

Competitors now need to be friends if cold chain wants to reach full compliance

AFCCC chair Mark Mitchell explains how cooperation is the key to advancing Australia's cold supply chain.

There's nothing wrong with friendly competition. In fact, if you thrive on challenges and hate to be outdone, some friendly competition may well help motivate you and reach your goals.

But now there is a new meaning to friendliness in Australia's cold chain industry when moving chilled or frozen foods from farm to plate.

It's more like friendly cooperation.

I could argue that it will only be through continued and friendly cooperation that Australia's cold chain will come anywhere near being totally compliant in the future.

The biggest single challenge facing our cold chain is not a lack of technology, but the implementation of process and correct use of the data that technology produces – and the

ability to share it.

It is a sad situation to see compliant cold chains mostly only exist within the minority closed loop systems or end-to-end supply chains without change of custody or ownership of product. This mostly applies to the many Covid supply models, but even more sadly it didn't apply to the majority of routine vaccine cold chains until Covid came along.

Since the pandemic has put the spotlight on cold chain logistics, the industry has been inundated with proposals from telematics companies offering solutions for the food cold chain sector. Many of these offerings are quite inadequate for the job required, while some are very sophisticated and up to date and already being used by existing cold

chain operators.

The solutions are out there, but there is a lack of appetite among cold chain competitors to share their data, which in essence, breaks the cold chain. And by data, we are only talking about temperature, which in itself is the most important tool applied in the cold chain – or it should be.

There are many critical control point events between both competitive and non-competitive stakeholders. It is at these vulnerable points, such as loading docks, transfers between transports or movement into cold stores, where delivery and receipt temperatures require verification. This is where the breakdown occurs in the majority of cold chains and while this non-sharing culture continues, the cold chain will remain

broken and non-compliant.

Some of Australia's biggest shippers of refrigerated foods have had many products arrive at their destination out of temperature specifications. As a result, far too many loads of valuable food have been diverted from the loading dock to the dump.

The problem was not a lack of temperature data – the data existed when the problem occurred. What was wrong was that there was no agreement to both share and use the data between the companies involved in the food transfer. In those cases known to the AFCCC, the issue just went away when there was agreement that the data would be shared, and how it would be used.

There is just too much knee-jerk opinion in the Australian cold chain, that tracing is the panacea that will solve all of their issues. It won't, not by itself, and that is part of the reason the cold chain culture needs to undergo change.

Where we have seen a greater degree of cooperation between stakeholders is when companies, for other reasons, put in a quality management system under ISO 9001 in some part of their business. Operating under ISO 9001 for quality product delivery seems to have the effect of encouraging natural participation with and cooperation between stakeholders. This can spill over into the cold chain process of the same company with positive effects.

A quality management system, on any section of the business, breaks the ice for the cold chain in that business and generally leads to a change of culture throughout.

The work of the AFCCC is encouraging government incentives to embed quality management systems for food supply and the cold chain. **F**



AFCCC chair Mark Mitchell said the biggest single challenge facing the cold chain is the implementation of process and correct use of the data.