

The theme for this year's World Meat congress in Berlin was "Safety in Meat - The Bottom Line for Consumer Confidence." It was an issue close to the hearts to all delegates who had travelled from more than 40 countries.

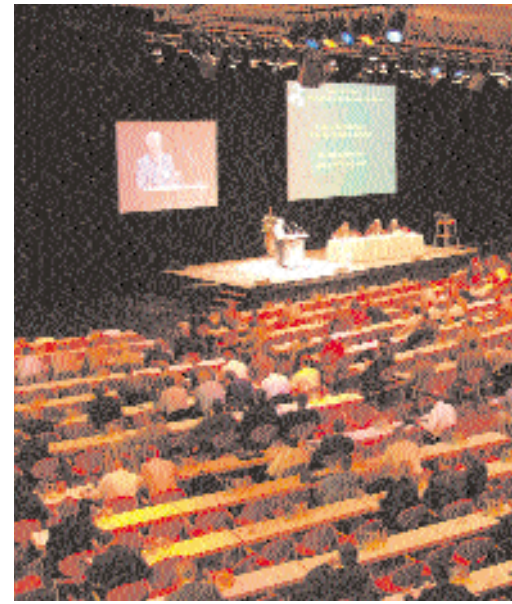
By Cedric Porter

Safety dominates Meat Congress



Germany's new QS standard aims for safety along the meat chain.

Like most of its neighbours, Germany has not escaped meat safety problems that have had a severe effect on consumer confidence. The discovery of BSE in cattle at the end of 2000 is still being felt more than 18 months later, while other smaller scale scares have not helped. But it is not just Germany and the European Union that has to deal with such scares. Every country that produces meat is at risk, and although more needs to be done to emphasise to consumers that eating any food product is not risk



free, more is being done to reduce the risk and to minimise problems.

Quality and safety

The World Meat Congress coincided with the introduction of Germany's Qualität und Sicherheit (Quality and Safety) system, to be generally known as QS. The system is a response to demand by consumers and government to ensure a quality assured meat product. It has been developed by the German meat marketing association (CMA) and other associations and organisations that represent producers, processors and marketers of meat.

There are four elements to the QS system. They are: documentation and control of production processes; transparency of production; product safety and consumer confidence. It applies to beef, veal, pork and sheepmeat.

To become a member of QS an application to the company has to be made. Then the business will have to prove that it has implemented a comprehensive self-assessment system. It will also undergo administrative and physical inspections carried out by inspectors working to a set of



Delegates from more than 40 countries focussed on safety during the congress.

accredited rules. If all the criteria are fulfilled a contract with QS can be signed. Besides a proof of assurance, this also entitles the use of the QS symbol when selling products.

Inspection

To ensure that standards are met, regular inspections of production systems by independent auditors will be carried out. They will report directly back to the central administrations. Failure to maintain standards will result in sanctions that could include suspension or even dismissal from the scheme.

One of the loudest supporters of QS is Südfleisch. It is one of Germany's largest meat processors and its products were some of the first to go on the shelves bearing the QS logo. Board spokesman Karl-Heinz Kiesel told the World Meat Congress that there is need for such a system as QS. He said that since 1975 the expenditure on meat has halved in real terms and per capita consumption has been falling.

He attributed this loss in confidence to the feeling by consumers that meat is now an anonymous mass product and the questioning

Emphasising need for quality

The World Meat congress coincided with the discovery of a banned pesticide called nitrofen in supposedly organic animal feed in the east of Germany. With her mind clearly elsewhere, German agriculture minister Renate Künast addressed the congress on the need for quality assurance and the importance of food safety. Before her speech she was mobbed by television camera crews and reporters wanting to know more about the nitrofen scandal. The intense interest again demonstrated the significance that the media attaches to food safety problems.

The German ministry traced the source of contamination to a grain store in the former Communist eastern part of Germany. Before re-unification of Germany the store had been used to hold pesticide and weedkiller.

Initially it was thought that contamination had only occurred for six months, but it was found that it had been occurring for three years. The scandal led to the closure of around 100 chicken farms and the slaughter of stock on hundreds of others. It also spread beyond the organic sector.

by consumers of modern agricultural techniques. To this image round Kiesel said that meat must be rescued from anonymity and farmers to view themselves as food producers and not just livestock fatteners.

Linking the chain

"Future food markets can only be stabilised and be crisis-proof if all



Agriculture and consumer minister Renate Künast stressed the need for assurance.



