

FeedSafe assures health and performance for livestock

The feed livestock consume quickly becomes part of the human food chain, and stockfeed manufacturers have developed a proactive quality assurance program to help protect the health of livestock and the quality of food they provide.

By Catherine Norwood

Terang dairy farmer Matthew Clarke knows that in order to keep his licence to supply milk he must be able to account for the quality of everything that goes into his cows. And if pork producer Noel Cornish wants to get his meat to market he must likewise provide traceability for the feed he gives his stock.

While it may seem a long way from the grain that feeds these animals to our own dinner tables, the quality assurance programs that guarantee us safe, contaminant free meals begin a long time before we sit down to eat.

Both Mr Clarke and Mr Cornish rely on Australia's FeedSafe program to ensure that what they feed their livestock can be traced back to its point of origin.

FeedSafe is a quality assurance initiative of the Stock Feed Manufacturers' Council of Australia (SFMCA).



Terang dairy farmer Matthew Clarke relies on the quality accountability of FeedSafe accreditation to help his calves grow strong, and to keep his milking herd in peak health and production.

SFMCA executive officer John Spragg says FeedSafe was launched by the SFMCA in 2003 with three main aims.

“It is to provide safe feed for animals, protect the safety of human food, specifically in meat, eggs and milk, and to protect the domestic and international reputation of Australia's livestock industries as being clean, and free from contamination,” he 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; so there is a lot at stake.”

About 12 million tonnes of stockfeed 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 exports and lamb feedlots are among the other, smaller users.

About half of the manufactured stockfeed consumed in Australia each year comes from FeedSafe-accredited mills and Mr Spragg says the stockfeed industry is keen to increase the level of participation in the program.

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

Matthew Clarke buys up to 500 tonnes of pelleted feeds a year for his 400-cow herd to supplement the pasture, hay and silage he produces himself.

“With milk prices falling 50 per cent earlier in the year, I don’t need to lose the premiums I do get by failing a quality audit on a feed traceability issue,” he says.

“Ridley AgriProducts is my supplier, and their FeedSafe accreditation gives me peace of mind on the traceability issue, but also in terms of maintaining cow health and performance.

“I know the pellets will perform as expected, in terms of nutritional value, which is important in maintaining milk production, and I also rely on Ridley to make sure that whatever medications I have specified will be added to the feed in the right quantities. It’s much easier to get the medications mixed with pellets, but the wrong medication, or the wrong dose could affect milk production, or put a cow off milking for the whole season, he says.

Ridley national dairy and ruminant nutrition manager Tim Harrington says the customer confidence that comes with the company’s FeedSafe accreditation is an important marketing point.

“All of our incoming materials are tested for quality and contaminants – for mould or sprouted grain, rocks or other foreign material. We do a visual inspection and nutritional analysis, we check the history of the trucks carting grain and cleaning procedures used between loads.

“There are very tight nutritional specifications from our clients, and in our products, and we have to ensure that what we produce meets those specifications, and that we segregate different products.”

Mr Harrington says the procedures that are part of the FeedSafe program have also helped to improve workplace safety and performance, minimising the risk of production errors and accidents.

Pork producer Noel Cornish operates a 540-sow piggery at Trafalgar in Victoria’s south east and says compliance with feed traceability is a given. “The pigs go to an export abattoir, Diamond Valley Pork at Laverton, and we have to meet all the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service requirements. That includes providing a declaration that we can trace all of our inputs, that we can show where everything came from.”

He also relies on the assured nutrition content of FeedSafe products to optimise animal growth and improve the profitability of his business.

“Feed represents two-thirds of production costs, so I need to ensure that the pigs can use every nutrient possible to give them an edge in their growth rates. The more quickly I can raise them to market size, the more I can improve returns.”



For Gippsland pig producer Noel Cornish the traceability of inputs that the FeedSafe program offers is an essential part of the pork industry's quality assurance to customers.

Mr Cornish uses his own nutritionist, working with his feed supplier, Rivalea, based in Corowa, NSW, to ensure an optimal feed mix to maximise growth, achieving growth rates of up to 710gms a day, producing 105kg baconers in 20 weeks.

General manager of Rivalea, Andrew Peake, says that given the low margins and price sensitivity of many livestock industries, ensuring that the quality of feed matches desired specifications is essential.

Ongoing sampling of raw materials and finished products is a key part of this process and annual independent audits ensure Rivalea's continues to implement the Good Manufacturing Practice guidelines that are a part of the FeedSafe accreditation.

“Manufacturing stockfeed without the rigorous processes in place that FeedSafe demands could easily prove dangerous to the target animals if the wrong ingredients or medications were used. Every component is important, and through the FeedSafe program we can guarantee to our customers that their feed will be fit-for-purpose,” he says.

To achieve FeedSafe accreditation feed manufacturers must meet minimum standards in the maintenance of the 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 Stockfeed 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>.