

BRUCE KAPERNICK

NFAS AUDITOR – QUEENSLAND

Working in partnership with operators is an essential element of auditing NFAS-accredited feedlots, auditor BRUCE KAPERNICK says.

Ensuring the integrity of the *National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) Rules and Standards* is the core role of an independent feedlot auditor.

As part of the certification process conducted by AUS-MEAT, all of the scheme's approximately 400 accredited feedlots undergo a third-party audit every year.

One of half a dozen feedlot auditors in Queensland, Bruce Kapernick travels throughout the central region that runs from roughly west of Rockhampton to west of Bundaberg.

"It's all done very professionally," Kapernick says.

"The auditors are genuinely interested in the industry and we want to make sure the NFAS is operating correctly."

Kapernick has been auditing NFAS feedlots since the Scheme's inception in 1995. He has first-hand experience of dairy, beef and pork farming, along with cropping. Having also held middle-management positions in meatworks and been a meat inspector has given him a uniquely multi-faceted perspective.



"I've seen everything from the primary production side right through to putting meat into a box," he says. "Having a fairly broad background, I can understand the challenges a feedlot operator may encounter from time to time."

The number of NFAS audits allocated to an auditor is dependent on their location and availability. Kapernick conducts between 20 and 50 feedlot audits in any given year.

The logistical challenges of deploying auditors to regional areas means Kapernick normally covers his home range in Central Queensland, conducting a variety of different audits including feedlots. AUS-MEAT also has a policy of rotating auditors at least every five years; this is consistent with industry program requirements and aids in maintaining the integrity of the system.



In Kapernick's region he deals predominantly with smaller feedlots carrying hundreds rather than thousands or tens of thousands of head.

"It takes a minimum of three hours to conduct an audit on one of these smaller feedlots," he says. "With the larger yards, it can take quite a bit longer just for the physical inspection alone, in addition to reviewing the quality management system and associated records. That can take anything up to a day – it just depends on the size of the operation and how good their systems are, as well as the overall preparedness of the staff involved with the audit."

He says trust earned over many years has given lotfeeding a certain degree of autonomy where legislative authorities are concerned. "They're still watching; they haven't just handed it over – but they're certainly putting more reliance on industry to regulate itself, which is good."

Kapernick says this is due in large part to the "consistency of the NFAS".

"It provides feedlot operators with a defined framework to operate within – 'boundaries', you could call them. They know what's expected."

Kapernick says that once a 'corrective action' notice has been issued, a feedlot has a specified timeframe in which to obtain and forward to the auditor the relevant document – usually by email.

He says the strengthening of standards around animal welfare, biosecurity, environmental incident reporting and risk mitigation simply builds on and enhances existing elements of the NFAS.

"We've been doing a lot of this for years," he says. "It's all basically been there but the Standards have just been tightened up and tweaked to provide more clarity."

When conducting an NFAS audit Kapernick provides regular verbal feedback to operators.

"We have to address all the elements of the Standards, which includes commenting on the systems and evidence at hand to demonstrate compliance. Verifying that processes are in place and actually happening can be done in a number of ways: through records, visual assessment and the feedlot operator explaining the process. In reality, each of these plays a part in ensuring the systems are operating in accordance with the approved quality assurance manual.

"If an issue is detected, we discuss it straight away; we don't keep it to ourselves. By the time the exit meeting comes, the staff involved in the audit know exactly what we've discussed already."

Kapernick says establishing robust systems needs to be done only once.

"The people who've stayed in the NFAS have gone from strength to strength. Once you get a structure in place that works, you just keep working with it."

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme, phone AUS-MEAT Limited on 07 3361 9200 or visit <https://www.ausmeat.com.au/services/list/livestock/nfas/>