Providing feedback to producers – what value for the processor?

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to explore the value of providing producers of sheep and lambs with animal health collected at post mortem inspection and, having established the case, develop a reliable, accurate, and effective model for the collection of that data.

The project team worked with two medium sized sheep and lamb processors in NSW. The value of participating in this project was considered self-evident by the management at both plants.

The benefits for the processor were and still are based on the premise that **if** producers are provided with:

- animal health data on their stock
- the cost of those conditions in terms of reduced carcase weight (trimming and underperforming)
- the husbandry and pharmaceutical solutions to these conditions

then

producers will respond by addressing the prevalence of the conditions and the quality of the stock coming from these PICs.

Improved animal health of incoming livestock will benefit processors by:

- decreasing the amount of trimming and labour costs
- increasing offal recovery
- increasing carcase value due to reduced trimming.

Having agreed on the worth of the exercise MINTRAC worked in partnership with the companies to engage with and assess producer attitudes and likely responses to the provision of animal health data. In conjunction with the companies, five producer workshops were conducted. Seventy-three producers attended and toured the plants. At the workshops, presentations were given on:

- the nature of the common diseases and conditions
- cost of the condition to the producers
- potential solutions in the form of livestock pharmaceuticals and changes to stock management
- the costs to the producer
- the data collection system
- systems for them to access the data.

A sample of 30 producers were then telephone interviewed post-workshop to answer questions broadly on:

- the value of workshops

- what health data they were interested in terms of diseases and conditions
- how they would respond to such health data information
- how they would like to access their information.

Having completed this exercise with the producers it was apparent that producers were enthusiastic about stock health data but preferred to be informed of animal health data by a direct email. There was no enthusiasm for having to go into Livestock Data Link to retrieve this data. This was almost a universal response by producers so as part of this project the team built an access data base that enables:

- sheep health data to be recorded against a lot and PIC
- uploads to national databases such as NSHMP
- ability to automatically broadcast by email the animal health data to produces.

The database created enables companies to search and analysis animal health data against PICs and Local Government Areas.

The question asked on several occasions by people who have observed the speed of sheep and lamb chains is “just how accurate are inspectors in identifying diseases and conditions”? So again, as part of this project, the team has developed a model and a protocol for assessing the accuracy of different meat inspectors both in terms of visual identification and the accuracy of visual identification as assessed by pathology.

The model has been tested at a plant and while pathology results are yet to come in the visual assessment of inspectors indicated very high levels of competency.

Into the future there needs to be more processor producer engagement supported by animal health experts and some long term studies of trends in animal health as well as stock and carcase quality.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to assess the viability of providing animal health data from medium sized sheep processors to producers and whether or not this was likely to have an impact on the quality of incoming livestock to the benefit of the processor.

MINTRAC worked with two medium sized sheep processors who were already collecting data which was being uploaded to the National Sheep Health Monitoring Program data base. At the start of this project the companies were convinced of the usefulness of providing feedback but at that stage they had not commenced assessing the reliability of the data, how they would be making the data available to producers and what use they would make of the data base.

However, the extraordinary increases in lamb prices have focused both producer and processor in maximizing the value of each carcase by maximizing on farm performance of stock, minimizing trim and maximising offal yield.

The outputs of the project consisted of:

- producer workshop formats and presentations
- a database system for the collection, analyses and distribution of livestock health data
- a model, protocol and tools for assessing the accuracy of meat inspection dispositions.

These tools effectively allow any small to medium sized plant to set up a stock health data base collect data, assess the reliability of the data, upload to it to a national data base such as Livestock Data Link and to distribute it straight to the producer via email.

What is still left to be undertaken in this area is to develop some long-term statistical analysis tools that allow the detection of any deviation in inspection findings between inspectors. Additionally, there has not been the time to assess the impact of sheep/lamb health data on stock and carcases because producer/processor interaction has not been long enough for effective changes in husbandry to have occurred.

