



ON FARM QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: The Industry Definition *Collier Isaacs*

ON-FARM QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Deer industry has always taken a broad definition of "quality"

- "functional attributes"
 - product quality
 - quality-based brand
 - competitive advantage in market

ANIMAL WELFARE SAFE FOOD ENVIRONMENT

- "emotional attributes"
 - animal welfare
 - safe food
 - environment
 - meeting consumer concerns in market
- continuing theme is meeting market needs and perceptions essential for long term success

CONTROL - ASSURANCE - IMPROVEMENT

Specific thinking about quality has evolved over the years

- quality control (early-mid 80s)
 - "policeman" approach ambulance at bottom of cliff
 - checking at the end of the process process verification
 - ie DSP organoleptic inspections by MAF
 - better than nothing but flawed and inadequate
- quality assurance (late 80s early 90s)
 - systems approach
 - procedures to ensure consistent desired outcomes
 - ie Problem Identification & Control systems in DSPs, Industry Agreed Standards through to ISO accreditation
 - ie at farm level on-farm standards (facilities, farm practices, record keeping) also NVSB programme is systems oriented
 - auditing results to ensure compliance

- quality improvement (mid 90s and on)
 - focus on meeting customer demands increasingly efficiently
 - applies both to DSPs and to farms (vets too probably)
 - profitability through improved productivity, reduced costs
 - if we're going to be competitive keep on improving

TQM IS A STATE OF MIND

Total Quality Management is the overall philosophy

- "state of mind"
- continual improvement, never accept status quo
- recognises continuing changes in marketplace
 - consumer attitudes (including cynicism re marketing "gimmicks" and need for independent reassurance for marketing claims
 - eg move to food safety through HACCP, microbiological emphasis on product rather than on operating environment (hygiene emphasis) and operating procedures (systems emphasis)
 - eg move to environmental management programmes
- improving technology (also shapes consumer demands)
 - eg demand for chilled not frozen but with extended shelf life not previously possible for chilled product
- industry thinking still evolving
 - building on platform provided by earlier thinking and development
 - couldn't leap straight to TQM, need to recognise adoption rate of change in attitudes
 - not keep moving the goalposts

INSURANCE - IMPROVEMENT

Recognise two halves of TQM whole

- quality assurance - "insurance policy" for industry
 - NZ Inc (or Team New Zealand)
 - ensure we still have our industry in 10-20 years time
 - well prepared for all eventualities
- quality improvement - "improving profitability"
 - individual farm level
 - put more money in the pocket from better performance

Moving to encapsulating all programmes under one heading for greater visibility and improved perception of how they all fit together

- **DEER QA**

Quality has many perspectives

- means different things to different people
 - must be inclusive process,
 - move at speed of weakest link in chain (most vulnerable)
- quality as competitive edge
 - not an end in itself - a means to industry "end" of stability and profitability
 - business decision
 - applies to individual vet practices as well as industry picture (eg feedback panel comment re value)
- (a) short term
 - inevitably competitors catch up on specific aspects
 - technology speeds up catching up (eg deer QA on Internet)
 - quality level or programme becomes the norm - competitive edge blunted
- (b) long term
 - TQM attitude essential to stay ahead
 - reputation for innovation (new features and benefits), continual improvement (processes and benefits)
 - brand strength grows with consistent delivery on claims
 - customers expectations continue to grow, preference and loyalty grows

MARKET FOCUS

Agricultural sector not historically good at market focus

- productivity improvements (eg lambing percentages 70s and 80s) driven by production benefits (and artificial subsidies) not market demand
- deer industry programmes consciously trying to focus farmers on the market as part of quality thinking
- aim to breed deer to produce products to meet specific market demand
 - eg specialised velvet production system, designed to be cut early and tip used for specialist usages, efficacy tested, farmer paid accordingly
 - eg specialised venison production system, designed for specific sized cuts, very lean, maximum chilled shelf life, delivered for specific time (and specific client)
 - all driven by market demand

Quality performance must be recognised through payment systems

- all links in chain respond best to clear financial signals and market demand
 - eg "quality bonus" for beef meeting very tight market premium specifications, win/win farmers/exporters extracting premium returns from tight market segment

- by contrast, farmers demanding "top up" payments in trial "pay for quality" systems and taking business elsewhere, needs education approach
- quality payments can only come from the market

Latest industry definition (thinking) for quality is more integrated approach

- Deer QA concept
 - ties all programmes together with "own brand"
 - on-farm quality improvement focus
 - vets important part of that integration

Deer industry come a long way in past decade

- not being immodest to say further than most other pastoral industries
- valued support (and sometimes the challenges) from vets along the way
- essential to maintain the high ground - competitiveness in international markets
- competitive advantage is what you start with (eg ideal growing environment for deer) while competitiveness is what you do with it (eg develop fresh chilled venison market or efficacy tested velvet)
 - so our clear vision is to continue to use our natural competitive advantage to further enhance our competitiveness against all other suppliers, whether of other venison or alternative proteins, whether of deer velvet or alternative natural medicines
 - maintain our international leadership position in order to deliver sustained profitability for all sectors of the deer industry

Conclude with a challenge

- vets have played an important role in DEER QA (development, assessment, support)
- is it time to practise what you preach?
- is it time to implement your own VETQA programme?