

Growers turn to FeedSafe to counter grain contamination risks

Using suppliers accredited by FeedSafe is an essential strategy for Yetman pig producer Taneka Judge and Allora dairy farmer Shane Wright to maximise feed nutrition, protect the health of their animals and maintain access to markets.

By Catherine Norwood

Queensland pig producer Taneka Judge is no longer concerned about managing contamination issues such as weevil infestations and potential chemical residues from poorly stored grain, which have been highlighted in recent media reports.



Yetman pig producer Taneka Judge says clean, contaminant free feed is essential in maintaining animal health and producing the highest quality pork products for consumers.

After becoming manager of a 200-sow piggery at Yetman on the NSW border in April, she moved quickly from mixing feed on farm to sourcing a FeedSafe accredited manufacturer to take care of feed quality, contamination and nutrition issues for her.

“It was very inefficient mixing our own grains, and I want to ensure my pigs have the best feed possible to provide the highest quality product for consumers at the end of the line,” says Mrs Judge, who now buys 10 to 12 tonnes of feed a week from Better Blend Stockfeed a FeedSafe accredited supplier operating in southeast Queensland and northern NSW.

“I know the product is safe, and there is a nutritionist on hand to balance my feed requirements, to keep my breeding sows in top condition and the weaners growing well.”

FeedSafe is an initiative of the Stock Feed Manufacturers’ Council of Australia (SFMCA). It was launched in 2003, with three main aims:

- to provide safe feed for animals,
- protect the safety of human food, specifically in meat, eggs and milk, and
- protect the domestic and international reputation of Australia’s livestock industries as being clean, and free from contamination.

SFMCA executive officer John Spragg says international markets can be extremely sensitive, and just one positive sample of meat with a chemical residue, for example, could result in Australian products being banned.

About 12 million tonnes of stock feed is consumed in Australia each year. Beef feedlots are the major users accounting for 26 per cent, followed by the dairy industry at 25 per cent, poultry meat at 19.4 per cent and the pig industry 16 per cent. Chicken layers, aquaculture, the horse industry, live sheep and cattle exporters and lamb feedlots are among other, smaller users.

About 90 per cent of the stock feed sold in Australia comes from FeedSafe accredited feed mills. Mr Spragg says the stock feed industry is keen to see all feed manufacturers FeedSafe accredited.

“Consumers want greater accountability for what goes into their food chain and many food industries demand total traceability of inputs. That’s what FeedSafe provides.”

South of Toowoomba, Allora dairy farmer Shane Wright is also committed to a FeedSafe supplier to meet his dairy processor’s quality requirements. He says he already knows of at least one case where a milk processor refused to collect milk because the farmer did not meet the safe food standards.

Mr Wright has 480 dairy cows, and while he produces most of his own silage and hay, he buys in 13 tonnes of grain pellets a week from Oakey-based manufacturer Riverina Australia.

He says the pellets are helping to maintain milk production year round and have also improved cow health, with minerals and other additives in the pellets to optimise nutrition. "It's part of their FeedSafe processes to test the pellets regularly to ensure that I get what I'm asking for," he says.

"Each year Riverina provides documentation confirming the feed they supply is free of contaminants and meets human food safety standards, including traceability of inputs, and that helps me to meet the requirements of my milk processor, who audits my production processes. I know Riverina also gets audited each year as part of its FeedSafe accreditation," Mr Wright says.

General Manager of Riverina's feed division Dave Hunter says in the uncertainty of a deregulated wheat market many grain growers decided to store grain on-farm after the 2008, but poorly stored grain is at risk of insect infestation, such as weevils, mould and other potential contaminants.

"As part of the FeedSafe procedures, accredited manufacturers such as Riverina test every incoming load of grain for protein and moisture and screen deliveries over a sieve for weed seeds, dirt, foreign bodies, insect infestation and other extraneous matter.

"We have strict specifications for its raw materials and anything delivered outside the agreed parameters is rejected immediately," he says. "All our customers are paying for a quality product and to make a quality product you require quality ingredients."

Mr Hunter says raw materials are stored in designated silos that are systematically cleaned as part of the controlled hygiene program of the feed mill. Every time a silo is emptied for cleaning it is sampled for any possible signs of insect activity and treated to ensure nothing can contaminate incoming grains in the future.

Sales Manager at Better Blend Stockfeeds Ben Ball says not only do contaminants jeopardise the quality of stock feeds, they also present a biosecurity risk.

"Through the FeedSafe program the industry has set high standards to ensure producers using our products can meet human consumption standards, including export standards".

"It is a proactive, industry-wide approach to managing risks to animal health and human welfare," he says.

To achieve FeedSafe accreditation feed manufacturers must meet minimum standards in the maintenance of their premises, mill buildings, plant and equipment, staff training, the sourcing, purchasing, quality and storage of raw materials as well as feed formulation, manufacturing and labelling.

FeedSafe conducts annual, independent audits that also consider loading, transport and product delivery procedures, product inspections, sampling and testing and customer complaint procedures.

For more information on becoming FeedSafe accredited contact the Stock Feed Manufacturers' Council of Australia's executive officer John Spragg 03 9769 7170 mobile 0402 831 843, email jspragg@sfmca.com.au or visit <http://www.sfmca.com.au>.



Allora dairy farmer Shane Wright says the quality and nutritional analysis of FeedSafe products helps him to provide the best dietary mix to maximise production and meet food safety standards.