



Welcome

Our final edition of RA Food Focus for 1996 has an international flavour. Two and half years since the ground breaking GATT round was concluded, we take a look at how the agreement has created a positive climate for the ongoing access negotiations MAFRA is involved in. Inside we profile positive access action from Canada to Bulgaria. We also introduce EDI - the way the business of export certification will be done in the future, and the databases which help back up our cases in international negotiations. To all readers of RA Food Focus - whichever country you're in - happy Christmas!



RA food focus

MAF Regulatory Authority Information for the Agriculture and Seafood industries.

International Access -- The Background

The Uruguay round of GATT was concluded in April 1994, after seven years of talks notable for tackling a series of trade issues such as agriculture and textiles which had long been in the "too hard" basket for GATT negotiators.

The new World Trade Organisation promised a lot for New Zealand with the lure of more open and fair trading conditions for agriculture, commitments to increased market access, reduced export subsidies and tariffs, and the removal of unfair non-tariff barriers through the Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) agreement.

The principles of the SPS agreement have been especially favourable to New Zealand's way of doing trade because of the relatively high quality standards already prevailing here and the strength of our science based justifications for access says Neil McLeod, a MAFRA National Adviser on the SPS agreement. The key principles of the agreement include:

- countries may not unjustifiably discriminate against foreign suppliers where similar conditions prevail;
- more stringent standards than the international norm can only be used to protect consumer health if there is scientific justification or objective risk assessment;
- use of equivalence agreements - permitting importation of goods if they meet hygiene standards equivalent to those in the importing country.



Barry Marshall



Tony Zohrab

New Zealand had been an insistent voice, keeping agriculture on the GATT agenda throughout the negotiation process, and is now in the forefront of forging its implementation through a host of involvements in multi-national fora and bilateral agreements.

Global standards are on the agenda of organisations with strong New Zealand input, like APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), Codex Alimentarius Commission, IPPC (International Plant Protection Convention) IDF (International Dairy Federation) and the Paris-based world organisation for animal health (OIE).

Permanently at the front line for MAFRA are two Veterinary Counsellors based in the major markets of Europe and North America who work with controlling authorities to facilitate improved New Zealand trade access by gathering information, building relationships and influencing the decision makers.

The two present Counsellors, Tony Zohrab in Brussels and Barry Marshall in Washington are qualified vets, and will soon be joined by a Wellington based Market Advisor for the Asian market.

Ongoing vigilance, lobbying and the development of global market strategies are vital to the continuing success of New Zealand's agricultural industries.

Quality Quote

"Last night we went to a Chinese dinner at six and a French dinner at nine, and I can feel the sharks' fins navigating unhappily in the Burgundy."

Peter Fleming, 1937, on the perils of mixing international cuisine.

INSIDE

Progress on market access:

Canada
Bulgaria
Poland

EDI is coming
Database secrets



Access Snippets

Green light from the US

An important forum which recommends policy for the import of live animals and animal products into the United States has acknowledged New Zealand's Scrapie and BSE free status.

The United States Animal Health Association looked at import policies for sheep and sheep products at its annual meeting held in Little Rock, Arkansas, in October.

The Association brings together US state and federal officials with US industry leaders and representatives from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Mexico, European Union, South America and Australia.

While attending the meeting to press home New Zealand's case, MAF Chief Veterinary Officer Barry O'Neil and Washington based Veterinary Counsellor Barry Marshall also heard important new US research on the effect of pasteurisation on *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*, the organism that causes Johne's disease. The research showed that pasteurisation at 72 degrees centigrade for 15 seconds, completely inactivates any *M. paratuberculosis* that was present in the milk. This reinforces New Zealand's existing policy of mandatory pasteurisation at these time/temperature parameters. The postulated link between *M. paratuberculosis* and the debilitating Crohn's disease in humans was also discussed with a leading Crohn's researcher ruling out any link between the two.

Progress on Eastern European Access

MAFRA Chief Veterinary Officer Andrew McKenzie and National Manager (Research and Development), Steve Hathaway recently returned from Poland and Bulgaria where they successfully negotiated improved access for New Zealand meat and dairy products.

