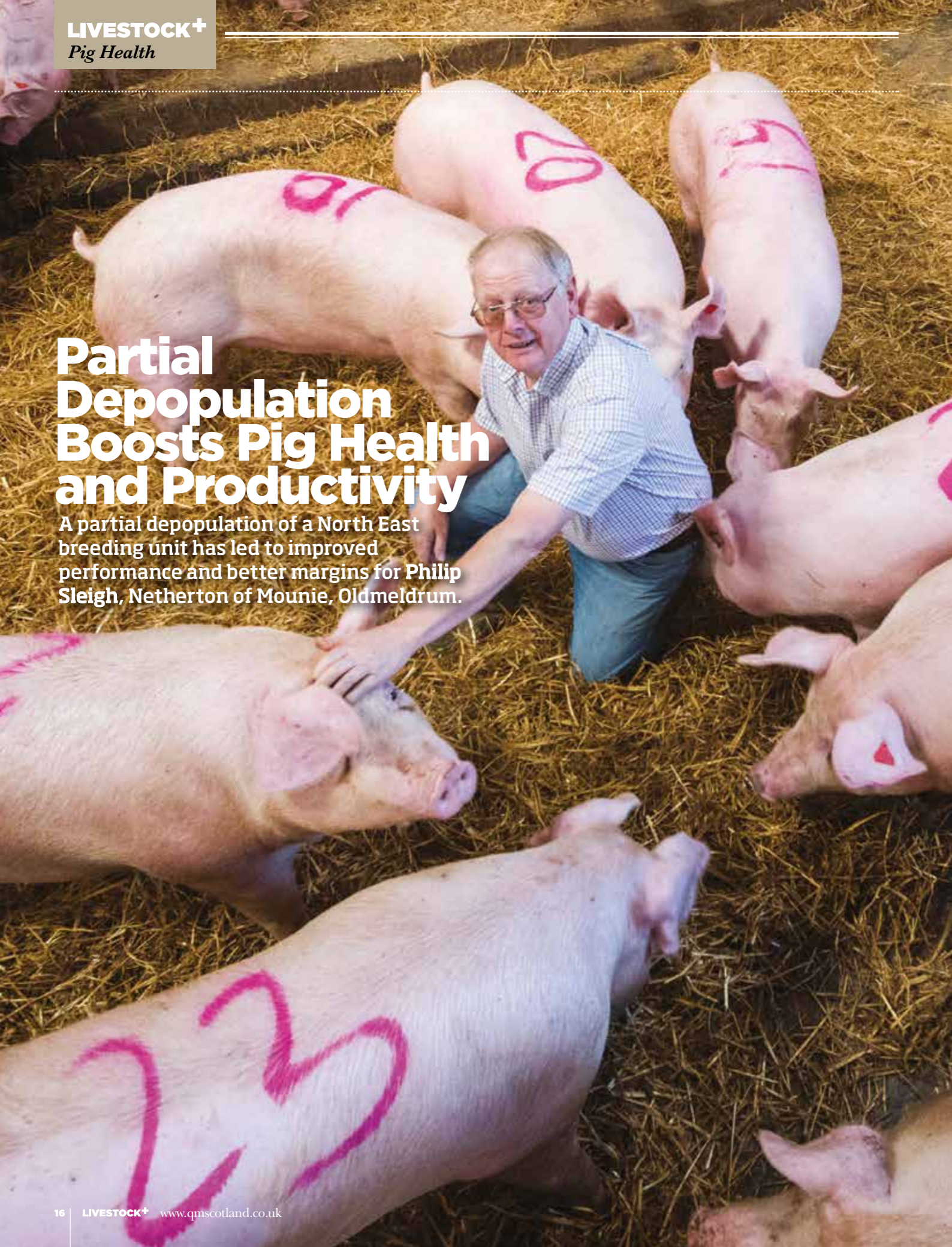


# Partial Depopulation Boosts Pig Health and Productivity

A partial depopulation of a North East breeding unit has led to improved performance and better margins for Philip Sleigh, Netherton of Mounie, Oldmeldrum.



