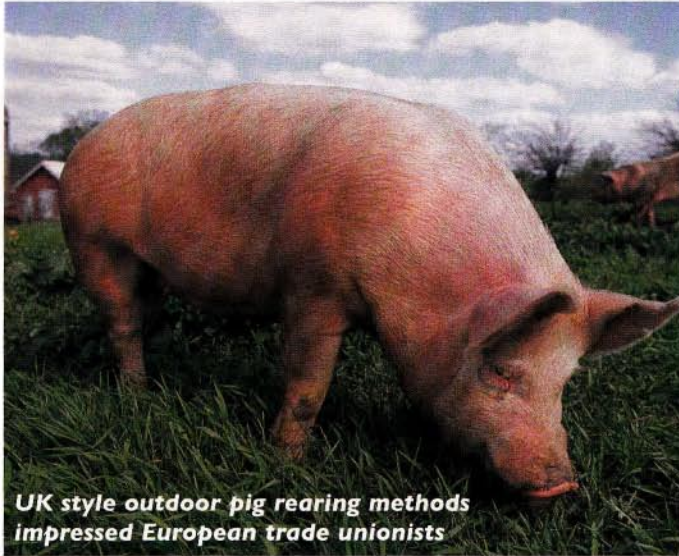


European trade unionists praise the role of the threatened AWB – even though UK wages are lower

The value of the training structure set up by the Agricultural Wages Board in the UK has been praised by trade union delegates from across Europe – just as it faces abolition for purely ideological reasons.

The delegates were taking part in a two-year project funded by the EU to improve agricultural workers' training and working conditions across Europe. One of the conclusions was that both pay and career prospects needed to be



UK style outdoor pig rearing methods impressed European trade unionists

improved greatly if young workers are to be attracted into the industry.

The UK's outdoor pig rearing practices, as opposed to intensive indoor methods in Europe, were also praised by delegates as they visited pig farms in Germany, Denmark and France.

Unite members **Steve Leniec** and **Ivan Monkton** represented the UK on the delegation. Others were from the three host countries plus Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Spain.

They studied the working conditions and training opportunities in the pig industry in the three countries they visited.

Outdoor pig units are almost unheard of in Europe, and the majority of pigs spend their lives in intensive indoor facilities, where sow crates and close containment of the animals are seen as essential for economic production.

One French farmer when questioned about animal welfare said: "If you put pigs on straw you put farmers on the dole."

Everyone commented on the UK's outdoor pig systems and their viability, even when consumers are price-led in their food purchases.

The qualifications and grades, linked to the Agricultural Wages Board in the UK, were seen as a positive recognition of training and acquired skills.

Significantly however, the pay rates in the three countries visited by the delegation, were higher than in the UK.

Clearly, young workers will not be attracted to the industry across Europe unless both working conditions and ongoing career opportunities improve, said Steve Leniec. "Land based industries are no longer seen as a rewarding career either financially or professionally," he said.

The final meeting was held at Unite's conference facility in Eastbourne and it drafted a set of demands for European and national governments to adopt for common standards of training and employment across the industry.

The project will continue until these are agreed across all agricultural sectors for Europe-wide qualifications and employment opportunities.

The work was led by the German IG BAU union and supported by the Peco Institute. It focused on the pig husbandry across Europe and studied employment and training opportunities in a number of countries before agreeing recommendations for common standards of training and employment.

MARCH FOR THE ALTERNATIVE – 26 March