Both countries have requirements relating to *Tb* which create problems in terms of certification. In effect, their requirements preclude animals and animal products from any farm which is under any restrictions at all for *Tb*. There is no valid scientific reason for this and no other markets have these restrictions.

But both countries are also seeking to join the EU (some time in the next four to six years), which has the prerequisite

that they harmonise their legislation with the EU.

Wishing to avoid complex certification requirements during the period prior to joining the EU, New Zealand was able to assure officials of both countries to accept that, because New Zealand was equivalent to the EU, it was therefore equivalent to them. This then made it possible to draft a simple certificate to cover all animal exports.

Initial discussions were also held with Russian officials on the same theme, and the groundwork laid for a visit of the officials to New Zealand.

These were notable successes in dealing with countries which have the potential for increased trade with New Zealand.

Sorting out compounds confusion

Intervention by MAFRA has saved the day for a New Zealand meat exporter whose lamb was suspected of containing residues of the compound zeranol found in the growth promotant Ralgro.

Comprehensive research and monitoring data was provided to the Canadian Controlling Authority showing that the residues detected were not from the use of 'growth promotants', but actually from the naturally occurring fungi of the *Fusarium* sp.

Fusarium sp fungi are commonly found on pastures and grains around the world.

To help prevent any future confusion, the laboratory involved was supplied with a method refinement to allow them to better distinguish the difference.

The Washington based Veterinary Counsellor Dr Barry Marshall, who presented MAF's case relied upon published research and monitoring data undertaken by the MAF QM National Chemical Residue laboratory at Wallaceville, supplemented by further research from AgResearch Ruakura.

MAFRA National Manager (Residues), Dr Bill Jolly comments; "Since the conclusion of the Uruguay round of GATT, the ability to provide reasoned explanations backed up by sound science has become increasingly important. This case was a good example of how research undertaken or compiled by MAF can be used to address market concerns and minimise potential disruption to trade."

Enforcement note:

A Waikato farmer landed \$4200 in fines and costs in Hamilton District Court at the end of October when he pleaded guilty to presenting a Bobby calf for slaughter containing residues of Sulphonamide drugs. This is the first of three recent detections to be resolved in Court. It follows a prosecution in 1995 where a farmer was ordered to pay \$7,200 in fines and costs for a similar offence.

