

"Welfare is a quality characteristic"

Michelle Edge, DPI Victoria

Domestic and overseas markets are beginning to demand that their suppliers provide information on animal welfare and management practices at all stages of production, transport and processing. Industries have been progressively implementing HACCP based quality assurance systems in their businesses over the last 10 years. In response to increased public interest in the welfare of farm animals in agriculture, both local and world markets are beginning to ask for more information about the animal management and welfare practices of their suppliers.

To ensure that the animal industries can build on the good welfare practices that are currently in use, comprehensive animal welfare quality assurance documentation has been developed for the animal industries to demonstrate their use of 'best animal welfare practices'. In earlier projects supported by DPI's Naturally Victorian program, documentation for best animal welfare practices was developed and integrated in both the poultry and pork industries in Australia, with the dairy industry documentation almost complete. The documentation has been developed to help fulfil both industry's and the community's expectations of high levels of welfare associated with production.

All projects have drawn on information from existing industry quality assurance programs, scientific knowledge, the Codes of Practice for welfare and current industry practice to develop documentation that can be practically integrated into current quality assurance programs within the constraints of current production systems. The documentation was developed to fulfil several aims, most importantly, that of demonstrating high standards of animal welfare. However, in achieving this objective there are also a number of subsidiary aims, including improved awareness by industry personnel of the interactions between production and welfare, an improved ability by industry participants to be spokespersons for their industry on both welfare and other quality assurance issues, identification of research priorities and a recognition that welfare is not static and can be continually improved.

The documentation for these industries was developed with the inputs of a Management Group comprising of industry, producer, welfare, veterinarian, teaching, research and policy representatives. The documentation for the industries is focuses on daily tasks of producers, transporters and processors, that impact on animal welfare. Thus, the documentation consolidates the relevant welfare related information for commercial farming and adds additional information from the scientific literature and experts in Australia, that can be used to demonstrate to customers and a range of other stakeholders, practical, science-based application of animal welfare principles to everyday farming production.

The Australian Pork Industry very recently, in collaboration with DPI, launched its revised QA program in Victoria that has adopted all the welfare standards and best practice recommendations identified in the DPI Naturally Victorian project. The national standard was launched by the Minister for Agriculture, Bob Cameron, in July 2004. "Having this type of animal welfare quality assurance for the pork industry means that Victoria and Australia can market products in a way that reassures buyers the industry has met a high standard of animal welfare," the Minister said.

Over the last 3 years, Naturally Victorian has provided a successful mechanism to assist industry in a proactive and collaborative approach to integrating animal welfare quality assurance that will assist in growing and maintaining access to markets both domestically and internationally.

Now DPI and the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) have begun the process of developing best practice welfare standards for the Australian Meat Processing Sector.

This project is the final link in the farm to fork supported by the previously completed Naturally Victorian projects.



Photo at the Australian Pork Industry Quality (APIQ) launch of the new animal welfare standards for the pork industry. From right: Mr Bob Starford (Coles Myer), Minister for Agriculture, Bob Cameron, John Cook (Australian Pork Limited) and John Barnett (DPI Victoria).

These projects (poultry, pork, dairy and processing) have enabled DPI, together with industry to develop linkages and partnerships across the chain and the ability to assist the delivery of true through chain quality assurance for animal welfare.