



Soapbox Robert Verkerk

No place for conventional feed in organic rations

Continued derogations leave sector vulnerable to criticism

■ Apparently there is not enough organic feed available to feed all-organic diets to organic poultry.

The deemed solution is an ongoing derogation allowing 5% conventional feed to be included in organic diets.

The step to 100% organic diets was originally due in 2000 - a target the sector has missed by some 14 years and counting. Each time the ruling is set to come into force, the EU - allegedly with the overwhelming support of the UK feed industry - prolongs the derogation for a number of years, the latest being an extension to 2017.

Those against all-organic poultry diets argue that limited organic protein sources would restrict feed formulation to the detriment of animal health and performance. But the arguments invariably omit to mention that some organic poultry producers have fed 100% organic

diets for years, with no detrimental effects. Furthermore, rarely are the different justifications of an organic and conventional diet emphasised - organic supports the birds' natural development, while conventional is used to try to maximise production.

The derogation also undermines the confidence of anyone wishing to supply fully-organic proteins. Every time it is extended, it artificially suppresses demand and stifles future supply of new organic protein sources. It must be remembered that many of the proteins in question are by-products from starch production - a process that typically requires capital investment of several million pounds. Who is going to make such an investment as long as the derogation stays in place?

The degree to which chemically-produced feed in the organic food chain bothers the public is almost

certainly minimal, but only because so few are aware of it. But how much would it cost the sector if they were to become aware of it? A so-minded red top tabloid could inflict untold damage by deriding organic efficacy, potentially setting the sector back 20 years.

Perhaps the greatest concern is a perception of who in the feed industry has the most sway when it comes to keeping the derogation. Even mild scrutiny shows that a high proportion of those involved are major players in the conventional feed market, with their interest in organic slight by comparison. It poses the very serious question: Is the organic sector being run by conventional feed manufacturers?

Furthermore, it is permitted that the same manufacturing facility can be used to make both organic and conventional feed, which in turn means an abundance of conven-

tional raw materials are stored on the same site as organic raw materials. This is at odds with the rigorous separation of organic and non-organic for foods destined directly for the human food chain.

At a time when cross-contamination from GM and drugs, including antibiotics, is a major issue of concern, it is not unreasonable to suggest a tightening of the regulations is required.

Organics in the UK has challenges enough without placing landmines of this kind in its path. Conventional feed has no place in organics and the sooner the organic sector wakes up to this fact, the better.

Dr Robert Verkerk is executive and scientific director for the Alliance for Natural Health International, an advocacy group promoting natural diets and natural health care

Source: *Poultry World*, October 2014, www.fwi.co.uk/poultry