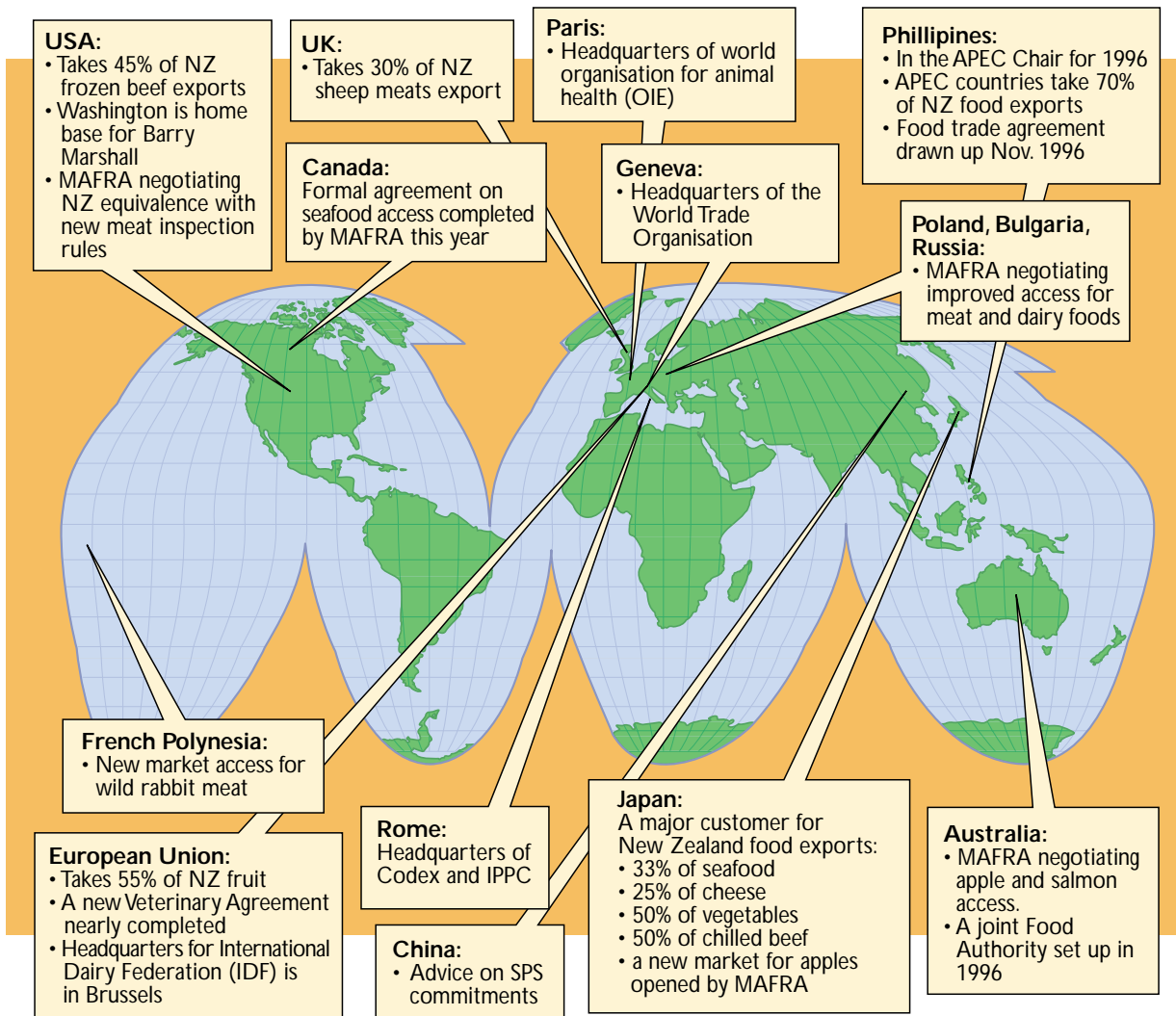
Meet our People - Sandra Greenall



Sandra Greenall is MAFRA Meat and Seafood's System Manager (Publications.) The role involves coordinating the production of technical manuals, standards and guidelines then distributing them nationwide to food hygiene and quality standards practitioners in the export and domestic sectors of the meat, game and seafood sectors. It's all about "getting the right information to the right people at the right time," she says. Sandra has been with MAF RA and its predecessors for 23 years now. Away from her work at Palmerston North's Batchelar Agricultural Centre, she likes to unwind with a good book, going to the theatre and relaxing with friends.

Thinking Globally:

Some markets where New Zealand and MAF RA are making an impact.



EDI to speed up international links

MAFRA has secured the rights to software developed by its Australian equivalent, AQIS, which will allow New Zealand agricultural industries to begin trialling EDI for their internal use early next year.

EDI is the computer technology and protocols necessary for the rapid national and international exchange of documents such as export certificates. The system greatly decreases the amount of paper transfer required.

MAFRA Information Manager Brent Fry says trialing is planned by the meat industry for March 1997.

It is envisaged that successful trialing will result in this approach to an industry's internal use of EDI being progressively adopted by the other industries, such as the live animal trade, dairy, plants and seafood industries.

With an agricultural industry approach to EDI seemingly assured, the MAFRA Board has agreed on a single approach to export certification using EDI across the industry groups. This will save on development costs, ensure consistency across the industries and assist MAFRA to meet its statutory requirements for control of the overall process.

The approach specifies how a certificate is to be forwarded to MAFRA electronically, authenticated as a MAFRA export certificate, and then forwarded electronically to the appropriate overseas country.

MAFRA already has agreements for the use of EDI for meat export certification with Australia, Japan and United States. Those countries begin trialling their systems in May 1997.

New Zealand will be able to learn from the results of their trials and, all going well, begin exchanging EDI messages with those countries in July 1997.



Tapping the wealth from databases

It's not widely known that effective databases play an important role in building access for New Zealand food exports to a host of international markets.

In the international trading environment the databases can be used to establish base-lines for judging the "equivalence" of New Zealand's food safety programmes with those of our potential and existing trading partners when negotiating access.

