

Hatchery benchmarking – a worthwhile tool?

One of the current buzz words is 'benchmarking'. Before we consider benchmarking let us consider targeting and what its role is in today's hatchery.

A target is really a standard to which we should aspire and to be effective it has to be realistic and achievable. Once achieved there is absolutely no reason why the target should not be reset to, in effect, create another goal to be aimed for.

Far more motivational

If our production is currently, say, 79 units per hour and our ultimate goal is 100 units per hour a series of targets that are achievable, for example, 82, 85, 89, 93, 97 and, finally, 100, is going to be far more motivational to staff than trying to achieve the goal in one big step.

This is because the majority of staff like to be praised and a series of targets provides a series of opportunities for praising staff and, therefore, a series of occasions when staff will be motivated. Conversely, one hard to achieve target can quite easily become very demotivational!

So, our first message about targeting is that goals that are created in the process must be achievable and be achieved in a reasonably short time.

Benchmarking is the process by which we compare our performance to that in our sector or that of our competitors. It may be that when we do this we find our benchmark is a totally unrealistic one for us to set as a target in our hatchery – hence, there is a real difference between targeting and benchmarking.

Achievable goals

This is something that we must never lose sight of. Benchmarking is an exercise that compares us to others, whereas targeting is a process that provides our staff with realistic and achievable goals so that we can progress our business.

From what has been said the cornerstone to benchmarking is finding out what others are doing

and this is not always the easiest of things to do.

Fortunately, in the hatchery world two sources of such data are available. Firstly there are key suppliers into the sector such as the breeders and incubator manufacturers.

They have a wealth of information so how can we tap into it? With the breeders if you are their customer it is really a case of helping each other.

If you are prepared to provide them with information, they are more than likely going to be prepared to supply you with a summary of all the information that they have correlated, but which also protects the identity of those who have supplied it.

A fee based service

In some parts of the world, for example North America, this

exercise is done by an independent body and a fee is charged for the service.

Irrespective of which system you use, you will be able to compare yourself with the other participants, but you will not be able to compare yourself directly with Competitor 'X' or Competitor 'Y'.

Know your position

For example, you will be able to see that you were 32nd out of 124 respondents in terms of fertility, but when it came to hatchability you were 112th out of the 124 respondents.

In this case the benchmarking has been a very worthwhile exercise because this information suggests that you are not operating your incubators as effectively as most of the other hatcheries and this is something that you should be able to improve.

With benchmarking we must appreciate that everyone else in the scheme will be doing what we are and that they will also be trying to improve their performance.

Thus, an important aspect of benchmarking that we need to appreciate is that the benchmark is a 'moving target'.

This means that we could actually be improving our performance, but slipping down the league table because others are making bigger improvements than those which we are achieving.

For this reason many prefer to set their target to be in a particular zone of the league table. To this end quartiles (or quarters) are used.

If you are in the upper quartile you are in the top 25% of participants, whereas if you are in the lowest quartile you are in the poorest 25%.

Constant improvement

Thus, if you are in the lowest quartile you may well set the goal of getting in to the next or the third quartile. If you are in the top quartile and want to get better then the goal to set is to be in the top 10 or 5%.

A very useful benefit that accrues from benchmarking is that you can see the best performance, or the performance level that you feel is realistically achievable, and then use this for costing purposes.

For example, you may feel it is reasonable to predict that changes to the incubators would give you an additional 2% in hatchability.

Supporting data

From the data you have seen in the benchmarking exercise you may be able to say, 'yes I can get a 2.65% improvement, but being realistic I could get 2% or, conversely, I may only get 1.75%'.

Then you can calculate best and worst case scenarios and use the data from the benchmarking exercise to substantiate your case when you put forward a project for consideration. ■