

Program improves accountability for stock feed safety

Australian farmers and feed manufacturers are responding to consumer demands for greater accountability and safety in the human food chain through the FeedSafe quality assurance program for livestock feed.

By Catherine Norwood

Dairy farmer Phil Depiazzi milks 250 cows at his property at Dardanup, near Bunbury, WA, and needs to know that the feed he gives his cows won't jeopardise the health of his herd or his access to milk markets.



Dardanup dairy farmer Phil Depiazzi says FeedSafe accreditation for his stock feed helps to ensure his milk will meet market quality requirements.

For Richard Evison, production manager at the Great Southern Pig Company in Albany, WA, it is essential that inputs into products for human consumption are subject to strict quality control and can be traced back to their point of origin.

Both Mr Depiazzi and Mr Evison rely on Australia's FeedSafe program to provide the health and safety assurances they require, and traceability of all inputs into their stockfeed.

Mr Depiazzi says manufactured stock feeds – pelletised grain, plus mineral supplements – make up 20 to 30 per cent of his herd's diet, depending on the season.

“We need to demonstrate to our milk processor that our feed inputs, including manufactured feeds, are safe and comply with the processor's quality assurance requirements – that there are no chemical residues or other contaminants in the feed.”

“And I need to know that it won't interfere with milk production, or taint meat, when we send our cull cows, or the few steers we run, to the abattoir,” he says. “I am confident there will be no contamination issues when I send my milk and meat to market, because of the FeedSafe accreditation of my feed supplier, Milne AgriGroup.”

FeedSafe is an initiative of the Stock Feed Manufacturers' Council of Australia (SFMCA), launched in 2003 with three main aims, says SFMCA executive officer John Spragg.

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

“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.”

At Albany, Mr Evison will buy in more than 10,000 tonnes of manufactured stock feed for his 1700 sows and their offspring this year, from his FeedSafe accredited supplier, Wesfeeds, conscious that what he feeds his livestock becomes part of the human food chain.

“At the end of the day we are producing meat for consumers and we need to be sure that our product is a safe one, to maintain confidence in the industry,” he says.



Based at Albany, WA, Great Southern Piggery unit manager Shane Anderson ensures all feeds for the company's animals are FeedSafe accredited, as part of the pork industry's quality assurance to customers.

“Quality assurance systems are an essential part of that process. The traceability of inputs is essential because if something does go wrong it allows us to track down what happened and to fix the issue long before it reaches the consumer.”

As a business that has recently reduced stock numbers in response to volatile pork prices, Mr Evison says it is also important that feed products help maximise animal growth efficiency and profitability. The testing of finished product for nutritional content, which is part of the FeedSafe quality process, helps to ensure that feed products meet specified dietary requirements.

General manager of milling and technology for Milne AgriGroup, Brett Thomson, says the FeedSafe program has lifted the standards of production across Australia's feed manufacturing industry.

Dr Thomson says the annual accreditation audits and review of the program mean it is constantly being revised and improved. He says because the program is tailored to the stockfeed industry, while other programs such as the SQF2000 are not, it includes processes that allow mills to internally review and improve their own processes, as well as making changes in response to FeedSafe updates and external program audits.

Operations manager at Wesfeeds, Ross Allomes, says quality assurance is particularly critical in preventing cross transference of different feed inputs, particularly following a number of overseas feed contamination incidents.

“It made the Australian industry take a look at what could go wrong here, and develop procedures to address them. FeedSafe is our response to the hazards such as chemical residue contamination, which shows the government, and the world, that we can safely manufacture feeds for different species in the same mill,” Mr Allomes says.

FeedSafe requires ongoing sampling of raw materials and finished products and annual independent audits ensure accredited companies, including Wesfeeds and Milne AgriGroup, continue to implement the Good Manufacturing Practice guidelines that are a part of the accreditation.

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, 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>.