



QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DEER TB CONTROL

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INTRODUCTION

Many Veterinarians feel frustration when confronted with evidence of variation of application and interpretation of Tb tests in the field. This dissatisfaction extends to the difficulties in finding accurate and up-to-date versions of the scheme rules, area boundaries, and test intervals.

The variation in practice standards from across the profession plus the lack of a set of rules and standards has resulted in the need for a profession driven quality assurance system for Tb testing deer to be established. This will ensure our client, the farmer, knows he/ she is receiving a consistent standard of test application and interpretation irrespective of the area or person testing.

The introduction of the Biosecurity Act 1993 provides for the Animal Health Board (AHB) in its Pest Management Strategy for control of Bovine Tb to have Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) accredited Tb testing officers in the field Tb testing deer and cattle.

In order to accredit Veterinarians for this role a system of training and audit of performance had to be put in place, to satisfy the CVO and the AHB.

We therefore needed to develop a Quality Assurance scheme if veterinarians were to be allowed to continue Tb testing deer into the future.

The result of both of these needs has been the development of the NZVA Deer Tb testing Quality Assurance scheme (Deer TbQA).

QUALITY ASSURANCE & MANAGEMENT

Quality Management provides a pathway to Quality Assurance. It affects everything that we do in our profession, e.g. Surgery, diagnostics, and companion animal hospital standards. All of these aspects specifically relate to the impact of service delivery to the client.

In the Deer Tb testing QA scheme we have two clients,

One The AHB as the contractor of our services to Tb test deer in the field

Two The farmer who owns the deer and who ultimately is to become responsible for the payment of Tb control on their farm

Quality Management is a set of tools, which involves ideas and principles as well as specific skills

Most importantly the achievement of quality service delivery involves changing the way that we behave. It involves improving performance, and monitoring consistency of technique

Quality assurance systems are based around three components

1. Competency standards

Competency standards or specifications are defined as the level of performance expected in employment within an industry, occupation or function

Competence is defined as the application of knowledge and skills in a practical situation in such a way as to satisfy prescribed standards

For the NZVA Deer Tb testing QA scheme the Veterinary Testing Officer manual forms the standards by which competency is assessed. The test specifications included in the manual were formulated by NZVA Deer Branch, MAF, AHB, the Deer Farmers Association, and The Deer Research Lab

Any veterinarian Tb testing deer needs to be totally conversant with these specifications. Also included in the manual are the following sections

- Scheme Layout
- Deer Tb control scheme rules
- Test conduct and procedures
- Documentation requirements
- Critical necropsy techniques
- Epidemiology of Bovine Tb in NZ
- Interpretation of test results
- Glossary of terms and recommended references

The role of the veterinarian in Tb control extends far beyond the physical performance of testing procedures and reporting of results

- Having full knowledge and understanding of the theoretical basis of each test. This includes sensitivity and specificity and the factors which influence interpretation of results
- Knowledge of disease, i.e. epidemiology, and pathogenesis
- Being able to evaluate circumstances on the farm and the factors that may be contributing to the disease problem
- Being able to educate and inform the client about disease, and testing and control procedures
- Offer advice on management, integrated with other species, on testing and control programmes, including testing timelines
- Perform critical necropsy where necessary

- Interact and report to MAF Qual and other clinical practitioners where necessary

2. Audit

The purpose of the Audit is to achieve quality through good practice by facilitating change. Without audit the clients (both farmer and AHB) cannot be sure of consistency of service delivery to the standards laid down. The accrediting body (CVO) also needs the assurance that those he accredits under the Pest Management Strategy continue to perform to the standards he was advised they should be.

The audit component of the Tb QA scheme has two levels

Internal audit

The in house audit is undertaken by Tb Assessing Officers (TAOs). These Veterinarians are specifically trained, and have a high level of experience in Tb testing deer in the field in NZ. The training course for them will be undertaken at the conclusion of this conference. They have been selected both on their experience level and also geographical distribution around the country.

The initial component of the internal audit is the assessment of veterinarians wishing to become Veterinary Testing Officers (VTOs). This is in effect a 100% audit, by the sitting of a multiple choice theory examination, and then practical and oral assessment on farm. Passing of these is a prerequisite for continuing to Tb test deer in the field. It is also designed to facilitate improvement up to a minimum of the specified standards by those veterinarians not performing to this level.