A first-generation pig farmer, who introduced the enterprise to his arable farm 20 years ago, Philip carried out the partial depopulation in order to eradicate a number of diseases. This has been very successful and has significantly reduced the amount of antibiotics used in the unit.

Around 142 hectares of winter and spring barley are grown at Netherton of Mounie, with all of the barley being used in the pig units. Philip said: "Ninety-nine percent of what we sell here is pigs."

The breeding herd of 435 Landrace/Large White sows - with a Danish Duroc boar used as a terminal sire - are kept at Yonderton Farm, Ellon, about 15 miles away from the home farm and all pigs are transferred to Netherton of Mounie for finishing.

However, the buildings at Yonderton for the weaned pigs were badly in need of an upgrade, so five years ago Philip took the opportunity to put all the pigs off the unit at weaning and build a new shed, while refurbishing another.

He decided against a full depopulation, which involves all the pigs leaving the farm, as it would be costly and also create loss of cash flow. He explained: "Retaining the breeding sows meant we did not completely lose our cash flow during the depopulation period."

The young pigs were moved off site for eight weeks, while the sows were double vaccinated for Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) and medicated for Enzootic Pneumonia (EP) and Actinobacillus Pleuropneumonia (APP). Meanwhile the finishing unit at Netherton of Mounie was emptied of stock for four weeks, thoroughly cleaned down and double disinfected.

The result, according to Philip, has been a real boost in the performance of both the breeding and finishing herds.

He said: "Conception rates have improved, as have numbers of piglets born alive, and numbers weaned have risen from around 24/25 to over 30 per sow per year. In the growing herd liveweight gains have improved to 850g/day from weaning to slaughter, while mortality has dropped to under two percent.

The pigs are also reaching their finished deadweight of 86/87kg two weeks earlier."

Philip is delighted that the sows have remained free of the three problematic diseases for four years without being on vaccination and medication programmes, which means a big saving on vet bills.

He commented: "There are many small improvements in both herds, which have led to a more efficient and more profitable unit."

Piglets are weaned at four weeks then after 60 more days at Yonderton, they go into the finishing unit at Netherton of Mounie. They reach their target weight at 20 to 23 weeks old compared to 22 to 25 weeks before the partial depopulation.



Philip Sleigh with Yonderton Pig Unit Manager Andrew Munro.

**"There are many small improvements in both herds, which have led to a more efficient and more profitable unit."**

Better conditions in the new and refurbished sheds have had a lot to do with the improved performance. Philip explained: "Under the old system the pigs were moved twice; now they stay in the same healthy, well-ventilated environment until slaughter. We also changed from a dry feed to a home-mixed, ad-lib wet feed system."

The four full-time members of staff are also enjoying the new environment with higher roofs and much easier movement of pigs.

The 12,000 or so finished pigs are all sold through Scottish Pig Producers, of which Philip is a director, to Quality Pork Processors Limited at Brechin.

Since the depopulation, Philip has noticed that condemnations at the abattoir have reduced. Less than one per cent of pigs are now affected by pleurisy, whereas before it was 33 percent. He also produced over half a tonne more of saleable meat after the depopulation, thanks to fewer condemnations. Carcasses which have condemned areas of meat not only lose the money for that area but are also penalised a few pence per kg over the whole carcass; therefore, fewer condemnations translate directly to more money.

Philip said: "When times are challenging in the pig business, we are better able to deal with it with a healthier herd. We, as an industry, are also under pressure to reduce the use of antibiotics, which we have done significantly in our herd."

He continued: "I have no regrets about doing the partial depopulation; it was a lot of hard work, but the business is in a much stronger position now and fit for the future."+



## Wholesome Pigs (Scotland Ltd) Abattoir Health Monitoring Results for Netherton of Mounie

	July 2014 (Before Partial Depopulation)	January 2015 (After Partial Depopulation)
Enzootic Pneumonia-like lesions	3.1 average score	0 average score
Pleuropneumonia-like lesions	9.1%	0%
Abscesses (lungs)	9.1%	0%
Mild Pleurisy	18.2%	0.5%
Severe Pleurisy	33.3%	1.1%

