

SGS Wool Testing Services

Info-bulletin

Accreditation - ISO 17025 Certification - ISO 9000

On 27 Sep 96, SGS Wool Testing Services became the first laboratory in the world to be awarded ISO Guide 25 accreditation for their fleece testing services.

BACKGROUND

SGS Wool Testing Services have always believed that it's not enough to simply say that your services are of the highest quality, you have to prove it. The way to prove it is to have all your systems scrutinised by a recognised independent audit agency.

In 1990, coincident with the move of their central laboratory to purpose-built premises in Kilbirnie, Wellington, they gained TELARC laboratory accreditation for their normal range of core test services, including IWTO certification. In 1993 they extended their scope of accreditation to include the testing of bulk, and of Length after Carding (LAC), which was the first commercial LAC test line in the world. At the same time they also took on board the challenge to have their management systems certified against ISO 9002.

ACCREDITATION FOR FLEECE TESTING

During 1995 and 1996 SGS continued to invest in refining the quality of the services offered to the New Zealand wool industry. Mike Welham, their general manager, says: "As part of the ongoing review of our services, we asked ourselves the question as to why didn't we submit our fleece testing services to the same independent and detailed scrutiny as all our other services. Our fleece testing laboratory, opened in Timaru in 1989, and established using the most up to date equipment and processes, has always upheld a very high level of quality. Formal recognition of this was, however, hard to achieve when there were no accepted international standards for this type of service."

"Recent concerns in the industry about the standard of some fleece testing operations, and particularly suggestions that some operators were blatantly sacrificing quality for cost, emphasised the need to differentiate ourselves. As a leader in the wool testing industry, we could not afford to be associated with such rumours, and so we decided to demonstrate through independent audit that our fleece testing services were of as high a standard as the rest of our work."

"With the publishing of the draft joint Australia-New Zealand standard for fleece testing (AS/NZS 4492), we now had a benchmark against which we could work. This multipart Standard, which had input from all the major experts in Australasia, defines the sampling and testing methods that must be used in order to achieve the necessary accuracy and precision of results. The new Standard goes into considerable detail on the quality aspects of testing midside samples for the

ACCREDITATION & CERTIFICATION - THE DIFFERENCES

ISO 9000 certification

An organisation must have a documented management system which complies with the ISO 9000 requirements, and must be audited regularly to confirm that they do what their documents say.

ISO 17025 accreditation

Laboratories must comply with ISO 9000, and additionally their staff and equipment must satisfy independent peer experts that they are suitable for the work - staff must be qualified and experienced; and equipment and facilities must comply with the test methods, be calibrated and maintained. They must demonstrate that they can perform consistently in interlaboratory trials without bias.

purposes of animal ranking or lot building, and effectively sets minimum standards which all respectable fleece testing operations should adopt."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Apart from the fact that SGS Wool Testing Services is the first wool laboratory in the world to be accredited for all their services, from fleece testing, through sampling supervision, to testing and certification, what does this mean to a client?

Most importantly, it means that we are accountable for all our work. There are no second-class services in our business. The same quality assurance systems apply to everything we do, so that test results are repeatable, animal to animal, sale lot to sale lot, shipping container to shipping container, year after year. Test results are accurate, whether they be for yield on a single midside sample, or for length after carding on 100 tonnes of scoured wool.

Having your wool tested by SGS also means that you have access to world-class quality services provided by over 36,000 staff in over 160 countries. Wherever your wool goes, SGS has someone nearby to help, whether it be for technical advice, customs certification, or claims resolution. In most cases these services are also ISO 9000 certified.

IWTO LICENSED LABORATORY #2

From 01 Jan 1997, all laboratories providing IWTO certificates need to be licensed by IWTO for the specific certification services they provide. In order to become licensed a laboratory has to be ISO Guide accredited for those services. SGS Wool Testing Services are Licensed Laboratory number 2, covering all the possible laboratory-based methods.

Fleece testing isn't covered by IWTO certification, but SGS Wool Testing Services believe that it's as important for growers to know that they get the same quality of service.