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TRACEABILITY CONTRACT SESSION

G. H. SHACKELL

AgResearch Invermay, Private Bag 50034, Mosgiel, New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

Food safety issues, especially those associated with animal disease (e.g. BSE in cattle), human health (e.g. salmonellosis), genetic modification and animal welfare are driving consumer pressure for traceability of animal-derived foodstuffs. Several of our trading partners already have in place, or have signalled, expected compliance dates for meat traceability requirements.

This contract session addresses some of the background as to why, and when, New Zealand (NZ) can expect to be required to have traceability procedures in place to ensure continued access to the world's meat and animal derived foodstuffs market. The following 10 papers will also describe examples of what is currently in place or projected to become available for tracing animals on the farm, during transport and through meat processing plants both in NZ and overseas. The mix of speakers has been chosen to encompass legislative, industry and scientific aspects of traceability of meat and meat products.

The session is chaired by Jeff Grant, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Meat and Wool New Zealand and also Chairman of the Animal Identification Working Group (AIDWG). The AIDWG started its work in August 2004 as a result of industry concerns about the discussion document produced on the future role and functions of the Livestock and Animal Products Tracing and Information System (LAPTIS) Committee. The LAPTIS Committee had been responsible for the governance of the animal identification database administered by AgriQuality and used by the Animal Health Board. There was general agreement among the deer, sheep, beef, goat and dairy industries that the time was right to consider enhancing the animal identification

system in NZ in order to meet future biosecurity, market access and commercial needs.

The working group has limited its considerations to appropriate systems for cattle and deer only although conscious of the need to provide as much flexibility as possible so that the same principles can be applied to other species. The working group has carried out work on assessing the current regulatory and administrative systems, the plethora of industry databases in NZ and traceability systems in operation overseas. While keeping a watching brief on technology the working group has developed principles and policies that are entirely technology neutral and can be applied to manual or electronic identification systems.

The working group has agreed on the primary drivers for an animal identification and traceability system and further work has identified the data fields that should be mandatory. Further, the group also agreed on a set of 'guiding principles' that would provide future direction to the process of enhancing the animal identification system in NZ.

There is further work to do and, in accordance with its terms of reference, the working group will be producing a full report with recommendations to the governing bodies of the stakeholders. At this point an opportunity for full consultation will be provided. The AIDWG is attempting to achieve that delicate point of balance between not reinventing the wheel and also having a system that will meet the likely future needs of the stakeholders (who all have different perspectives on 'needs').

The working group aims to produce its report early in the second half of 2005, once the effectiveness of current tracing systems in 'exercise Taurus' (a simulated foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the North Island planned for early 2005) is known.

The ten papers in these Proceedings immediately following this page were presented as part of a contract session on traceability of animal products