

Quality assurance on your deer farm

In a nutshell

New Zealand has an enviable record of good farming practice, but that is no longer enough. Retail buyers, wholesalers and chefs around the world want to be assured that our animal welfare, traceability, animal feeding and use of animal remedies meet good farming standards.

On-farm quality assurance (QA) provides customers with this assurance because it involves an independent audit. It allows us to differentiate NZ farm raised venison from competing meats that don't have audited QA. This gives our venison access to markets and customers that demand safe and ethical food and transparent supply chains.

Our fellow New Zealanders also expect us to treat our animals humanely and to take care of the environment. When examples of poor animal welfare or environmental damage become public they can tarnish the reputation of a whole industry.

Having an independently verified QA scheme that proves farmers meet good management standards, makes it easier to advocate for the industry. Also it enables the industry to distance itself from any examples of bad practice should they occur.

QA involves the application of quality management principles across all your farm operations. It is not just a box ticking exercise.



Affluent customers of our venison not only want a delicious eating experience, they also demand that the food they eat is safe and ethical. On-farm QA provides them with this assurance and allows us to differentiate our venison from competing meats that don't have audited QA

Key messages

- Customers and buyers of our venison want to know that our deer have been raised humanely with respect for animal welfare, the environment and food safety.
- Quality assurance (QA) provides buyers with this assurance because farms have to meet the credible Deer QA on-farm standard. Compliance is checked by independent auditors.
- The Deer QA standard has been included in the on-farm QA programmes operated by all major venison exporters, as well as the NZ Farm Assurance Programme (NZFAP) for red meat producers.
- Talk to your venison company about what their QA programme has to offer you.

By taking a QA approach, you will ensure your farm complies with many laws, codes of practice and standards. Your farm records will also provide benchmarks which you can use to continually improve product quality and farm performance.

On-farm QA

- Satisfies customer concerns about farming practices.
- Helps the industry advocate for farmers to the NZ public.
- Helps streamline farm record keeping.
- Reassures farmers that they are complying with NZ laws and regulations.

How on-farm QA works

QA for deer farmers is based on the Deer QA on-farm standard. This was agreed by the five main venison processing and marketing companies in October 2016. It has the support of Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) and the NZ Deer Farmers Association.

To make QA accreditation as straight forward as possible, the Deer QA on-farm standard has been included in the NZ Farm Assurance Programme (NZFAP) developed for beef and sheep farmers. Most importantly, it has also been incorporated into the on-farm QA programmes operated by the major venison companies.

Having one base standard that all parts of the industry have to meet is especially important when our five major venison companies market venison under one appellation – Cervena™. The companies and DINZ will use our compliance with good farming standards to enhance the positioning of NZ venison in selected markets.

Having one standard will also make it simpler for farmers supplying more than one venison company.

For your farm to meet the standard, you will need to pass an initial independent audit, organised by your venison company. This audit will cover many aspects of your deer farming operation, ranging from animal health and welfare to yards and fences.

To retain its QA status, your farm will then need to be re-audited from time to time, depending on the requirements



Having one base standard supported by all parts of the industry makes it easier for us to champion our industry and its products. It also makes it simpler for farmers supplying more than one venison company

of individual companies and their customers.

On properties that supply cattle and sheep, as well as deer to a single processor, there will normally be only one audit covering all drystock species. If you supply livestock to more than one processor, multiple audits may be required.

If your farm is already QA-accredited through your venison company, the new standard may not mean major change.

If you are new to on-farm QA, your venison processor will explain their approach to QA to you and give you all the information you need. You will probably find that you only have to make minor changes in order to meet the standard.

Although the on-farm QA programmes operated by all venison companies are based on the Deer QA on-farm standard, individual companies may have one or two extra requirements to cater for the needs

What do deer farmers think about on-farm QA?

With good records, QA is not a hassle

Colin Gates manages a mixed livestock operation above the south western shores of Lake Taupo for the Waihi Pukawa Trust. Each year it produces 138,000 kg of venison and 235,000 kg of sheepmeat,

Like his stock managers, Gates prefers to be outdoors, managing livestock in this stunning landscape, but each month he needs to report to the Trust board. Also, with seven on the team, it's essential that all staff know when each mob was drenched, whether there have been any unusual stock losses and so on ... all of which requires good recording and reporting.

"Because we have good records, QA is not a hassle. It just formalises what we are doing for our markets anyhow ... an evolution. I don't expect anyone will find it a problem."

To make recording easier and to get better analysis of stock performance Gates says he's signed Waihi Pukawa onto a farm management software system. It will also help with his on-farm QA compliance, generating many of the reports required by the auditor.



Waihi Pukawa deer manager Earl Marshall and farm manager Colin Gates after opening a new break of Spitfire rape for a mob of mixed-sex post-rut weaned deer



Andy Russell checks his drench register which highlights when stock are 'works-safe' following a 91 day drench withholding period

Because the market is always right

For 12 years **Andy Russell** has worked with his preferred marketer as they have developed year-round premium markets for their suppliers' venison. A key element in this has been on-farm quality assurance, backed with annual audits.

"So much of what QA covers is common sense, but the paper trail is very important. Our reputation as food producers is based on us being able to prove we do what we say we are doing. Why? Because the market is always right," he says with the conviction of someone who has fronted up to consumers at NZ venison promotions overseas.

Russell buys in 1020 B11 mixed sex weaners each year and finishes them at an average of 70 kg carcase weight off 125 ha at Tangimoana and Ohakea in the Manawatu. It's a finely-tuned finishing-only system where everything is recorded.

