



THE VETERINARY ROLE IN ON-FARM QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

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The New Zealand Deer Industry has continued to develop and extend its fully integrated quality systems. In particular the On-farm component of this programme is steadily gaining momentum with over 800 properties registering to join the scheme.

To understand what role the Veterinary profession may play in the On-farm programme it is first of all necessary to grasp more fully, some of the underlying principles of a Total Quality Management (TQM) approach and integrate these within the current marketing environment that the Industry operates.

Quality management principles define that "the customer is king" and we must meet his/her needs both stated and implied. QA programmes are basically a standardised, systematic approach to ensure that a customer's requirements are satisfied. Relating this to venison production, the on-farm QA programme ensures that we meet minimum standards covering

- a) Animal welfare e.g. humane velvet removal through the NVSB velvet removal programme
- b) Chemical residues - the Agricultural Compounds Unit and minimum drug with-holding times
- c) Food Safety = "wholesomeness" i.e. freedom from disease - e.g. BSE and Tb - Tb QA scheme

As you can see veterinarians are already playing a major role in this area and this role will expand as market demands and customer requirements become more focused. Veterinarians have clearly demonstrated their ability to react in a proactive fashion by designing and implementing the Tb QA scheme when market forces indicated its necessity.

Field veterinarians should also work towards having a more formalised and standardised role in disease surveillance as I believe this will have a far greater role in market access in the future.

[The Veterinary Role in QA was covered in my 1995 NZVA Deer Branch paper]

'Quality Assurance' however usually only gives an exporter or producer access to the preferred market. This has assumed far greater importance in a post-GATT environment where non-tariff barriers are having an increasing impact. Failure to meet these standards results in the loss of potential or current markets and the subsequent reduced profitability of all Industry sectors. QA is purely, the COST of market entry. It is not, and never will be, a guarantee of market premiums.

THE MARKET PLACE

MARKET REQUIREMENTS FOR ON-FARM Q.A.

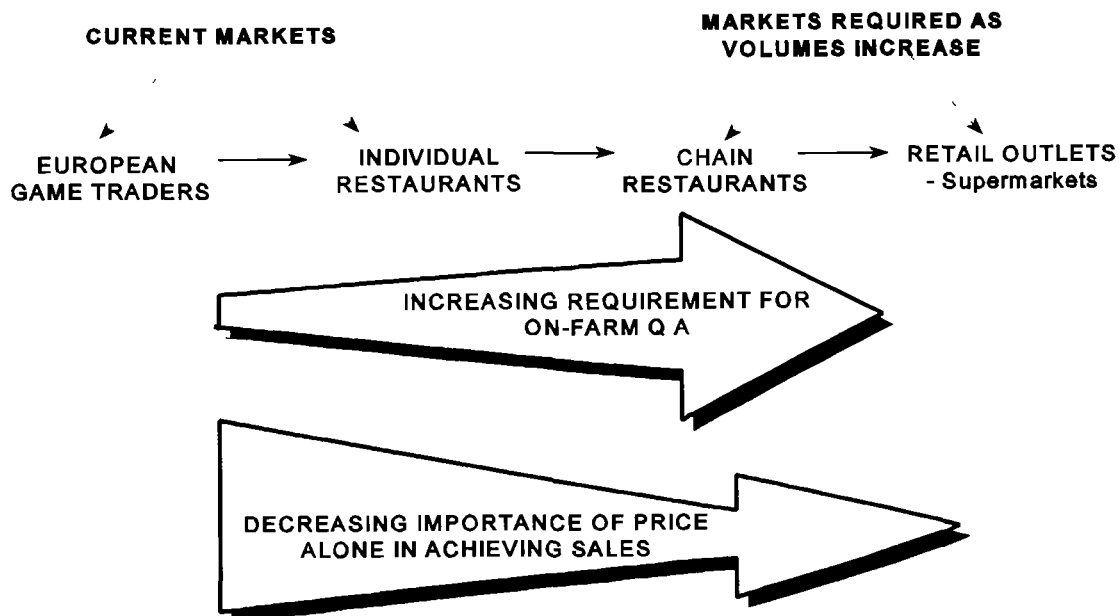


Figure 1

From Figure 1 it can be seen that the markets currently supplied with NZ venison have a relatively low requirement for On-farm Q A and a high sensitivity to price alone in making sales. This severely limits the ability of an exporter to pay premiums to the producer for quality programmes.

As product volume increases however, the new markets which will need to be tapped, e.g. chain restaurants and retail supermarkets, have a far greater emphasis on quality programmes as they are acutely sensitive to shopping trends. This increased sensitivity and decreasing reliance on price alone means that exporters can then extract a premium for quality assured product.

The difficult path that this programme faces is how to best prepare producers for the next market expansion phase, during a period where supply shortages and current markets severely limit exporters' ability to pay schedule premiums to properties within the Q A programme. Clearly there must be inherent advantages within the On-farm Q A programme rather than depending on market premiums to attract further participants.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

In a T Q M system, after the customer, "*the process*" is the most important factor. This is the area recognised as quality improvement and by definition the process, as it relates to On-farm Q A, covers all aspects of on-farm productivity.

- e g
- pasture productivity - (nutrition)
 - reproductive rates
 - growth rates
 - velvet production

The reduction of wastage also features under the umbrella of Quality Improvement.

- e g
- Losses (deaths - disease)
 - carcass damage
 - poor pasture utilisation

All these factors are under the control of the Quality manager (the farmer) and his/her decisions should be guided by supporting information supplied from various sources.

- e g
- Veterinarians
 - D S P feed back info
 - Farm consultants
 - G I B market reports etc
 - Stock agents

I believe veterinarians are in a pivotal position to provide progressive farmers with a service that gives packaged, performance enhancing skills and information, delivered in a personalised fashion to meet the individual's needs.

In an industry where returns have increased rapidly in the past year and look likely to continue improving then the scope to market these types of programmes increases greatly. We are developing an industry which could possibly stand support systems and input levels similar to that of the dairy industry but one which hasn't yet developed the infrastructure and information base to cope with rapid production improvement. Information to hand indicates a huge range in profitability between the best and the poorer performers. Surely this must indicate an area of opportunity.

The On-farm Q A technical committee has recognised the important financial benefits to be had from Quality Improvement and they have begun establishing a data base from all farmers involved in the Q A programme to help individuals recognise their own weaknesses on both a local and national basis. Hopefully this should encourage these individuals to seek professional help to improve their performance.

SKILLS REGISTER

I don't believe that the diverse range of farm management skill required to implement a major Quality Improvement programme will be possessed by a large number of veterinarians. They are not skills that most of us were trained for and they can only be developed by those with a specific and on-going interest in the Deer Industry. Continuing education programmes can then be developed to focus and improve upon those skills already possessed.

Perhaps the Deer Branch could lead by example, in setting up a "skills register" of veterinarians capable of providing the specialised talents needed to enhance the On-farm Q A programme.

SUMMARY

The Deer Industry has a bright future. If veterinarians want to share in this we must develop a range of skills and services that assist our clients to maximise profitability from their farms. Traditional disease-treatment roles have little place on tomorrow's deer farm. The On-farm Q A programme provides us with an opportunity to market a new range of skills to our clients. Veterinarians must continue in their public relations role by promoting the Q A scheme, and be enlightened enough to see "the vision of the future" that Deer Industry Leaders are working to create. Together, in a win - win partnership the future looks exciting.

