



Abattoir Assurance

Assurance schemes started back in the early 1990's by the retailers in response to various food scares (Swine Fever, BSE etc). Originally this was focussed at farm level but has also be introduced through the chain to markets, livestock transport and abattoirs over the last 15 years.

The primary role of assurance from the Retail perspective is 'due diligence'. The Food Safety Act 1990 requires all steps of the chain to take all reasonable precautions to protect their customers. Retailers and retail outlets have used assurance to deliver this in their supply chains.

Assurance needs to be credible and deliver real benefits to the members and their customers. The principle of assurance is based on independent inspection and the fact that it is not government owned or controlled. From the public point of view, they trust the retailers and other outlets that are supplying meat to them, to provide product which is 'safe'. Research has shown that consumers in particular, do not trust any organisation with government input and hence the retailers put the emphasis on independent inspections e.g. assurance as part of their own brand messages. If the likes of ABM wasn't around the retailers would insist on doing inspections themselves (in fact some already do!) and some plants supplying multiple retailers may be subjected to even more inspections!

Abattoirs in particular are subjected to a number of inspections, MHS, OVS, Food Hygiene regulations, Beef labelling regulations to name but a few, however all these have affiliations to government and as such the retailers will not use them alone to promote the safety of their meat and underpin their brands. Enforcement authorities, although working to a national remit, often interpret the criteria in different ways as they is little overarching governance.

The ABM standards are consistently applied across the board, giving greater confidence in the outcome of inspections.

Specific beef and lamb issues, such as verification of assurance (adding to credibility of product labels) is not covered by any other enforcement agency, likewise with the welfare at slaughter. There is specific legislation on stun to stick times and stunning methods and the MHS and OV are in part responsible for this, no one body, accept assurance schemes, are consistently checking this. The standards also require staff to be trained under recognised course such as the Bristol Animal Welfare Office course, which is currently above any legal requirement.

If the demand for assurance wasn't there, assurance wouldn't be where it is today and underpinning both the Red Tractor Logo and EBLEX Quality Standard Marks. ABM reviewed its standards in 2005 to ensure they were applicable to both large and small/medium sized businesses and to allowed better integration with the BRC standard. Ongoing work is looking at further streamlining standards in line with others such as BQAP (Pigs) and NACB (Catering butchers) to minimise the burden from assurance on processors.

Assured Product Intake Flow Chart