Because of his good records and experience with exported QA, he takes the NZ Farm Assurance Programme in his stride. "The auditors are not here to find fault, they're just making sure that we are doing things correctly. Next generation farmers and those using farm management software will find it a breeze."

of some of their customers. Your venison company will explain what's needed.

Each venison company has its own time-frame for introducing its new or revised QA programme. Ask your venison company rep when it will take effect and how you can be involved.

Quality Q&A

Is QA compulsory?

No. Becoming QA-accredited is voluntary. But to supply deer for Cervena™ venison you will need to be accredited by the 2019 venison season. Also, individual companies may have contracts with some customers who insist on being supplied with meat from QA-accredited farms.

By not being involved you will also miss out on other benefits of QA, such as supporting your farm's compliance with a growing number of laws and regulations covering chemicals, animal remedies and more.

WHAT DO MARKETERS SAY?



Glenn Tyrrell

"Quality in all respects – from animal welfare, to environmental protection, to food safety – underpins the brand values of NZ venison and Cervena in particular. It's what chefs and consumers are buying and ultimately determines the premium they are willing to pay for our meat," says venison marketer Glenn Tyrrell.

"Over the years individual exporters have developed their own QA schemes in response to varying customer demands. Now, as part of Passion2Profit, we have agreed on a single credible standard for deer that will be easier to communicate to overseas customers. This standard will be delivered by exporters to their suppliers.

"I strongly encourage deer farmers to talk to their venison company or deer agent about what the new on-farm QA standard for deer has to offer them."

Part of the routine

For Te Anau's **Ross Carran**, gathering and keeping records for on-farm QA auditing is now part of his daily routine – and a very useful management tool. Together with his father Chris, he runs Lochinvar Wapiti, carrying 2,800–3,000 hinds and supplying about 3,000 venison animals each year.

He uses a phone app, Agrimap, to capture a whole range of information on the spot before it's loaded into the Cloud for easy access. "The app includes a farm map, so if I've just sprayed a paddock I can tap that information in straight away, including the area covered and what I've used."

Nearly every QA-related bit of information is recorded electronically.

"We get regularly audited by the meat companies we supply, and by MPI. They are all mainly looking at the same things, which makes it easier. Because it's something we have to do, it makes sense to use the records for our own purposes. For drenching, the system records all we need to know about what products were used and when, so we can see what's been working."



Chris Carran checks the emergency procedures for the deer shed are up to date

Good practice in a modern business

Because QA has become such an everyday part of his farm management routine, **David Nind** admits he doesn't really sweat on it. Nind runs a large-scale breeding and finishing operation over 4,500 hectares on four blocks in northern Southland.

"We started up with FarmIQ about five years ago and really cranked it up in the past 18 months. The information about everything we need that's connected with QA – animal remedies, chemicals, fertilisers and so on – is getting more and more streamlined as people like the vets and fertiliser companies get on board. We have all our NAIT records and kill sheets fed into FarmIQ as well.

"Our agent audits us every year and they'll usually focus on a couple of things each time.

"Having a good setup for QA is just good practice in a modern farm business. Doing it properly helps with the bottom line, too because we can see how we're performing and where our costs are.

"Our meat company sometimes brings overseas customers to look at the farm too. I enjoy that – it helps them put a face behind the product they're buying."



David Nind on his Northern Southland farm. He talks about Deer QA in a video interview with Deer Industry News editor Phil Stewart at bit.ly/NindQA

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

Here's a summary of what a QA auditor will be looking at:

Records

- Your venison company's QA standard
- Agrichemical and fertiliser application records
- Animal health plan
- Animal remedy inventory
- Animal treatment records
- ASDs for sold and purchased livestock
- Livestock mortality records for all animals
- NAIT records
- Staff competency and training records
- Stock residency records
- Stock feed purchase receipts

Farm and facilities

- Dog kennels: shade, shelter, water
- Facilities and yards
- Fences and laneways
- Offal pits
- Shade and shelter for stock

Before the auditor arrives, make sure your records are complete and up-to-date. Also, set aside enough time to do a pre-audit check of your farm and facilities and to fix any shortcomings.

Refer to your venison company's on-farm QA programme for the full details of the standards your farm needs to meet. The Deer QA on-farm standard which their programme is based upon is here: www.deernz.org/onfarmQA.

The standard has also been included in the NZ Farm Assurance Programme.

Who pays?

Talk to your venison company, it might not cost you anything to become QA accredited. It depends on the company.

What if I agree to an audit but don't meet the standard?

If you don't comply with a standard, a corrective action request (CAR) will be issued by the auditor. You will need to action this for your farm to become or remain accredited.

Who wrote the standards?

The development of the Deer QA on-farm standard was co-ordinated by DINZ in consultation with venison companies and deer farmers. Funding came from Passion2Profit (P2P) a Primary Growth Partnership (PGP) programme between DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

The development of the NZFAP was co-ordinated by the Red Meat Profit Partnership, a PGP programme involving red meat processing companies, MPI and Beef+Lamb NZ

Both the Deer QA and NZFAP standards have been tested on farms and fine-tuned where necessary as a result of feedback from the farmers involved.

These standards are living documents and will be modified over time as customer and community expectations change.

More >>

The Deer QA on-farm, standard which your venison company's QA programme is based upon is here: www.deernz.org/onfarmQA. The standard has also been included in the NZ Farm Assurance Programme.



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