

Providing feedback to producers – what value for the processor?

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Project Description

In this two-year project MINTRAC reviewed five existing models of producer feedback and developed Case Studies, particularly focusing on the returns and benefits to processors of each model.

MINTRAC developed and trialled a simplified model for SME processors for the collection and analysis of data and provision of feedback to producers. Priority was given to those areas of feedback most likely to generate a return for processors.

During the final six months of the project, an extension and support service was provided to other SMEs wishing to implement the model.

Project Outcome

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 carcass 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 producers.

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.

