

Ensuring safe sustainable food

By Mark Ross

New Zealand's biosecurity systems, quality control processes, use of innovative products and geographic isolation allow our country an animal disease-free status. This is an important factor in our agricultural success, which is recognised by the World Organisation for Animal Health.

With the majority of New Zealand's agricultural production being sold in markets overseas, we must be at the forefront of safe food production.

Being part of a global food production system, regulators such as the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) must consider our trading partners' requirements for effective pest and disease control. Exporting a disease or unwanted pest on our produce is not an option, so having the right crop protection or animal health product available is critical to this process.

The agrichemical industry works with government on safe food production, ensuring that any diseases are quickly contained and controlled. This minimises any negative impacts on New Zealand exports and biosecurity risks.

The New Zealand TBfree disease management programme is an example of one of the world's leading disease control schemes. The successful government-industry partnership has seen reduction of bovine Tuberculosis (TB) in New Zealand cattle and deer.

Farmers and industry groups are working with government to make it one of the world's leading disease control schemes. Regional committees, made up of farmer volunteers and other local stakeholders, communicate, advocate and support the delivery of the strategy. As a result, incidents of TB in livestock decreased, allowing trading markets to remain open.

New Zealand also imports a significant amount of food, with our proportion to exports being one of the highest in the western world. This is a reflection of our climate (which limits the foods that can be grown domestically), seasonality of production, and economies of scale in the production of pre-processed foods.

Due to the large amount of food we import, it is essential that we participate in international decisions on food quality. This includes making sure that our stringent maximum residue limits in imported agricultural products are adhered to, and that no unwanted substances or organisms are imported with it.

Legal requirements on imported food are overseen by the MPI. Importer requirements must be met to ensure that the food we import is safe. For example, foods for sale must comply with labelling and composition standards in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, such as labels in English.

It is satisfying to know that New Zealand's farmers, growers and production systems have an international reputation as a safe and secure food supply source. Through the MPI, and by working with industry groups like Agcarm, New Zealand sets the highest standards for its food producers to ensure that the country remains a world leader in producing safe and healthy food products.

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