

FAN Meat Scheme - Blessing or Curse?

Namibian meat producers have in the past frequently complained of a lack of development of markets for their product. The wave of globalisation has become a reality and has opened new doors in the process. It is virtually the case that where the producer would previously wait for the market, the market now waits for the producer and it is the onus of the producer to serve the needs of such markets. Although numerous markets are becoming available and accessible, each has unique needs and regulations regarding food quality and safety. The more profitable the market, the higher the requirements to entry.

The quality of meat can nowadays only be partially evaluated by visual inspection, with the safety of food becoming an integral part of quality. The history of a portion of meat, traced from the birth of the animal in question to the store shelf, has become essential with respect to quality. The public wants to know exactly what is consumed and therefore the history of what is presented on the plate has become instrumental in the determination of quality. Knowledge of the origin of specifically meat products is a necessity for the consumer. In the event that the origin cannot be identified, the product is unwelcome, particularly on the European shelf.

This places the ball in the court of the producer. Where previously we *pushed* our product into a market, we are now increasingly dependent on forces that *pull* the product into the market. Indeed, the world can be our market provided that we are prepared to take the correct steps. We must realise that the traceability of our product will become vital. This immediately implies the identification of animals and the implementation of a system to trace animals and meat movements. This is the first essential step. Any producer who does not recognise this necessity denies Namibian meat shelf-space on the overseas market and, by implication, accepts that meat will continue to be transacted only in Namibian Dollars.



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Irrespective of the system to be implemented, additional input will be demanded by the producers, abattoirs and processors. The system that needs to be implemented to ensure a greater playing field for Namibia is Farm Assured Namibian Meat (FAN MEAT). It ascribes to the producers additional administrative functions by tasking them with the responsibility of animal identification and record keeping of animal movement. Success is therefore contingent upon the commitment and positive attitude of producers. A long-term perspective of the benefits inherent in the system, including ancillary benefits such as improved control of stock theft, clearly indicates that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

The FAN Meat scheme holds the future for meat producers. All role-players in the Namibian meat industry will need to co-operate to optimise the scheme for Namibia, thereby accessing the best possible markets.