

Report from Crown Pet Foods Open Meeting



15th May 2008 at Caryford Hall

Answers and actions to pave the way ahead

“We are listening, we do care and we are responding.”

This was the key message from Francois Demauge, Managing Director of Crown Pet Foods, at a special Open Meeting held on Thursday 15th May at Caryford Hall that we organised for members of the local community to ask questions of our senior management team. Chaired by Janette Cronie of Ansford Parish Council, the meeting featured a short presentation to explain what we do at our new production facility, followed by an open Questions and Answers session.

For those of you who were unable to attend, and those who submitted written questions at the end of the meeting, we've summarised many of the topics covered in this issue of our Community Matters newsletter. We've also included a short profile of our senior management team so that you know who we are.

Commitment

Our commitment to invest a further £1m in odour abatement technology and our resolve to minimise odour emissions was emphasised at the meeting. The commissioning and installation of this new equipment is on schedule for completion by the end of July (The contract with the supplier was signed on 16th May and the supplier's office is now set up on site). We are also continuing to work closely with the Environment Agency and we invited Andy Gardiner, Area Environment Manager, to join us at the Open Meeting so that the community had the opportunity to clarify any aspects of the Agency's work in the area.

Open Dialogue

Earlier in the week, we invited members of the local press to a tour around our new facility so that they could see our pristine kitchen in operation and our production standards at first-hand. We were also delighted to accept a request for a member of the community to join one of the reporters on this tour. Although this didn't materialise, we very much hope many of you will join us on 6th September when we are holding an Open Day and guided tours for everyone in Castle Cary and Ansford. At our invitation, many of the journalists also came along to the Open Meeting, as we are keen to develop and maintain open communications at all levels and at all times.

Co-operation

Some of you have concerns. Some of you have expressed support. And, some of you just want to know more about us and what our plans are for the future. We have given an undertaking to respond personally to any concerns you may have and we're delighted that so many of you share our determination to work together rather than against each other to resolve any concerns. We're also grateful for the expressions of support from individuals and many representatives of the local community. And we look forward to fulfilling our objective to be accepted as a responsible, valued and respected member of the local community in the months and years ahead.

Question Time

The following Questions and Answers are based on the points raised at the Open Meeting and include a number of answers to written questions submitted at the end of the meeting. We have excluded supportive and critical personal opinions conveyed by local individuals at the meeting and focused on the main questions that were raised.

How serious is your commitment to resolving concerns about odour emissions?

We are absolutely committed to do everything possible to minimise odours. Actions speak louder than words and the fact we are now investing £1m in new odour abatement technology is a clear demonstration of our commitment to minimise odour emissions from our new facility. We understand that the three levels of odour reduction, which will be in place by the end of July, are unprecedented within UK food production. We are confident this new system will prove to be extremely effective following highly successful trials over the past few weeks at one of our larger facilities in France.

If you want to be a good neighbour, why has Crown Pet Foods appealed against the Enforcement Notice served by the Environment Agency?

Our appeal against the Enforcement Notice has no bearing on our stated commitment to invest in additional odour abatement technology. We are determined to resolve the concerns that some of you have by taking decisive action with substantial additional investment within the shortest possible timeframe. The Enforcement Notice was issued because the Environment Agency considered the system we originally installed (based on equipment regarded as 'Best Available Technology') was not working properly. However, the system is working in accordance to the manufacturer's performance specifications, which is why we have appealed. That said, we're now taking steps to further minimise odour emissions and continue to work closely with the Environment Agency – although this is not as a direct consequence of the original Notice.

Do the emissions from the company's new facility pose any health risks?

Every one of the ingredients we use is fit for human consumption. We simply blend the ingredients in a large scale kitchen. Any odours that are produced are just as you would expect from any cooking process, so there is no health risk whatsoever.

Why did you come to Castle Cary and why don't you employ more local people?

Because of our success in this country we decided to start production here. Previously we were based in Yeovil and we wanted to stay in this area of Somerset so that we could maintain employment for our loyal and growing workforce. The site we selected was designated for industrial use and was within reasonable travelling distance from our former office, which is why we're here. We're delighted all our staff transferred to our new facility and pleased we've been able to recruit people from the local area. However, the decision to limit production as we seek to resolve some concerns about odour emissions has, understandably, deferred our full recruitment drive.

