



The Machine Minder

Control and traceability – yesterday's control but today's necessity

Over the last twenty years we have seen many different formats for tracing leather through the tannery. Most have tried to link selection with production and inventory control and have allowed tanneries to take at least a small step in the direction of just-in-time management.

There is one business approach that says that you inevitably grow out of your history, a sort of path dependency, which is resource based. A company finds itself building resources and skills and then adds to them in various ways as it needs additional technologies to meet the demands of a changing marketplace. Consequently it is quite logical that the Australian designed Gibson Bass Hide System should link with a computer-based data system to allow tanners to despatch a pallet of wet blue or finished leather in which the origin of each individual piece can be traced right back to the abattoir.

Indeed the Gibson Bass stamper evolved from many years of work, and would probably never have been developed were it not for the Australian Government funding provided for it in the early years.

The Gibson Bass Hide System is now a well-recognised means of effectively stamping an identifier on a hide or skin which should, in normal circumstances, remain legible throughout the process. By linking this into the Tannery Management System (TMS), devised by Peter Jones, we have the level of traceability required to manage animal by-products in a time of diseases such as BSE and Foot and Mouth. Also based in Australia, TMS is offered by Systems Engineering Pty. Ltd. of Stirling, South Australia.

Following the right track

'Trace back' is very important these days as Peter Jones will tell you, "Even IKEA likes to be able to identify where each individual chair leg they sell came from so that if a chair is returned they can identify the origin of the timber, and that it was correctly grown and harvested in line with company policy."



In New Zealand today when exporting a container of wet blue it is a requirement to be able to nominate the origin of each hide by abattoir on each pallet."

TMS also allows a large amount of data about the hides and skins to be accumulated quickly and easily whilst they pass through production. Capable of handling any type of raw material and able to link the origin and mark with the software used, it is now possible to trace the hide, including splits and segments, at each and every stage. At the splitter or wet blue sorting stage, the hide stamp details are entered manually, and after that it is possible to set parameters on the equipment as to where the grain and the split (or drop as it is often called) should go.

The system works well where automatic handling and conveyors are used as the TMS monitors and directs each item, based on preset parameters.

For tanners who already have a computer-based recipe system, the TMS can work in conjunction with this, and can recognise the profile of every piece in the drum. On the other hand, the TMS itself includes a recipe programme which manages the run times and chemical usage and data can be exported as a pdf, word or excel file. It has not yet been integrated into an accounts package and this would be done on a case-by-case basis.

The system is intended to be run on its own server, and if production volumes are high, users are advised not to slow the system by making alternate demands on the server. A hierarchy of menus offers access to various staff levels, and it has been designed to be easy-to-use, even for those with little or no computer experience. A wide range of reports on quality yield and price can also be produced easily.

One interesting aspect is that TMS is designed without the concept of closure, so the tanner can always return and produce reports for any given moment. Many reports, at all levels, can be produced on yields and outcomes as well as a Total Inventory Report which covers opening stocks, incomings, production, grading, and outputs. On the final pallet each hide has a known position and can be despatched with export documents offering complete traceability.

TMM

