

# Farm to market hide traceability

Gibson Bass Stamper  
Wash-down Procedure



**L**owe Corporation, are an innovative New Zealand wet-blue producer. Recently, they have embarked on a hide traceability project. Managing Director of Lowe Corporation, Andy Lowe, says that the aim is to get greater integration with the market place and traceability to suppliers. While there are potential supply benefits, Lowe's primary aim is market focused. The critical elements of this project have been creating a true inventory record of each hide, utilising a software developed with USA firm Kors Engineering that is used to manage all aspects of the company's operation, and the individual hide identification provided by the Australian made Gibson Bass Stamper.

## Strategy

The strategic imperatives of this project are firstly to authenticate the origin of Lowe's products and, secondly, to provide quality assurance to Lowe's customers. Recent events in Brazil in relation to socially responsible production in the meat and leather industry have emphasised the need to assure end-users that, in the supply chain delivering their product, no people were exploited, the environment was respected, and all animals were treated humanely. When marketing high-end products to sophisticated consumers this must now be verifiable.

All Lowe's hides come from cattle that are treated humanely, sustainable and in a socially responsible manner, and now they are able to prove it through traceability.

The other benefit for customers is that this system provides the ultimate quality assurance scheme. Every hide they

receive is identified, its history recorded and every hide's grade can be reconciled back to the data recorded at the sammying machine grading station.

The supply side benefits will come from the planned co-operation with hide suppliers in improving the quality of the product moving through the supply chain, via education of and communication with the abattoirs and through them to the cattle producers.

## Planning

Representatives from Lowe Corporation embarked on a worldwide search for suitable software and an individual hide identification system. The package had to include full raw material, production, inventory, marketing and accounting functionality. After extensive research, they decided on Michigan, USA based, PLEX On-line ERP system and partner Kors Engineering's PleXML Plant Integration Module. This modular package allows users to consolidate multiple machines and protocols through a single Java based server to enable their plant floor to directly interact with the Plex On-Line ERP systems.

Their equally widespread search for a suitable individual hide identification



Hides being stamped  
after fleshing

## Technology | Traceability



system led them to Brisbane, Australia where they decided that the Gibson Bass Stamper was the hide ID system that could deliver their needs. Firstly they required individual identification with a reliable, safe, efficient operation. They also required an ID system that could be easily integrated with the in-plant software and one that would not add extra cost and time to their operation. The Gibson Bass Stamper was able to satisfy these conditions. Another important criteria was that the machine could operate in tannery conditions. The recommended wash-down procedure gave Lowe confidence that the machine would have no trouble meeting this criteria.

### Traceability system

Hides are received from various suppliers and are fed into the system at arrival at the flesher feed chain. They go from there through the flesher, and following fleshing they receive their individual identification stamp. The integrity of the ID system guarantees that every hide has a number – and every number has a hide – a critical aspect of the project. The stamper PLC's software was specially tailored by Gibson Bass to the needs of the project to ensure this requirement was met.

Once entered into the database inventory, hides are individually tracked through tanning to the wet-blue sammying machine. Here the individual ID number is recorded and the hide is graded into stock. Lowe's system tracks hides through all stages of production. They know not only how many hides are in a drum, but which ones they are. This system then forms the ultimate quality

assurance system for customers. Every hide Lowe receives is identified, and every hide's characteristics (weight, grade, sex, kill, date etc) are recorded along with the processing details for that hide. After processing, every hide is known and each hide on a pallet delivered to a customer is known.

The PleXML software allows the individual recording, grading and tracking of every hide, from receipt through to delivery on a pallet into the customer's warehouse.

### Implementation

It was important to Lowe that this traceability project did not impact on labour costs. A critical evaluation of the fleshing operation resulted in several

tasks being streamlined and made more efficient. This along with some minor task alterations meant that the stamping was done with no extra labour; and no jobs were left undone.

Similarly at the sammying machine, with an analysis of the various workstations and operations, the reading and recording of the numbers was accomplished without extra labour and without slowing production. The key was to record the numbers at the input to the sammying machine. As the hides are delivered by mobillator, the operator has a clear view of the number, and with a few key strokes enters the significant digits into a touch screen. Each batch has a known number range, with at least the first two digits and sometimes the first three digits of the six digit number remaining the same for the whole batch, reducing the touchscreen entry requirements. The software includes checks for authenticating the number entered.

### Conclusion

The first installation was in Lowe's Hastings wet-blue plant in New Zealand, with further installations coming on stream with the system in the near future. Anyone wishing to view the operations of the system can contact Lowe directly ([www.lowecorp.co.nz](http://www.lowecorp.co.nz)) or organise this through Gibson Bass Hide Systems ([www.gibsonbassstamper.com](http://www.gibsonbassstamper.com)). ■



Numbers visible as delivered by mobillator to the sammyer