

Australian Pork Newspaper Article – March 2007

“Quality Assurance revolution for Australian Pork Industry”

By APL CEO Andrew Spencer

Twenty-first century consumers want to know where their food comes from and how it is produced. This push from consumers is presenting a challenge to many rural industries, including pork, that are faced with the need to protect markets in an increasingly competitive world.

Quality assurance (QA) in this context is nothing more than a tool to protect and promote our product and our industry through giving assurances through the supply chain on quality and risk management.

Over the last months the Australian pig industry has had what I describe as a QA revolution. This is especially so with export requirements dictating broad uptake of QA systems across the industry in a very short space of time and the PigPass NVD carrying key risk information to the buyer.

Not only was PigPass QA was introduced to enable compliance with an acceptable system in quick time, but the subscription and certification through APIQ has also ballooned. This solved a short-term urgent problem around access to export markets, but the long-term role of QA in our industry still needs to be managed to serve the industry and stakeholders individually.

Standing back and looking at QA in a more strategic view, our industry presents a number of issues to manage:

- PigPass QA is an interim solution only for pig producers to fulfil the requirements for export certification, so we need to bring the standards up over time to match full APIQ certification. PigPass QA covers only food safety standards while APIQ covers food safety, biosecurity and welfare standards.
- APIQ is in many ways still a rather complicated system, especially for smaller producers who are not raising pigs as their first source of income. We need to consider a re-design APIQ to make it simpler to comply with the standards without compromising on the standards themselves. Additionally, we need to look into systems of complying with the APIQ standards that make sense for both small producers and large producers,
- Domestic abattoirs are presently not necessarily requiring any form of QA in the production of the pigs that they are buying. This has the potential to create a two-tiered quality structure in the industry (one for export, one for domestic). Different standards of quality for domestic and export consumers cannot be defended and we all need to work towards one quality standard for the industry for us all to prosper together. Both Federal and State Government agencies are working with the pork industry to achieve one uniform standard
- Government initiatives around national food standards means that food producing industries such as the pork industry need to have robust QA systems. These QA systems not only need strong and independent audit procedures, but also QA systems that comply with international standards (which from time to time will also be audited) such as ISO9002
- Community pressure on the way the pig industry manages issues, such as animal welfare and environmental sustainability means we need to demonstrate improvement over time in these areas. This can be done through robust information and statistics which is based on real information about our producers' abilities to comply with the standards we set ourselves. Our QA systems form the backbone of our ability to set standards, comply with them and gain broader recognition.

APL managed the frenzy of introducing QA systems to a great proportion of the industry during the last few months (and learnt a lot in the process). We are now focussed on looking further

ahead with respect to quality issues. We want to work with producers to position the industry in a positive position with respect to quality for the future, recognising consumer confidence and producer viability as key outcomes.

It is worthwhile mentioning that APL has received feedback from producers on a range of issues facing them in implementing QA programs. This feedback will be taken into account when we review the APIQ program to ensure its ease of adoption by all producers.

Compliance with QA standards clearly imposes a cost on pork production, which is today a cost of doing business that cannot be ignored. Our challenge is to use the high standards of our production to our advantage, through promoting and demonstrating the efforts we go to in putting the best product possible on the shelf.