REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

2013

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

SAPA Research Selection and Training Committees
These Committees consist of ‘topic’ specialists who meet to consider and pass judgement on
input provided and or proposals made by Committee members or stakeholders outside of
SAPA. On reaching consensus, the Committee instructs the relevant SAPA representative to
effect the work required within defined boundaries. When cost implications apply, the
Management Committee signs off on the Committee decision.

The Research Selection and Training Committees’ outcomes include projects and programmes
on a once-off as well as continuous basis. In the period under review, these have been funded
primarily through the statutory levy. External funds raised were also used, including
approximately R2,3 million from government utilised by SAPA Training and Development.

Successful funding was also secured to the value of R1,2 million from the IDC for transformation
related research for programmes to be completed in 2014. While SAPA sponsors the Chair in
Poultry Health and Production at Pretoria University’s Onderstepoort campus, the Chair
incumbent, Professor Celia Abolnik, also raises external funding to supplement SAPA’s
contribution.

The statutory levy ended in the third quarter of 2013, so SAPA will have to raise additional
external funding to effect planned programmes going forward. In the latter part of 2013, due to
uncertainty relating to the levy renewal, some research requests were refused. In the levy
context, SAPA is responsible to the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC).

The SAPA Research Selection Committee and research related outputs
The Research Selection Committee evaluates research proposals that utilise funds made
available via the industry levy for market, trade and scientific research. Research must be of
broad-based practical advantage to the industry, covering disease management, production
management, abattoir operation and agricultural (poultry) economics. At least 20% of the
research must benefit the goals of industry transformation, assisting smallholder farmers
entering the commercial sector.

“Buy local – create a local career”
Small footprint. Big impact.
The three main components of SAPA’s research strategy are the provision of research facilities; ensuring poultry science lecturers and research students are fostered; and research programmes.

A lack of levy funds together with the 2013 SAPA strategy review process means activities in the period under review focussed only on applying funds to extend research facilities at Onderstepoort. This took the form of a bio-safety level 3 (BSL3) facility for research into serious and prevalent controlled pathogens that affect poultry, such as salmonellosis, avian influenza (AI) and Newcastle disease (ND).

To satisfy the industry’s objective of establishing the PDMA as a Public Private Partnership with the DAFF, the chief interaction is on areas of mutual interest - the ‘controlled’ diseases. As the DAFF imposes strict controls on laboratories performing diagnostic tests or experiments with these pathogens, any research or diagnostic procedures can only be performed under DAFF-approved BSL3 (Bio-safety level 3) conditions. A BSL3 laboratory has special engineering and design features suitable for work with infectious agents which may cause serious or potentially lethal disease as a result of exposure through inhalation. The facility cost approximately R2.5 million and was successfully completed at the end of 2013 under the guidance of Professor Celia Abolnik.

**Onderstepoort Research Progress**

The SAPA-funded mycoplasma hair study was published in ‘Poultry Science’ with an IF or Impact Factor of 1.7. The IF of an academic journal is a measure reflecting the average number of citations to recent articles published in the journal. It is frequently used as a proxy for the relative importance of a journal within its field, with journals with higher impact factors deemed to be more important than those with lower ones. It is available to interested parties, and has also been published in SAPA’s Poultry Bulletin.

Significant progress has been made with three Tshwane Animal Health Cluster / Technology Innovation Agency (TAHC / TIA) funded projects. These include culturing and full genomic sequencing of more than a dozen mycoplasma strains (historic and 2013 isolates); expression of influenza virus H5 and antigens and conjugate production for ostrich ELISA; and influenza virus isolation from wild ducks.

A new strain of Newcastle Disease virus, classified as genotype VIIa, was identified by Professor Abolnik as the cause of outbreaks in the country at present. This appears to be a recent introduction to the region from South East Asia according to phylogenetic analysis.

A number of postgraduate students are working under the Chair for their MSc and PhDs.

