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Proposals to guarantee the quality of animal feeds

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SUMMARY – This paper describes the principles and procedures followed in France in order to guarantee the quality of animal feeds. The establishment of the official certification ISO9000, the application of the 95/96/CE directive, the creation of a French feed manufacturers raw material commission, the implementation of procedures for the traceability of raw materials, the elaboration of practice guidelines for the sector and the generalization of labels in each feed are key issues in order to provide a maximum safety guarantee for feeds.

Key words: Animal feeds, quality safety, traceability, France.

RESUME – *"Propositions pour garantir la qualité des aliments destinés aux animaux". Cet article décrit les principes et les procédures observés en France afin de garantir la qualité des aliments bétail. L'établissement de la certification officielle ISO 9000, l'application de la directive 95/96CE, la création d'une commission française des matières premières en alimentation animale, la mise en place des procédures de traçabilité des matières premières, l'élaboration de lignes directrices pratiques pour le secteur et la généralisation des étiquettes pour chaque aliment sont les éléments clés pour permettre une garantie maximale de sécurité pour les aliments bétail.*

Mots-clés : *Aliments pour animaux, qualité, sécurité, traçabilité, France.*

Introduction

The animal nutrition industry, being a link in animal production channels, has taken into account the issue of identification and control of hazard points within its sector for many years, thus contributing to comply with public health in relation with foods.

Quality assurance

In France, the quality assurance schemes began in our professional sector by translating the ISO 9000 system of reference in 1990. Since then, animal feed firms have undertaken a quality assurance scheme, whose objective was the quality and traceability of products and, for some of them, the official certification ISO 9000. This implementation of the quality assurance policy is *of interest for all production levels*: from the purchase of raw materials to the manufacturers, from the monitoring of manufactured products to the services provided to livestock farmers.

Among French feed manufacturers, almost 80 firms representing approximately 70% of the production have already obtained the certification.

About a hundred more firms are presently following this process.

Approval and registration of animal nutrition firms

The 95/69/CE directive establishes an approval or registration for firms that intervene in the animal nutrition sector: from additives and raw materials to animal feeds. This directive, by now, has certainly been retranscribed in national legislations of all member states of the EU.

This directive sets up the approval prior to activity or registration (depending on the case) of operators, based on technical requirements very similar to ISO 9000 (approval: 75% of ISO 9000) and

HACCP. Traceability, control of hazards are the key words of these standards to which feed manufacturers are nowadays well prepared: their requests should be submitted to Veterinary Services before the summer 2000 in our country.

Thus, quality assurance has now become compulsory in animal feeding.

Nevertheless, it is regrettable that this approval should not apply to all operators intervening in the sector of animal nutrition. Standards have been interpreted in such a way that some operators are not obliged to be approved nor are they subject to registration. They will simply remain unknown to control services (this problem occurs especially for firms or operators mixing raw materials, for some livestock farmers-manufacturers, etc.). As far as public health is concerned, a deadlock such as this one is not acceptable.

Raw materials

The requirements for the animal feed sector have yet to be increased.

Convinced of the need to unite in order to improve the quality of raw materials provided, the French feed manufacturers in 1992 decided to create a raw material commission within their association.

The purpose of this commission shall be to improve the scope of quality of raw materials used, by: (i) proposing technical measures such as minimum acceptable levels, dissuasive price reductions, precise definitions of constituents; (ii) proposing draft schedules of conditions, terms of negotiation with suppliers' associations; and (iii) encouraging raw material suppliers to better understand the sector's requirements.

Various schedules of conditions have thus been signed between manufacturers and suppliers: mill residues, sunflower cakes, meat meals, fats, etc.

Two crises have shattered the animal production sector, namely BSE (bovine spongiform encephalitis) and dioxins. Their origin lay in a defect in the process for raw material obtention. This highlights the present importance of our actions aiming at quality and safety of raw materials.

In France, the case of the incorporation of sewage sludge in meat meals, which caused great concern during the summer 1999, made feed manufacturers to feel quite rightly outraged. For the future, the sector's requirements shall yet increase to an upper level. The associations of the animal nutrition sector are working together with knackers to prepare a positive list of products that can be included in the elaboration of meat meals. This list shall be used to prepare a system of reference to get the certification for the product obtained.

We decided to extend this scheme to all our suppliers, and not necessarily to exclude certain products, but to determine a much more accurate characterization of raw materials, especially co-products. This tougher requirement from our suppliers is aimed at ensuring a supplementary element of safety guarantee for raw materials. Characterization and transparency in manufacturing processes are the new demands on raw material suppliers.

It is not excluded that some areas of processing or reuse of certain ingredients, which are to be converted into raw materials for animal feeding, be required an approval such as the one of the directive No. 95/69 for feed manufacturers.

Traceability

For several years, feed manufacturers have implemented procedures for tracing raw materials and feeds to their feedmills and to the farms. This traceability goes from raw materials to the label on manufactured feeds stating delivery indications: with these data it will be possible to trace an element back from a livestock farm to one or more raw materials included in a feed (in the case of husbandry disorders) or to trace it forwards, from a particular raw material (when a problem is suspected at this level) to a livestock farm to which it has been delivered.

These traceability data have allowed, noticeably, to keep record of all suspicious products in the dioxin case, while waiting for analysis results.

Traceability is a requirement that must presently be implemented by the whole sector of manufacturers, either through different schedules of conditions, or through approval itself.

Practice guidelines for the sector

In order to harmonise the practice of professionals, in areas where animal and human safety could be at stake, animal nutrition associations prepare practice guidelines which, afterwards, are validated by public authorities.

In France, practice guidelines for manufacturing medicinal feeds were the first to exist. They date back to 1988.

In 1996, practice guidelines for controlling cross-contamination by meat meals were implemented in collaboration with public authorities.

In 1999, the approval of animal nutrition firms provided the opportunity to prepare practice guidelines for approval, which is an internal working instrument for manufacturers, who are thus guided in their implementation of hazard analysis and control procedures, as required by the regulations.

All these guidelines are supplementary elements to guarantee animal feed safety. Their implementation is fast being extended everywhere under the combined action of associations, public authorities (validation) and animal production channels (their implementation is required within schedules of production conditions).

Practice guidelines also exist at European level, prepared by our European Federation, FEFAC. They can be obtained on request, for professionals wishing to use them as a reference example.

The label: The feed passport

The regulations on animal feeding require that each feed should be released with an information label. This label includes various obligatory items, determined at European level (some labels have been given to participants as an example).

The label gives information on the origin of the feed (manufacturer, intermediate dealer, etc.), its composition, nutritional values, additive content, manufacturing date, and any indication related to lot, precise instructions of use (regarding basic allowance in the case of ruminant feeds).

The label is the feed passport. It is the element that allows the feed to be traced back (the delivery note, in the case of bulk products, can serve as a label).

Conclusion

All these elements are tools that can be used daily by feed manufacturers to provide a maximum safety guarantee.

Prevention related to raw materials and feed manufacturing, controls in both directions, traceability and contingency procedures in case of problems, are instruments for food safety in the animal nutrition industry.