Recent analysis by MAFRA of the bovine carcass microbiological survey, for example, has shown very encouraging results compared with surveys in other countries, especially with respect to *Salmonella*. This provides us with a good basis for arguing the "equivalence" of hygiene practices in New Zealand, without the need to replicate additional costly controls and microbiological monitoring that may be deemed necessary by some importing countries.

Now that the New Zealand baseline has been established, an on-going National Microbiological Database will continually demonstrate the performance of meat hygiene programmes in all export premises in the country.

Records of the diseases and defects of cattle at slaughter have been placed in a computerised database in New Zealand since 1 October 1981. MAFRA has now launched a project to ensure the local meat industry is making the most of the information collected, and employs the most cost-effective system.

In recognising the importance of effective databases, the wealth of information contained therein must also be accessible and useful to industry.

MAFRA'S National Manager (Research and Development), Steve Hathaway says the first step in the project is consulting with industry to get feedback on the usefulness of categories used in the existing databases and explore opportunities to make better use of the data.

He uses the example of the existing database category, "wounds and bruises".

More detailed classification, he says, will assist the industry to identify the type of bruising which is of most concern. This could help reduce labour costs and disruption during slaughter, improve the quality of the product and assist animal welfare.

An enhanced disease and defect recording system will also help ensure that inspection standards and judgments are consistent at all premises. Differences in prevalence and condemnation figures can be used by MAF Quality Management to assess whether they are a result of geographic differences or of different interpretations among inspectors.

It is not the intention to develop a costly new system, but to respecify the data categories currently used in national data collection systems so they are more appropriate to current strategic needs. Additional data that is gathered will be of greater relevance to all interested parties, while also bringing in audit systems to ensure the database does not contain errors.

Bright Note

Hot off the wire comes news that risk analysis approach and principles have been accepted by the Codex Committee on General Principles and incorporated as an Annex of the Procedural Manual.

"New Zealand has had a major strategic interest in ensuring that the Codex system utilises a risk analysis approach wherever appropriate," believes Steve Hathaway, National Manager Research and Development.

"Despite the provisions of the WTO SPS agreement, some governments have resisted formal recognition of the role of science and risk analysis in Codex. Inclusion of these in the Manual represents an important advance in implementation of the intent of the Agreement and in establishing conditions for fair and unrestricted trade in food which is clearly to New Zealand's advantage."

How are our deer doing?

Peter van der Logt of the MAFRA Research and Development Group has been running a PC-based disease and defect database for farmed deer over the last year, as a prototype for a new system. The first task was to accurately record prevalence of diseases and defects according to current categories, then analyse the data. The second phase is the implementation of a PC-based system using new disease and defect categories, which will commence in February 1997.

The records show that in the year ending September 1996, a total of 307,781 farmed deer were slaughtered in Deer Slaughtering Premises. A total of 38,361 tickets were used to indicate diseases or defects.

Two conditions were very commonly recorded. They were contamination with 5.05% and wounds and bruises with 4.65%. Together these two conditions accounted for 77.81% of the tickets used.

The most common disease was pleurisy with 2,980 affected animals of which a very small proportion, 9 animals, were condemned. There were 1,758 animals with Other Causes of which 25 animals were condemned. The only other remaining category with more than 1,000 affected deer was arthritis with 1,078 affected animals and 5 condemned animals.

A large number of animals was recorded with facial eczema lesions (955 deer).

It appeared that usually the carcass was not affected but the liver only.

A total of 593 deer were condemned, that is 0.19% of the slaughtered animals.

The most common reason for condemnation was emaciation (176 deer), followed by *Tuberculosis* (145 deer) and Wounds and Bruises (144 deer).

If contamination and wounds and bruises were excluded 8,514 tickets were used to indicate disease. It should be noted that more than 1 ticket can be used per carcass. This means that at most 2.77% of all the deer slaughtered showed disease requiring reinspection and trimming on the detain rail.

The disease and defect findings illustrate the healthy status of deer in New Zealand which are slaughtered for human consumption.

Editorial Box

RA Food Focus is the quarterly newsletter of MAF Regulatory Authority. It is provided for general information only and people requiring specific information should contact the Authority. Food Focus welcomes feedback and suggestions for future editions.

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