

EXPORT CERTIFICATION: NEW INITIATIVES UNDER WAY

For the past three years, MAF Quality Management (MAF Qual) and the beekeeping industry have been going through the difficult process of developing a fully auditable system for the export certification of live bees and bee products. Two years ago a draft certification system was purposed to exporters, and last year the split between policy and delivery for this certification was formalised in a written contract between the MAF Regulatory Authority (MAF RA; the owner of the government seal and all NZ government export certificates) and MAF Qual (the contracted deliverer of export certification services).

In that contract, MAF RA requires the same performance criteria for the export certification of live bees and bee products that it does for all other New Zealand plant and animal exports. The criteria includes the use by MAF Qual of an export certification quality system and the adherence to strictly auditable procedures in carrying out that certification.

What this means, in essence, is that MAF Qual, as the contractor, must ensure that the statements made on any export certificate it issues are verified with supporting documentary evidence. Local knowledge and presumptions by certifying officers are no longer enough. MAF Qual is now subject to independent audits to check that such documentary evidence exists for all certificates.

The problem, of course, is that such certification costs more money, both for exporters and for MAF Qual. During the past year, bee and bee product certification ran at a substantial loss to the MAF Qual business, and *now Agmic* MAF Qual directors have signalled that this situation must be reversed. At the same time, MAF Qual is vitally aware that certification procedures, especially those needed to satisfy importing country government requirements for such markets as Korea, have significantly reduced margins and profitability for both exporters and their suppliers.

It is therefore vitally important that the beekeeping industry, MAF Qual and the MAF RA, work together to produce an export certification system that both meets the required quality system criteria and costs individual exporters and their suppliers as little as possible in order to comply.

Your industry has taken a series of important initiatives in this regard, including the appointment of Mervyn Cloake, from the NBA Executive, as chairman of the export certification committee. Mr. Cloake has held meetings with both industry exporters and representatives of MAF Qual and the MAF RA, and has agreed to cooperate in the development of a joint export certification system.

As well, the MAF RA has designated Jim Edwards to work on all bee-related export matters. In the last year, Dr. Edwards has carried out

important export protocol negotiations for the industry in a number of significant markets, including Korea, Japan, the United States and the EC.

At a meeting held in Palmerston North in late May, Mervyn Cloake and Jim Edwards met with MAF Qual Apicultural Advisory Officers to map out a strategy for export certification for the coming season. The strategy includes the following important initiatives:

- The Development and Implementation of a New Quality System Manual for Bee and Bee Product Export Certification - the manual, which is being written this winter, outlines the system which will be used by MAF Qual for bee and bee product export certification, and includes requirements and procedures for exports to all known overseas markets. The manual will be updated regularly and will be made available on a controlled document-basis to exporters. The controlled document provision simply ensures that all manual holders receive the same changes whenever they are issued.
- The Use of Conformity Certification Agreements - the system includes the use of compliance agreements for both bees and bee products. Exporters and their suppliers would be given the option of joining such an agreement each year, regardless of the number of markets they wish to supply. The conformity option has been designed to keep costs to a minimum by giving exporters and their suppliers as much responsibility as possible for making sure their products meet the standards of importing countries. Exporters will still be required to make declarations for each shipment stating that the product complies with the importing country's requirements. However, to ensure that these declarations are correct, the exporter/supplier's quality system will be subject to audit by MAF Qual. Exporters/suppliers will have to pay for these audits, but the cost will be spread over all shipments to all markets for the year. There will also be a consignment inspection option available, involving the testing of product for each export, for those individuals who either wish to make only occasional exports, or do not, for one reason or another, use the conformity certification option.
- The Re-Negotiation of Onerous and Costly Importing Country Requirements - both MAF Qual and exporters are well-aware of the high costs and verification problems associated with the area freedom declarations insisted upon by several important export markets. There is common agreement by all New Zealand parties that a system of product testing would be less expensive and provide even greater assurance of disease-free status. However, before such testing can be substituted, negotiations must take place between the MAF RA and the various importing countries. As well, the Palmerston North meeting recommended that strong efforts be made to achieve parity on certification and inspections systems with other countries supplying similar products to our most important export markets. The MAF RA

has agreed to approach overseas governmental authorities to discuss both these matters on the New Zealand beekeeping industry's behalf.

Needless to say, the re-negotiation process will take some time to complete, and the reduction of costs associated with area freedom declarations may not fully be achieved during the coming export year. It is hoped, however, that all beekeeping industry exporters will join with MAF Qual and the MAF RA in supporting these initiatives. Cooperation and mutual understanding will be essential for this new system to work.

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