A feed scandal meant minister Künast was mobbed by the press.

market partners are inter-linked and networked throughout all stages of production and if all processes are documented and comprehensible. All parties involved were agreed that only by means of concerted action would they be able to develop a new and comprehensive quality and assurance concept that would allow them to guarantee food quality

QS requirements

Feedstuffs

Suppliers must be recognised in accordance with the provision of the law governing feedstuffs

Control plan with defined controls for basic, individual and composite feedstuffs

Retention of samples from each production batch

Exclusive use of raw materials/individual feedstuffs from the QS positive list

Open declaration of ingredients of mixed feed in descending order

Client receives delivery note with QS registration

Farming

Maintenance of animal register

Proof of veterinary surgeon responsible for farm

No use of antibiotic growth accelerators in feedstuffs

Complete record of use of medicines and drugs (record book)

Documented QS self-assessment system with varying emphasis depending on type of animal

Salmonella monitoring of fertiliser regulations by providing nutrient comparison

Slaughtering and cutting

State-of-the art BSE tests for calves and beef cattle

Correct disposal of hazardous materials with regard to slaughtered beef cattle

Proof of disposal of waste and hazardous materials

Documentation of results and feedback to producer

Documentation of observance of animal husbandry, transport and stunning regulations

Regular external hygiene controls

Traceability of goods flow and origin

Processing

Declaration of constituents to independent control bodies

Regular sampling of raw materials and intermediate products

No use of mechanically separated meat

No use of brain or spinal cord material

Traceability of goods flow and origin

Retailers

Controlled QS self-assessment system

Traceability of origin in the case of fresh meat

Proof of continuity of refrigeration chain

Regular sampling by accredited test institutes

and safety to consumers and thus to regain their trust. For this reason, the alliance QS – quality and safety in food all the way from producers to consumers was founded.”

But QS is not a new concept. Germany's neighbour the Netherlands launched its quality assurance scheme IKB (translated to Integrated Chain Control) in 1993. It ensures that all the links in the chain meet certain set qual-

ity, origin and safety requirements. Each link has to comply with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) or Good Veterinary Practices (GVPs). Its regulations cover traceability, feed, hygiene, use of drugs on animals, transport and animal welfare. The requirements go beyond legal minimum ones and include the checking of carcasses for prohibited growth-promoting substances.

Recognition and trust

At the beginning of 2002 independent market consultants Research International carried out a survey on behalf of the Dutch Meat Board, which administers IKB.

A total of 222 pork buyers for processors, wholesalers or retailers in Germany, Italy, Greece and France were asked how they viewed various quality assurance schemes. Quality assurance schemes were important to 95% of the buyers. The IKB system was the most well known, with 22% being able to name it spontaneously. The Danish DS system was named by just 3% of buyers as was an existing German scheme called Prüfsiegel. When asked which scheme was the most convincing, 58% said IKB, followed by 48% for Prüfsiegel.

The buyers were also asked to name the most important criteria they use when buying pork. Top of the list was quality, next came uniformity, then guarantees through assurance schemes, price, delivery as per product specifications, supplier and finally country of origin.

Worldwide trend

But assurance is far from being just a European issue. For Uruguay beef exports are vital. In the past they have made up as much as 20% of total export revenues. Although it was hit by an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001, quick action meant the disease was quickly contained and the country was ready to export again within six months.

To help maintain its image as a supplier of quality safe beef, Uruguay has developed a Certified Natural Beef scheme. The National Meat Institute (NMI) operates the scheme. It says that Uruguayan beef already has a number of natural advantages. This includes the fact that production is based on grass and

WMC 2004 and Uruguay 2003

The next World Meat Congress will be held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada between 14 and 17 June 2004. Manitoba is a major livestock producing province. It accounts for 9.3% of the 12,959,100 cattle that are produced in Canada, 18% of the 13,200,600 pigs and 10.7% of the 801,000 sheep and lambs. In addition it is also a leading producer of Canadian poultry and grain.

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www.worldmeatcongress-canada.com

Uruguay is to pay host to an International Meat Secretariat meeting to discuss the future of the meat industry, in particular trade, health issues and consumer confidence from 30 March to 1 April 2003. The event will be in the coastal resort of Punta del Este. For further details contact: INAC Mercados Externos. Tel: +59 82 916 04 30. Fax: +59 82 916 20 71. Email: imsregional2003@personas.com.uy. Website: www.imsregional2003.gub.uy.

cattle and sheep contribute to a sustainable and diverse agricultural environment. Animal feed is just made from vegetable proteins which protects cattle from BSE says the NMI. Hormones, anabolic steroids and other growth promoters are also prohibited.

The certifying scheme registers all cattle births and movements. At the slaughter house and cutting plant labelling carries traceability up the chain. All export plants are HACCP registered. To ensure that the standards of the scheme are met, inspectors from independent internationally recognised certifying agents are used. **MI**