

Importance of Product Licences

Robin Pickering of Shep Fair Products outlines the complexities of running an animal health business and the vital importance of the licencing system to David Stone

After leaving the army Robin Pickering trained in estate management as a mature student at The Royal Agricultural College. After graduating he became assistant agent at Stowell Park, Cirencester, where his future business partner, Michael Fair, was assistant farm manager.

Robin moved to Wales as resident agent to George Williams of Craig-y-bwla, Crickhowell. George Williams, president of Christie Tyler Furnishing company, wanted an agent to get involved in the business side. The estate had 1000 acres of farmland, 38 furniture companies and a hotel.

Michael Fair joined the estate one year later as farming partner with George Williams on a 500 acre farm. Robin and Michael's future partnership linked their agricultural and business expertise.

NZ influence

When George Williams retired, Robin and Michael formed Shep Fair Products. They produced, from 1984, Golden Hoof Zinc Sulphate footbath. Michael Fair and his wife with their New Zealand connections realised that New Zealand used zinc sulphate footbaths almost totally whereas in the UK we used formaldehyde. Farmers here were geared up to the walk-through footbaths whereas zinc sulphate needed a wider bath where groups of sheep could be held for at least two minutes.

Trials had been conducted in New Zealand and a two-minute standing time produced slightly more favourable results over formaldehyde. It is also odourless, kills bacteria and promotes healthy regrowth. It doesn't harden the hoof and is painless to ewes and lambs (which can be done together) and very importantly is not harmful to the operator.

With these advantages they decided to go for it as their main product. At

the start Robin taught English to foreign business people at a local centre (one of his students was Francoise Leotard, the present French Defence Secretary!) and Michael Fair kept on his farm.



Robin Pickering

In 1990 Robin Pickering took over as sole proprietor of Shep Fair Products and developed further products with Bill Tulloch of Colecton Research of Highworth. One of these is Golden Udder, a licenced alternative to antibiotics. It is absorbed through the skin and extremely effective against mastitis with no need to discard milk or face the danger of inclusion in the tank. They now supply the UK, Ireland and

Hungary. A development of Golden Hoof has also been produced - "Golden Hoof Plus". This has a surfactant included, which increases the absorption of the zinc sulphate into the hoof.

The veterinary licencing of products used in the treatment of animals is extremely important in Robin Pickering's philosophy and governs his whole approach to his business. "The licencing of a product guarantees the farmer that the medicinal claims made have been proven and the quality and manufacture is monitored and inspected to ensure that the product is up to the requirement," he says. "When you buy a licenced medication it is up to the standards quoted, and it works."

Shep Fair products are distributed through farm suppliers such as Wynnstay Farmers, Welsh Farm Supplies, Countrywide Stores, Central Wool Growers, Farmway, Mole Valley Farmers, WCE, A C Burn and all other major agriculture merchants and veterinary suppliers.

Licencing

"A huge amount of work has gone into the trailing and licencing of the products," explains Robin. "To gain a licence the product must first pass laboratory trials where it must be shown to be effective in a laboratory environment. Once achieved, field trials must be designed and carried out (in the case of Golden Hoof by the New Zealand Government Ministry of Agriculture and in the case of Golden Udder by ADAS using 800 cows for one year).

"Once a licence is granted the product has to be manufactured under the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in approved conditions on licenced premises. Golden Hoof is produced in Crickhowell and before release to the market the batched product is inspected by a Directorate approved person

who is a chartered chemist. The annual cost is several thousand pounds."

Robin Pickering is scathing about the way in which the licencing process is suffering a lack of publicity to the farming community and is being 'avoided' by some manufacturers.

"The licencing system is to the benefit of the farmer, ensuring that those products bearing a licence number perform as described both in efficacy and quality. Unfortunately, so little publicity has been undertaken to inform the farmer, he is generally unaware of how to recognise a licenced product and the genuine benefits that they bring.

"Because of the costs involved in licencing, many products avoid the process using what are known as weasel words which allude to medicinal properties without actually stating them in black and white. These products have no requirement to conform to any standards. They can be manufactured anywhere, in anything, with anything and therefore can be sold at a

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greatly reduced price in comparison to those that hold licences.

"It seems likely that if this state of affairs is allowed to continue the farming industry is likely to face another disaster by the introduction of some unproven, uncontrolled substance being given to animals which then passes into the food chain with the dire consequences which that has been shown in the past to bring about."

The formation and development of Shep Fair Products illustrates some of the decisions and character traits necessary to succeed in business.

It also shows that small companies based in the countryside, serving the countryside can compete with the large multinationals.

The safeguards given by the licencing system so forcefully described by Robin Pickering are for the protection of our industry and should be given our full support. Perhaps the licencing authority should be proactive in publicising the benefits?

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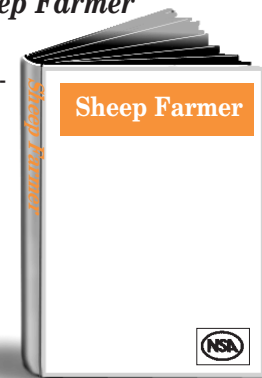
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