**University Relationships**

In the period under review, SAPA continued our engagement with various universities. This included the University of Pretoria on industry transformation research, with a focus on emerging farming market economics; the University of the Free State (UFS) on post-antibiotic disease control and meat science; the Tshwane University of Technology on abattoir operation; and Stellenbosch University on meat science. SAPA has also developed a new relationship with the University of Fort Hare and the associated agricultural college, Fort Cox, on matters relating to indigenous poultry production. These two institutions have developed the necessary research protocols relevant to this new arena that will benefit food security, job and wealth creation. This will be developed further in 2014 against a specific plan.
To foster student growth, SAPA sponsored the travel costs of two UFS post-graduates to present oral papers at the World Veterinary Poultry Association Annual Congress in France.

As mentioned in last year’s report, an essential output of this work is the creation of poultry centres of excellence that will support the industry – at a commercial and smallholder farm level.

In 2013 SAPA forged links with the South African Society for Animal Science (SASAS), whose aim is to advance animal science and promote viable animal production systems while sustaining natural resources and the environment. SAPA presented at the annual SASAS congress to promote the poultry industry amongst young scientists. This link also resulted in the promotion of relationship with the Agricultural Research Center at Irene and with Fort Hare University.

It is vital to the poultry industry that we foster the growth in numbers of animal (poultry) scientists to deal with local production and disease control issues.

- **The SAPA Training Committee**

SAPA’s Training and Development manager arranges and coordinates industry training by service providers that include the KwaZulu-Natal Poultry Institute and works to improve training resources. In this role, his function is informed and supported by the SAPA Training Committee comprising human resource managers from SAPA member companies and invited consultants.

- **Work Groups**

The importance of work groups as a means to explore solutions to specific issues affecting the poultry industry cannot be underestimated. These meet as a body of industry representatives with specialist knowledge of appropriate subjects, while external consultants are co-opted as necessary. With little or no funding required, work group participants perform required tasks to achieve set objectives. SAPA’s different Organisation Committees take the work group’s advice, implementing it as their decision. Work groups are generally guided by Acts, Regulations or well defined circumstances. SAPA’s three work groups are Poultry Health, Food Compliance and Poultry Welfare.

**Poultry Health Work Group**

The Poultry Health Work Group considers issues related to poultry health and poultry disease control, working with Government where appropriate to prevent and manage diseases that threaten the national flock.

In addition to this work group, poultry health is managed through the PDMA, the Chair at Onderstepoort; and the National Animal Health Forum, of which SAPA is a member and vice-chair.

As the threat of disease, especially notifiable, has not lessened, the emphasis is on precautionary measures, disease surveillance and control to reduce disease and minimise the impact of outbreaks. During the period under review, the focus was on Avian Influenza in chickens and ostriches (HPAI and LPAI); variant IB vaccine registration; salmonella movement control; residue monitoring and collaboration between the DAFF and our industry; application of a new disease reporting application; state vet training on poultry diseases; and the possible restriction of cross-province cull movements.
**Food Compliance**
The Food Compliance Work Group interprets and considers relevant Food Safety Acts (DoH and DAFF), regulations and industry standards, confirming how the industry must react to ensure continuous compliance when working with Government and consumer bodies. Following extensive work on poultry meat brining that started in 2012, this continued in the period under review with a focus on protocols and regulations such as R146 with the DAFF and the Department of Health. By end 2013, many issues were resolved, although the important question of brine percentage remains to be settled.

SAPA has employed consulting support from the Universities of Stellenbosch and the Free State where a joint research programme on brine content measurement is still being conducted, in conjunction with the Agricultural Research Council acting on behalf of DAFF.

In the period under review, a suitable Independent Meat Inspection (IMI) model has been agreed by the provinces, the industry, and the DAFF, which now needs to take this initiative forward.

**Poultry Welfare**
The Poultry Welfare Work Group considers proposals and issues relating to poultry welfare, including international practices and trading movements. Outcomes are recorded in SAPA’s Code of Practice, with which members are obligated to comply as a minimum standard.

During 2013, the NSPCA reported some deviations from their preferred practices which were resolved by the industry. Engagements between SAPA and the NSPCA continue on the issues of layer cage sizes (with a preference to move to enriched cages or barn raising) and the disposal and handling of live culled birds.

The topic of free range poultry production continued to be discussed during 2013 and SAPA has kept abreast of research in the field.