3.0 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are:

- identify those aspects of providing producer feedback which are of value to the processor
- develop and implement a model of providing producer feedback suitable for SME processors
- identify areas where future RD&E investment is required.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The project team worked with two medium sized sheep and lamb processors in NSW. The value of participating in this project was considered self-evident by the management at both plants.

The benefits for the processor were (and still are) based on the premise that if producers are provided with animal health data and what those diseases are costing then they would respond and address these problems by changes to husbandry**.**

Having agreed on the worth of the exercise, MINTRAC worked in partnership with the companies to engage and assess producer attitudes and likely responses to the provision of animal health data. In conjunction with the companies five producer workshops were conducted. Seventy-three producers attended and toured the plants.

A sample of 30 producers who participated at the workshops were then telephone interviewed post workshop to answer questions broadly on:

- the value of workshops
- what health data they were interested in terms of diseases and conditions
- how they would respond to such health data information
- how they would like to access their information.

There was almost a universal response by producers that they required the stock health reports emailed so as part of this project the team built an access data base that enables:

- sheep health data to be recorded against a lot and PIC
- uploads to national databases such as NSHMP (both plants are participants)
- ability to automatically broadcast by email the animal health data to produces.

The database created also enables companies to search and analysis animal health data against PICs and Local Government Areas.

The team also developed and trialled a model for verifying the accuracy of different meat inspectors both in terms of visual identification and the accuracy of visual identification as assessed by pathology. The model has been tested at a plant and while pathology results are yet to come in the visual assessment of inspectors indicated very high levels of competency.

5.0 PROJECT OUTCOMES

5.1 Identify those aspects of providing producer feedback which are of value to the processor

The benefits for the processor were and still are based on the premise that if producers are provided with:

- animal health data on their stock
- the cost of those conditions in terms of reduced carcase weight (trimming and underperforming)

- the husbandry and pharmaceutical solutions to these conditions

then producers will respond by addressing the prevalence of the conditions and the quality of the stock coming from these PICs.

Improved animal health of incoming livestock will benefit processors by:

- decreasing the amount of trimming and labour costs
- increasing offal recovery
- increasing carcase value due to reduced trimming.

5.2 Develop and implement a model of providing producer feedback suitable for SME processors

The initial step was to facilitate producer engagement which involved developing a workshop format and presentations. This workshop phase was followed by producer participant interviews to:

- assess their engagement
- the level of value they attached to animal health data
- the likely hood of them responding to animal health data
- systems for them to access the data.

A sample of 30 producers were then telephone interviewed post workshop to answer questions broadly on:

- the value of workshops
- what health data they were interested in terms of diseases and conditions
- how they would respond to such health data information
- how they would like to access their information.

Having completed this exercise with the producers it was apparent that producers were enthusiastic about stock health data but preferred to be informed of animal health data by a direct email. There was no enthusiasm for having to go into Livestock Data Link to retrieve this data. This was almost a universal response by producers so as part of this project the team built an access data base that enables:

- sheep health data to be recorded against a lot and PIC
- uploads to national databases such as NSHMP
- automatical broadcasts the animal health data for each day by email to producers.

The database also enables companies to search and analysis animal health data against PICs and Local Government Areas.

As part of this project the team has also developed a model and a protocol for assessing the accuracy of meat inspectors at plants. The model has been tested at a plant and while pathology results are yet to come in the visual assessment of inspectors indicated very high levels of competency.

5.3 Identify areas where future RD&E investment is required.

Into the future there needs to be more processor producer engagement supported by animal health experts and some long-term studies of trends in animal health as well as stock and carcase quality.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The project established that the processor's recognized the potential of supplying animal health data to producers with the belief that producers will respond to adverse animal health findings and long term the quality of stock will improve to the betterment of both parties with better on farm performance less trimming, better offal yields and higher carcase weights.

The gathering of animal health data is possible on the floor and with the software developed processors can readily establish data base that routinely sends out producer's health data for their lots processed.

The project also allowed a model to be developed that can be used to verify inspector disposition and initial use of the model suggest that current meat inspectors at that plant highly competent.

So, the industry's small and medium sized processors now have the tools to establish an animal health data feedback system in their plant.