

New quality standard will regulate venison

Annette Scott

annette.scott@nzx.com

A NEW, single, quality assurance standard for farmed deer will become a requirement for the supply of animals for Cervena venison and streamline paperwork for farmers.

The Deer Farmers Association (DFA) and all five major venison marketing companies have backed the introduction of the revamped QA programme.

The companies agreed on a single standard for deer that would eliminate duplication between firms running their own QA programmes.

There would be a three-year phase-in for compliance with the single QA standard that would then be mandatory for the supply of animals for Cervena venison.

The development of the single standard was initiated by the marketers and co-ordinated by Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) as part of the industry's Passion2Profit (P2P) programme.

For farmers who produced beef, lamb or goat meat as well as venison, the deer standard was included in the NZ Farm Assurance Programme developed by the Red Meat Profit Partnership (RMPP).

"This means all species will be covered by a single baseline standard and the same audit process, further reducing paperwork for farmers," DINZ quality manager John Tacon said.

"Venison marketing companies will deliver the standard to their farmer suppliers, with the timing determined by their customer requirements," he said.

Both P2P and RMPP were Primary Growth Partnership programmes between the Ministry for Primary Industries and the deer and red meat industries.

DFA chairman David Morgan said farmers supported the single standard that would help streamline paperwork for farmers already involved in QA schemes for two or more processors.

"I think any farmers trying QA for the first time will be surprised how easy it is to do and how useful it is," Morgan said.

"Most farmers will find they are already doing all the things they should but without the standard and audit you can't prove this to a third party."

A QA audit was a means of checking farms and staff were complying with all the necessary rules and regulations farmers now faced.

"Honest mistakes with things like registers of animal remedies can be extremely expensive. The QA scheme makes it less likely that you will make them," Morgan said.

While the onfarm benefits of QA were real, the ultimate driver for onfarm QA came from the marketplace.

Most NZ deer farmers took great pride in producing a quality product and treated animal welfare very seriously, venison exporter and DINZ deputy chairman Glenn Tyrrell said.

"This is not necessarily the case in other parts of the world. There have been a number of high-profile incidents that have upset consumers," Tyrrell said.

"Important international customers, food service distributors and supermarket buyers are increasingly demanding proof that all the food products they buy meet their expectations for ethical farming and quality standards.

"NZ's good reputation is a big plus but they still want a paper trail and an audit report," he said.

Over the years individual exporters had developed their own QA schemes in response to varying customer demands.

Now the industry had got together with a single

credible standard that would make it easier to communicate to overseas customers.

"Quality in all respects from animal welfare to environmental protection to food safety, underpins the brand values of NZ venison and Cervena in particular.

"It's what chefs and consumers are buying and ultimately determines the premium they are willing to pay for our meat," Tyrrell said.

He strongly encouraged deer farmers to talk to their marketing company or deer agent about what the QA programme had to offer them.



LESS WORK: A new, single standard for meat quality for all venison as well as beef, goat and sheep meat will cut paperwork for farmers, Deer Industry New Zealand quality manager John Tacon says.