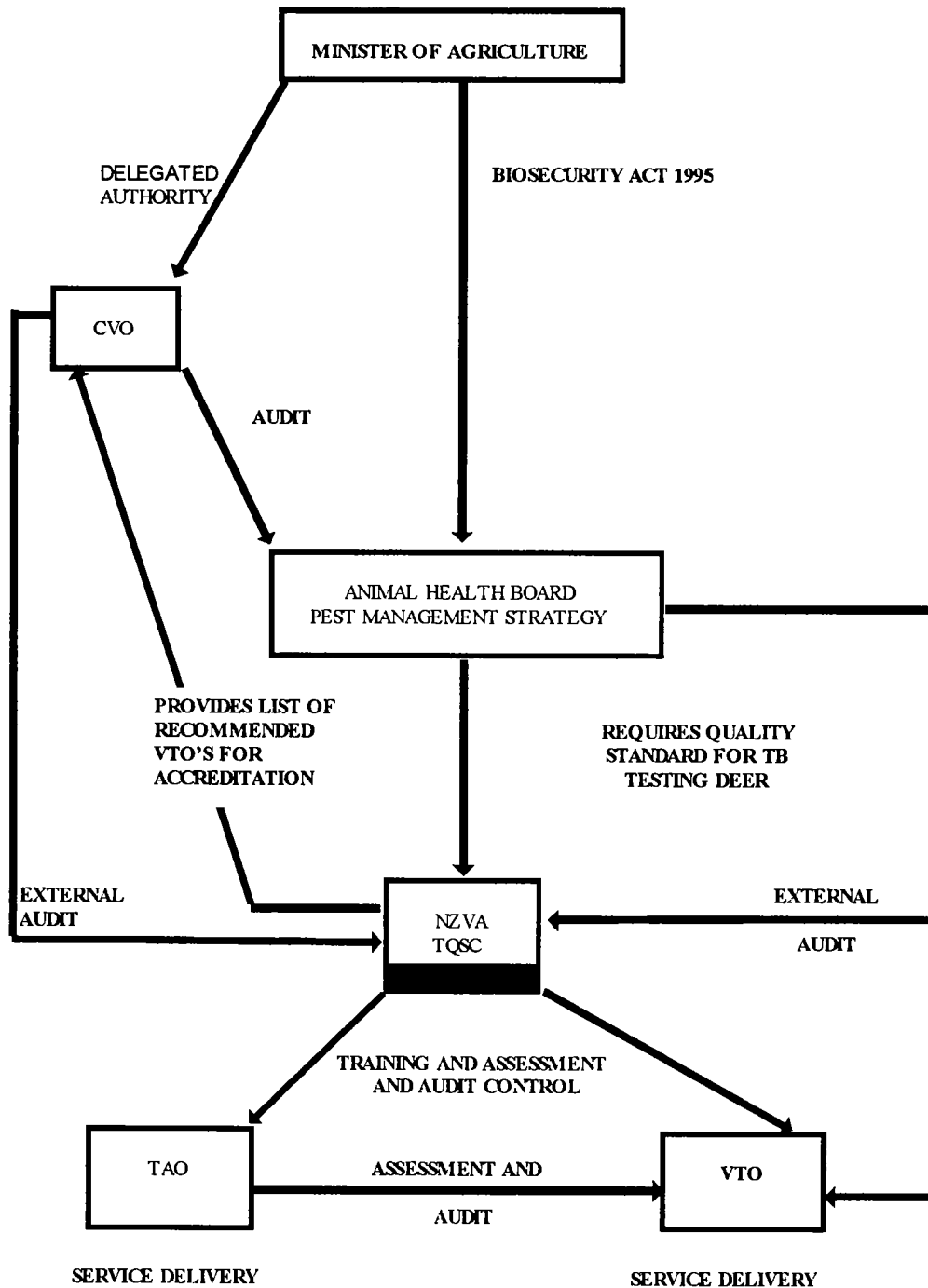
For those veterinarians already very experienced and performing to the level expected this initial assessment should not be difficult.

The ongoing audit of qualified VTOs is to be done on both a random and targeted basis.

The random audit will select VTOs for assessment on a statistically derived level from the MAF QUAL data base. The selection level will be negotiated between the CVO and NZVA on an annual basis. It could involve for instance all VTOs that consistently had zero test positive rates in all the Tb skin tests.

The targeted audit will be derived from feedback from MAFQUAL data base, relating to CCT usage, poor performance in initial assessment, herd breakdowns, or as a result of complaint by other Veterinarians, farmers, from RAHACs or MAF.

FIGURE 1.: HIERACHY OF NZVA DEER TB TESTING QUALITY ASSURANCE



External

Both the CVO as accrediting authority and the AHB as Pest Management Agency for Bovine Tb control need to be satisfied that the scheme is delivering what the NZVA is reporting. This guarantee can only come from an externally derived audit.

This procedure will usually comprise examination of internal audit results but could involve total examination of all levels of the scheme.

A summary of the hierarchy of the Tb QA scheme is shown in figure 1 taken from the manual.

3. Compliance

Once the Pest Management Strategy is adopted by the AHB (expected to be late 1995) then the VTO will have a legal obligation to meet the specified standard. Failure to pass initial assessment and / or non compliance of a serious nature will result in the CVO either refusing initial accreditation or removing accreditation from a veterinarian.

Non compliance can be classified as either minor or major.

Minor Does not alter the outcome of Tb control or eradication. This could be for incorrect filling of an allocation form or acting outside reporting deadlines.

Major These actions could act to alter the outcome of Tb control or eradication.

The most recent example I have of this potential effect is the placement of reactor tags in test positive animals. It is the testing officers responsibility to directly supervise the placement of the reactor tag. Failure to do so has the potential to have a non identified reactor arrive at the works and potentially jeopardise an entire chain of export product. The veterinarian could be financially liable for this loss as well as losing their VTO status.

A similar situation applies to the removal of reactor tags if an animal is cleared by ancillary tests. It is the VTOs responsibility to inform the farmer of the need to remove these tags if they are not removed personally by the testing officer. It is preferable that this be done in writing so a clear audit trail can be demonstrated in the event of a deer going to the works or for sale without their reactor tags removed.

A number of minor non compliance actions can act to become a major non compliance in some circumstances. For example continual failure to comply with test interval requirements, or incorrect use of allocation forms. These actions will result in the VTO becoming the subject of a targeted audit, and could result in subsequent recommendation for loss of accredited status.

CONCLUSION

Now that the frame work for the Quality Assurance Scheme is in place it is totally up to the individual veterinarians applying for VTO status to maintain the integrity and standards required of them. This system is demonstrating an initiative by NZVA and deer veterinarians, but will only work if those

participating follow the specifications described in the manual exactly Failure to do this not only has the potential to compromise the veterinary profession, but to also compromise that individuals standing within the profession and with their clients

