The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is increasing the scope and amount of its on-farm audits. This information sheet explains what we will be looking at and why.

Since 2005 MPI Verification Services has run an on-farm verification programme focusing on farms where the main activity is the supply of beef cattle, sheep/lambs, deer, goats or horses to export meat slaughter premises. The programme underpins the export certification that MPI provides for export of our animal products to the European Union (EU).

MPI has provided a commitment to the EU that veterinarians working at export meat slaughter premises will carry out on-farm verification, as a prerequisite for exports covered by the NZ/EU Sanitary Agreement.

The programme will continue to have an educational component for both the export meat slaughter premises and farmers/suppliers involved. However, a more targeted follow-up and, if appropriate, investigation and enforcement programme will be introduced for verification visits where problems are identified. This may include restricting product from overseas markets.

In the past, the scope of these audits has been on the accuracy of Animal Status Declarations that are selected at each registered meat slaughter premises.

Following the findings of the 2007, 2008 and 2011 European Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) visits to New Zealand, MPI has provided a commitment to the EU that we will increase the amount of on-farm verification (from 600 farms to 900 visited annually) and broaden the scope.

The specific areas included in the programme for review are now:

- Animal Status Declarations, animal movement and identification;
- use and control of hormone growth promotants (HGP);
- use of veterinary medicines, pesticides and other farm chemicals – including withholding times and treatment;
- use of ruminant protein (meat and bone meal etc) and the prohibition of feeding to ruminants;
- imported animal control and identification;
- Tb testing and movement control requirements for cattle and deer;
- requirements relating to Johnes disease vaccination;
- a voluntary section covering supplier knowledge of of the relevant animal welfare codes.

ANIMAL STATUS DECLARATIONS (ASD)

The ASD form is a vital component of the market eligibility system that supports the New Zealand government’s ability to provide assurances to overseas countries by way of certification. The form provides vital information about the identified animals to the next person in charge and ultimately to the processor. This acts as the animal’s “passport”. It carries the “need to know” information along the food chain.

An ASD must accompany animals when moving off farm – to sale yards, new owners or meat processing plants. It is even required to pass on the ASD to new owners if a farm is sold as a going concern.

ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION

The current system of animal identification is mandated for cattle and deer under Biosecurity (Animal Identification Systems) Regulations 1999 and is administered by the Animal Health Board (AHB).

The verification programme will look at what form of identification is used on the farm, particularly for cattle and deer, with an interest in the implementation of NAIT.

TB MOVEMENT CONTROL

One of the main drivers for animal ID is the control of Tb in New Zealand. ASD forms contain details of a farm’s status and the status of the animals submitted for slaughter.

IMPORTED ANIMALS

Under the regulations, animals imported to New Zealand are specifically ear-tagged following their arrival into the country and are then tracked throughout their life.

The owners of some types of imported animals and genetic material are required to comply with reporting obligations, as set out in the Biosecurity (Imported Animals, Embryos, and Semen Information) Regulations 1999. For example, notification is required within four hours of the animal’s death if from an illness, and within seven days if from injury or old age. Animal status reports are also required annually.

If you have imported animals on your property and they have reached the end of their functional lives, you need to be aware of your obligations for disposal.
AGRICULTURAL COMPOUNDS, VETERINARY MEDICINES AND AGRI-CHEMICALS

A key responsibility of farmers and suppliers of animals is to ensure animal products produced in, and exported from, New Zealand are free of potentially harmful substances, including pesticides and antibiotic residues. This responsibility includes maintaining written treatment records and adherence to withdrawal times.

There have been examples of overseas authorities detecting residues in imported New Zealand animal products. Examples include pesticides in beef to Korea and antibiotics in lamb to France. These have caused issues with the credibility of our New Zealand system. International reputations are hard-earned and easy to lose.

The registration, control and use of the above compounds are administered by MPI under the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicine (ACVM) Act 1997.

HORMONAL GROWTH PROMOTANTS (HGP)

The use of HGP in cattle is strictly controlled and is legislated under the HGP Specifications Notice, available on the MPI website. The specification requires that HGP are implanted by a veterinarian or a trained technician under his/her direct control. All animals that have been treated need to be identified and registered by the veterinarian into the national database.

There are specific requirements for farmers or suppliers who use HGP in their animals.

MPI Verification Services verifiers target a selection of HGP suppliers for the farm visits. If farmers have submitted HGP-treated animals then questions may be asked regarding the on-farm programme and the records that are kept of implanted animals.

RUMINANT PROTEINS

New Zealand is recognised as being free of a specific group of diseases called TSEs (Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies).

TSEs are invariably fatal diseases characterised by lengthy incubation and neurological signs. The animal diseases in this group are scrapie in sheep, Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease in cattle, and chronic wasting disease of deer (CWD).

New Zealand, while declared free of these diseases, has regulations in place to control the feeding of ruminant protein to other ruminants. This is covered by the Ruminant Protein Regulations 1999.

ANIMAL WELFARE

This component of the audit has previously been outside of the scope of the ASD. An animal welfare statement is now included on the ASD. This is in response to a request by Industry to help raise awareness with persons in charge of animals about their obligations under the Animal Welfare Act (which is administered by MPI).

New Zealand has established a reputation for good animal welfare practices with our overseas trading partners. The humane care and husbandry of animals providing foodstuffs is increasingly important with some international consumers overseas demanding to know that these animals are treated well.

An owner or person in charge of an animal has a duty of care to ensure that the needs of those animals are provided for. These needs are known as the Five Freedoms:

» proper and sufficient food and water;
» adequate shelter;
» the opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour;
» physical handling in a way which minimises the likelihood of unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress;
» protection from, and rapid diagnosis of, any significant injury or disease.

One of the purposes of your verifier visit is to gauge farmer knowledge of animal welfare requirements.