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Research grant to help improve stress resilience in pigs

Australasian Pork Research Institute Limited, The University of Melbourne, The University of Queensland, SunPork Solutions and Rivalea Australia have secured an Australian Research Council Linkage grant to support a \$900,000 research project to improve pig welfare by modulating stress resilience.

ARC funding for the three-year project, ‘Early stress experiences and stress resilience in pigs’, was \$450,000 with an additional \$449,393 cash from other partners, of which \$100,000 was from APRIL.

APRIL CEO and Chief Scientist John Pluske said the ARC grant was very significant, with improving pig welfare a hot button issue in the Australasian pork industry.

“It marks the first instance of APRIL, on behalf of its members, successfully leveraging external funding for a major research project of industry-wide relevance,” Professor Pluske said.

“APRIL’s vision is for collaborative pork industry research, focused on industry led priorities, leading to timely generation and adoption of outcomes able to ensure sustainability and profitability of Australasian pork producers.

“This project, backed by international collaboration, will have a global impact on new knowledge and improved husbandry,” Professor Pluske said.

Paul Hemsworth, Animal Welfare Science Centre, The University of Melbourne, and Alan Tilbrook, Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, The University of Queensland, said the project would examine stress resilience in pigs and generate knowledge on early life management to endow stress resilience in pigs, with expected benefits for their welfare, health, productivity and subsequent farm profitability.”

“Modern pig farming is a major source of food, providing substantial nutritional, social and economic benefits for Australia and the world,” Professor Hemsworth said.

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“Animal welfare is of increasing concern to the public, consumers and pork producers and stress vulnerability is an animal health and production problem in the life of the commercial pig.”

Project investigators are Professor Paul Hemsworth (The University of Melbourne); Professor Alan Tilbrook (The University of Queensland); Dr Jeremy Marchant Forde (USDA - Agricultural Research Service, USA); Associate Professor Roger Rassool (The University of Melbourne) and Professor Jean-Loup Rault (University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna).

The investigators agree that prior stressful experiences early in life may strengthen an animal’s resistance to subsequent stressors.

Professor Hemsworth said reducing farm animal stress would have substantial economic and social benefits, because stress reduced animal welfare, productivity and health.

“Importantly, public animal welfare concerns can dramatically affect welfare-based purchasing decisions and curtail farm profitability and the continued use of specific animal practices,” he noted.

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Charles Rikard-Bell, Dennis Mutton, John Pluske_0019.JPG: APRIL CEO & Chief Scientist, Prof John Pluske (right) described the ARC grant as significant, with improving pig welfare a hot button issue in the Australasian pork industry. He was pictured in Melbourne at the recent APRIL stakeholders’ day with APRIL Chairman Dennis Mutton (centre) and APRIL Manager Commercialisation and Research Impact, Dr Charles Rikard-Bell.