Our workforce does comprise people from Castle Cary, Ansford and the immediate local area. Currently we employ 13 people from within 5 miles of our site, and a further 57 from within 15 miles. We have introduced the opportunity for three apprenticeships for local school leavers and plan to implement our full recruitment programme from August onwards. In total we employ more than 170 people across the UK and offer very good career progression opportunities for all members of staff.

Your original planning application was opposed by many local people and, in some respects, split the local community. How do you think we feel when an agency you employed at the time refers to us in a highly derogatory way and shouldn't you be accountable for such comments?

We share your understandable grievance. We were advised about the information on the Meeting Place Communications website by a local resident and we were disgusted and appalled to read such disrespectful references – even more so because we have never been a client of the renamed agency. As you may have seen in one of the local papers, the agency has apologised to the community and to ourselves. We must stress that we had no prior knowledge of this information nor the opportunity to approve its content, and that any involvement we had with the agency's former set-up ended in late 2004.

What contingency plans do you have in place if the new technology doesn't work?

We are very confident it will work. Not many companies could provide such a rapid and significant response to concerns that have been raised by some of their neighbours – especially as we are talking about the introduction of an unprecedented series of three odour abatement technologies running in sequence. What's more we've been able to trial the technologies at our facility in France and are very encouraged by the results, although we must emphasise again that the complete elimination of odour is simply not possible as was made clear in our approved planning application. It is a question of minimising odour emission in the most effective way possible, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Why didn't you install this new odour abatement system from Day 1?

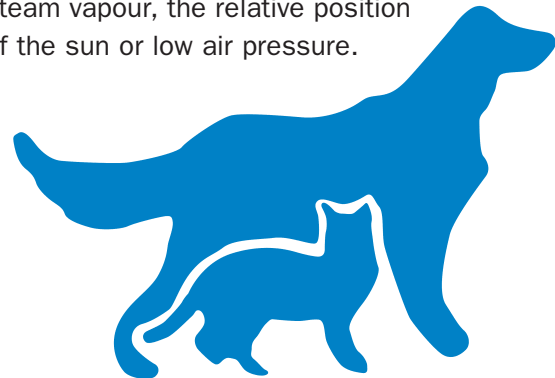
We installed equipment known as APP or non-thermal plasma which is widely regarded as a 'Best Available Technology' throughout the food production industry. It has also been used successfully by ourselves at other facilities around the world and by many other pet food manufacturers in the UK. But every facility is different and once we were aware of the concerns of some of our neighbours, we reduced production and limited activities to our least odorous products. Then we looked at other ways to minimise odours, which has resulted in this new investment programme. We believe we have behaved responsibly and moved very quickly to address concerns as effectively as possible.

Why does the facility have to be grey and white? Why can't you take steps to make it less obtrusive?

All our production facilities are in the same colours, and this was agreed and accepted from the outset as part of our planning application. We have also undertaken a lot of landscaping around the new facility – in fact we've planted nearly a thousand trees and shrubs. Although this will take some time to mature, all of the trees and shrubs have rooted well and the new planting will make quite a difference now that construction work is nearing completion.

Why does there seem to be more odour when there is no steam and why are the smoke emissions sometimes dark grey and sometimes white?

Firstly, it is not smoke that is emitted from the production facility, it is steam. Whether or not the steam is visible is entirely dependent on atmospheric conditions and unrelated to odour. If it appears to be darker, this may be caused by visual shadowing of the steam vapour, the relative position of the sun or low air pressure.



An overview of our production facility



Meet the people at Crown Pet Foods



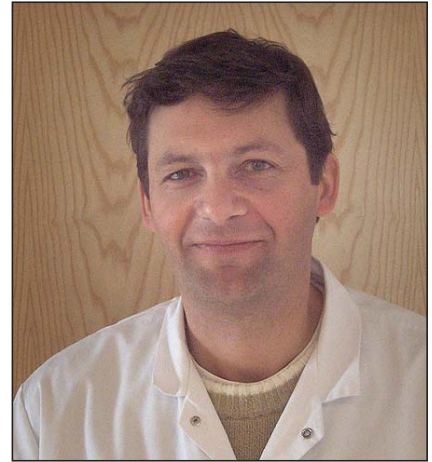
Francois Demauge

Managing Director of Crown Pet Foods UK and Ireland.



Glenn Jefferson

Production Director responsible for all on-site production activities and the continuing development of the production team.



Eric Lefevre

Project Director responsible for site development, commissioning of the new production facility and hand over to the new Production Director.



Gill Furniss

Project Director responsible for strategic planning and community relations.



Alex Chadwick

Communication Director responsible for communication, recruitment and health and safety