



BPA On-Farm Conservation Programmes



The Conservation Committee has agreed a strategy for the next few years. It is based on the two well known strands of farm livestock conservation - in situ and ex situ conservation programmes.

Let's dispense with the Latin right from the outset. In Situ conservation is what you do every morning when you get up in all weathers to feed your pigs. Not very glamorous but that is what is at the heart of saving our native breeds. Everyone who keeps pedigree pigs from the best known breeders with export customers around the world or an office full of show trophies to the member of a village pig club rearing a few pedigree weaners for Christmas is part of that conservation programme.

To start with we need to decide which breeds we are going to focus on. The BPA works with 10 native breeds and 4 non native breeds. Of those non native breeds the Duroc, Hampshire and Pietrain are not considered to be at risk worldwide which leaves the Mangalitza. A relatively recent arrival in the UK this breed is very much at risk in its homeland in Hungary. Like some of our own native breeds it has fought back from the very brink of extinction but it is still a Hungarian breed and the primary responsibility for its conservation lies with the breeders in Hungary. That leaves us with 10 native British pig breeds for which we are responsible and where we have to take the lead in any conservation programme.

The headline objectives of our plan for these 10 breeds are:

Conserve named male and female lines

Scientists might argue that named lines are not important but a breed is more than just a collection of genes that confer specific characteristics such as ear shape or coat colour. A breed is a living cultural heritage. The lines within the breed are more than just parts of its genetic diversity they represent its history and often the history of its breeders. Conserving the lines within our breeds has been the cornerstone of our conservation programmes over the last 40 years and we are not about to throw that out of the window. So we will continue to ensure that we preserve all the named lines within our breeds unless the breeders make a conscious decision that a particular line is not worth saving. Unfortunately three lines have been lost from those breeds featured in the 2002 survey and we don't want to lose any more. Our aim is to ensure that all male and female lines are being bred in a minimum of 5 herds around the UK.

Conserve Genetic Diversity within each breed.

Conserving the lines is already a step in the right direction but we know that the line names do not tell the full story. Inbreeding is the curse of any rare breed population and we have to try and manage this. We are often asked what is permitted. The BPA does not seek to tie the hands of breeders in managing their own breeding programmes and herds. Our best advice is to avoid any shared grandparents but experienced breeders seeking to improve or develop a line will make their own decisions. In the same way someone who has developed a business selling pork will be looking for a specific type of carcass to meet the demands of their butchers and customers. They will inevitably focus in on a limited selection of pigs that will give them consistent results - they are not looking for a wide range of diversity in their herd. That is why conservation breeding is more than just a business. Part of conservation breeding involves making decisions for the good of the breed as a whole rather than the bottom line of the business. It involves a commitment to the future of the breed and a desire to pass the breed on to the next generation with a healthy level of genetic diversity within the population.

Modern computing power allows us to look at all the live animals in the herd and work out how they are related to all the other animals in the national herd. The best time to do this is immediately after the Bloodline Audit in January when we have the most accurate picture of



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which pigs are alive. In future this whole breed analysis will be part of the Audit process every year and we will identify the pigs in each breed that are least related to the population as a whole. We will then try to ensure that a percentage of the least related females and males produce a litter and contribute to the next generation.

Conservation Targets

Named Lines

- Female lines. Ensure that current lines are bred in a minimum of 5 herds around the UK.
- Boar lines. Ensure that current lines are bred in a minimum of 5 herds around the UK.

Genetic Diversity

- Female lines. Ensure that a percentage of the least related females produce a litter and contribute to the next generation.
- Male lines. Ensure that a percentage of the least related males produce a litter and contribute to the next generation

Breed specific targets

Set breed specific targets for numbers of Sows, Boars and Breeders by working with Breed Representatives, Breed Clubs and Breeders Groups.

Applying for support

Breed Representatives can work with recognised clubs and groups to propose on farm conservation breeding programmes for their breed. These programmes can be submitted to the Conservation Committee for approval, technical and in some cases financial support.

These plans should be based on the latest published survey results and should follow the aims of the agreed conservation strategy outlined above.

The Conservation Committee may approve small grants of up to £250 for specific projects such as transport of breeding pigs in order to distribute the specific breeding pigs around the country in line with agreed targets.

Applications for funding should include the following:

- A named person or recognised group responsible for the project and to whom payment will be made
- Details of expenses to be incurred. This will not include purchase of animals.
- Details of how the expenditure supports the aims of the conservation plan and what the outcomes will be in line with agreed targets.
- A commitment to provide a written report with photographs on the success of the project to the Conservation Committee.

Summary

The intention of this programme is to support new and existing breeding programmes organised by BPA breeders in conjunction with Breed Reps working with Breed Clubs and Groups.

Applications for must state clearly how the proposed expenditure supports an existing programme that will help to fulfil the aims of the BPA Conservation Plan.