Pigs and Poultry at the Roseworthy Campus

Poultry research at Roseworthy Agricultural College commenced when the State's Egg-Laying Competition, initiated by the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society of South Australia, was relocated to the College in 1904, following the first competition held at Magill the previous year. The location of the Competition at the College led to the construction of improved poultry facilities and the Competition was identified as being held at the *Government Poultry Station, Agricultural College, Roseworthy.*

Following the establishment of the Parafield Poultry Station in 1911 the Government's poultry research activities at the College, and at the Kybybolite and Murray Bridge Research Stations, were consolidated at Parafield.

South Australia.

EGG-LAYING COMPETITION, 1907-8,

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE, ROSEWORTHY,

SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

OFFICIAL REPORT

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VPT

Fifty years ago, the Roseworthy Agricultural College's 70-sow piggery, located on the eastern side of the Wasleys Road, had commercial production as its primary purpose, some rudimentary research activity and some teaching benefit. The piggery had moved to that site in 1954 and was substantially upgraded in the mid-1960s. The section on the piggery in the 1967 The Student stated: *It is hoped that if all goes according to plan that in several years the College piggery will be the DEMONSTRATION UNIT for the S.A. Pig Industry as well as the course in pig husbandry at R.A.C.*.

Fifty years ago, the College poultry unit included a cage unit constructed in 1964 as part of a series of improvements over several years in the 1960s. The primary purpose of the poultry unit was egg production with the cull hens a frequent dietary item in the College Dining Room.

These arrangements continued until the 1990s. In 1993, Primary Industries SA (PISA), formerly the Department of Agriculture which in 1992 had merged with other agencies (Fisheries, and Woods and Forests) to become PISA, transferred its pig research program at the Northfield Research Centre to the Roseworthy Campus. The Centre, which was being sold by the South Australian Government for housing, included a 60-sow piggery.

Following subsequent mergers in 1997 PISA became the Department of Primary Industry and Resources (PIRSA) and in 2011 became the Department of Primary Industry and Regions, retaining the acronym (PIRSA).

Also, from 1993, PISA progressively moved its poultry research program at the Parafield Poultry Station to the Roseworthy Campus.

In addition, in the 1990s the University of Adelaide's animal science research activities at the Waite Campus moved to the Roseworthy Campus and PISA transferred the animal science research activities of the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) to the Roseworthy Campus.

SARDI, established in 1992, focused on driving innovation, productivity and sustainability across the State's agriculture, food, aquatic and bioscience sectors. Whilst initially independent of PISA, SARDI became a division of PIRSA in 1997.

Funds from the sale of the Northfield and Parafield land, which were allocated to the establishment of new animal science research programs at the Roseworthy Campus, including new infrastructure enabled, in 1996, the construction of a 300-sow piggery one kilometre north of the main entrance to the Campus.

For several years after the construction of the new piggery the existing piggery continued to be used as a grow out facility for pigs.

The new poultry facilities at the Campus enabled research to cover both egg and chicken meat production in experimental and commercial scale facilities.

This consolidation of pig and poultry at the Campus was supported by addition of experimental capabilities at the feed mill, and the development of a nutrition laboratory to underpin dietary research.

The progressive bringing together of all these activities facilitated the establishment of the Pig and Poultry Production Institute (PPPI) at the Campus in 1996.

The inclusion of PISA's extension arm (Rural Solutions) in the PPPI was to provide a pathway from 'discovery to on-farm application'.

For many years the new piggery was managed by a Board comprising of the University, SARDI and industry representatives.

In 2008, following a series of reviews the operation of the piggery was transferred to the University.

Two Cooperative Research Centres were centred at the Campus between 2005 to 2019. The first, the CRC for an Internationally Competitive Pork Industry operated until 2011 and the second, the CRC for High Integrity Australian Pork operated from 2011 to 2019.

Prior to the end of the CRC for High Integrity Australian Pork the industry determined that from 2019 a new entity, the Australasian Pork Research Institute Limited (APRIL) would be responsible for delivering results from the research outcomes of the two CRCs, as well as undertaking its own pork research and development work.

The basing of the two Pork CRCs at the Campus bought many PhD candidates and post-doctoral scientists, many of whom now occupy senior and executive leadership positions in the national industry and allied research agencies.

As a result of all the pig activities at the Campus and the decline of pig research activities in other States, South Australia became the lead state for pork research and development.

In addition to the pig research activities at the Campus, similar research on poultry nutrition and bird welfare has been undertaken from the mid-1990s.

In 2022, concerned to ensure the piggery achieved its full potential, SunPork Group, the largest pig farming integrator in Australia, sought and was provided the opportunity to lease the piggery. The lease was for an initial period of five years with the option of a five-year extension.

In the first twelve months of the lease SunPork invested more than $1 million in the piggery, expanding its capacity from 300-sow to 700-sow.

Given its strategic importance to the University, SARDI and the pork industry, the operation of the piggery is now overseen by a Piggery Management Group, comprising nominees of SunPork and the University, currently the Head of the School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences, Professor Rob Woodgate.

There is also a Piggery User Group (PUG), chaired by Dr Kate Plush, SunPork Group's Manager - Science, Technology and Adoption, who obtained her Bachelor of Science (Animal Science) and subsequent PhD at the Roseworthy Campus. The PUG is a small committee of stakeholders (SunPork, Adélaïde University, SARDI), formed to coordinate access to pigs for education and research.

Dr Plush has indicated that SunPork's philosophy is that research, teaching and training best occurs in a commercial environment. Therefore, the Roseworthy Piggery operates as a commercial piggery whilst hosting substantial research, teaching, and training activities.

As a result of the lease to SunPork the piggery today, in addition to its increased capacity, has world-class biosecurity with a new shower in - shower out facility, and refurbished farrowing facilities that include the SunPork developed ‘maternity rings’, a close confinement free farrowing system that optimises animal welfare for sows and litters.

Dr Andrew Pointon, Executive Officer of Pork SA Inc, who led the co-locations in the 1990s and establishment of the PPPI at the Campus through to 2000, states: *The Roseworthy piggery and poultry research has maintained relevance over a succession of research funding models, weathered a series of institutional management arrangements, and survived the attrition of applied farm research facilities on campuses nationally. The Roseworthy Piggery continues as a key part of a national network, which supports production innovation and the development of careers for the national industry.*

SunPork’s commitment to innovation now sees SunPork’s larger piggery at nearby Wasleys a participant in the Wasleys Renewable Natural Gas Facility Project. The Project, announced in March 2026, with a twelve-month construction period, is a joint enterprise between SunPork and LMS Energy, a South Australian based biogas to energy company. Part funded by the Australian Government's Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), the facility will be Australia's first commercial scale agricultural renewable gas facility, converting the effluent from that piggery into pipeline quality natural gas sufficient to provide gas to 2,000 homes.