and the EU average for the week ending 25 June is a whopping €17 per 70 kg carcase. The hard questions remain to be answered in the Irish context.

Northern prices in the June League, as one expects, are well ahead of the Southern level. €1.34 was readily available for pigs from the Republic going directly to Northern plants. However, Southern suppliers going through dealers to the North were being paid well under the €1.34.

Efforts to send these pigs directly and avoiding dealers were not successful. Medieval middlemen must be protected even in 2005.

Our June league is behind time. This is due to some key contacts being away on holidays. The plan is to have further leagues up to date. July's league will appear in mid August.



Source : Danske Slagterier.