

Identify your hazards and ensure transparency and full traceability

Are your hazards identified? Is your traceability traceable? Is your transparency visible?

Whether we like it or not, we are now in the era in which 'the supermarket is king' and, accordingly, they will do everything they can to protect their position and standing in the market place.

This has resulted in many new practices and philosophies being required at the breeding and hatchery level. Such things include being green or eco-friendly, being bird welfare conscious, being able to demonstrate we are fair employers, having a HACCP system, having systems to ensure anything undesirable does not get into our birds or their feed, and many more.

A better industry

While we may well curse all the additional work (and paperwork!) that this creates, we can not deny that we are a better industry for it. However, we need to consider the possibility that the law of diminishing returns could now come into play!

In other words, as we are asked to do more and more by our customers, we need to keep their requests under review. We will find that, on occasions, requests are duplicated and that we already have the means of satisfying their latest request without putting yet another system in place!

We also need to regularly review what we are doing to confirm whether or not it is still appropriate and necessary.

We also need to review what we are doing to see if there are ways by which we can streamline it or make it work more effectively for us.

We must not fall into a 'Yes Sir! Yes Sir!' culture with major customers – we must remember, as managers, that our first responsibility is to our own business and ensuring that it satisfies its goals. Hopefully these goals will, more or less, include satisfying our customers!

So, this brings us to the title of this article. If we look at everything we do the backbone to it is hazard identification and control, traceability and transparency.

Firstly, we can not control a hazard if we have not identified it. Think about the

Exercise 1.

Identify the last input of vitamin E into the feed mill before 16th January 2008 and account for it.

Exercise 2.

Mr X came to Farm A on 23rd March 2009 and we now know he had contact with disease. Define all the links from Farm A to other farms in the company.

Exercise 3.

We have identified that vaccine batch number xxxxx was substandard. Identify all the flocks that received this vaccine.

Table 1. Examples of traceability exercises.

melamine in milk saga in China. Yes, there were rogue elements at play but, was it reasonable for a dairy to have identified melamine as a possible hazard or risk that should have been monitored for?

In other words, how can you screen for a hazard you are not aware of?

To some extent we can screen for specific hazards that are unknown to us by having a more general rather than a highly specific definition of a hazard.

For example, rather than define our hazard as *Salmonella enteritidis*, we should define it as *Enterobacteriaceae*. Then, hopefully, the control measures we initiate will cover the real possibility of another bacterium within *Enterobacteriaceae* emerging as tomorrow's problem.

This is worthy of thought when you consider how *E. coli* O157 emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in the red meat sector.

Had it emerged in poultry, highly specific control strategies such as *S. enteritidis* vaccination would have been of little benefit, but more general control measures such as biosecurity and acidification of feeds could well have been beneficial.

There are a whole host of *Enterobacteriaceae* such as *hafnia*, *derratia*, *proteus* and *citrobacter* and a strain of any one of these could suddenly become highly virulent for poultry just like *S. enteritidis* did two or three decades ago.

Traceability is the backbone of risk containment should a problem arise. A good traceability system is one that provides all the information that the most discerning customer could request from you quickly and accurately.

For this reason, it is worth regularly

putting your team through traceability exercises. Randomly identify a day in, say, the last year and then select an input or output from your operation and ask the QA team to identify just where it went. Three examples are in Table 1. These may look simple to do but it is often not until you do exercises such as these that the shortfalls and weaknesses in your systems become apparent! These exercises need to be constantly varied if you are to identify deficiencies in your traceability system and records.

Keep it simple!

Then we come to transparency. Basically this means that everything is accessible and visible for inspection. Your customers want this so that they can satisfy themselves that everything you are doing is appropriate and being done correctly. Transparency is best achieved through simplicity of our other systems.

If they are simple it is much easier to demonstrate transparency – if your systems are complicated it is much more likely that they will inadvertently lose things and, hence, lose their transparency.

You should be able to describe everything you do to satisfy your customers on one side of A4 paper. Each of the components that you identify in this way may need to be then defined in more detail but the basic overview should be succinct!

There is a great tendency in modern management to be too verbose. An attribute of a good manager is to achieve clarity by brevity – this is very relevant when it comes to traceability and transparency! ■