Workflow: Product Quality

Toolkit 5.1
Developing a Quality Vision and Culture

target audience

Leadership team, strategic partner, supervisors, and contractors.

what it is

In any operation it is important that the meaning of quality is understood, and essential that there is a clear and practical commitment to quality from the leadership team. Product quality can be defined as that set of product characteristics that will satisfy the requirements of a specific customer grouping. Requirements will vary depending on the market. Therefore, the business needs a clear vision of the markets it wants to target, which in turn will determine the specific requirements. Refer to Toolkit 11.1- Value Chain Alignment.

A quality vision is a clear statement of intent that will describe the end-state the company is pursuing including aspect such as:

➢ Key products and markets to target.

➢ End-product as well as production process and certifications standards targeted for specific products and markets.

➢ Leadership commitment to assess and understand customer requirements and customer satisfaction.

➢ Creating a quality culture by embedding individual accountability for product quality at each step in the value chain.

➢ Commitment to continuously improve customer satisfaction and skill sets required to sustain expected quality standards all the time.

➢ A commitment to work with accredited suppliers of raw materials and services.

It should be noted that quality specifications of the final product can be controlled by a control process accepting/rejecting the product at different stages of the process during and after harvesting. There should however also be a clear understanding that quality specifications will apply to activities during the growth season that will influence eventual yield. For example, if a tree is well maintained during the growth season, chances are that a higher percentage of product will comply to colour, size, shape, sugar content, etc. specifications. Similarly, excessive chemical residue left on product after harvesting could result in rejections.

Companies often refer to the "Total Cost of Quality (TCQ)" when assessing the systems and processes required to sustain quality and avoid deviation from a standard. However, the lack of these systems and processes could result in poor quality and customer dissatisfaction with

potential associated costs. The leadership team must have a full grasp of customer and food safety requirements as well as the cost implications associated with sustaining product quality when making investment and operational decisions. The cost of poor quality (non-compliance) needs to be balanced with the cost of good quality (control and assurance processes).

Leadership must accept the concept of "Quality at Source", whereby product quality becomes an individual responsibility, i.e. at each touchpoint during each step of the process. The picker needs to take responsibility for personal hygiene (clean hands) and making sure that there is no physical or mechanical damage to the product before putting it into a picking bag and bin. Quality at source will also extend to the external supply of goods as well as services rendered by contractors.

why it is important

If you want to be successful in today's competitive environment, it is crucial to deliver products of good quality that will satisfy customer requirements. The vision clarifies the intent of where the company intends to sell its products (e.g. export to UK) and enables the process to clearly investigate and clarify customer and regulatory requirements. Product quality is often described as a business dis-qualifier, meaning that unless a company can consistently deliver against a quality and food safety promise, customers will find alternative supply.

Without Leadership commitment to quality and a clear quality vision, it will be impossible to meet and sustain frequently changing customer requirements over time.

Understanding customer requirements will enable you to:

➢ Define a product quality standard for each process step, including during the growth season.

➢ Implement "Quality at Source".

➢ Creating the processes and skills to sustain product quality.

➢ Work towards a Quality Culture where all employees will have a quality mindset when approaching everything they do, mindful of the potential impact on product quality.

➢ Putting a Quality or Food Safety Management system (e.g., Global GAP) in place.

The leadership team needs to understand the costs associated with good- and/or poor-quality products to enable effective decision-making. Understanding the cost elements will enable the company to re-direct assets (e.g., people, money) to processes that are not performing well, as well as optimising costs associated with processes.

success factors

What are the success factors for a clear understanding of customer requirements and building a quality culture?

➢ **A Quality Vision** – Farm management (including the owner) must develop the quality vision with a clear understanding of where and how the company wants to do business. This vision must describe the desired culture, including the individual responsibilities and ownership at all levels.

➢ **Leading by Example** – Leadership understanding and commitment to the vision must be demonstrated through their actions. Product quality and food safety compliance to standards must have clear performance objectives (Refer to Toolkits - Production and Certification), must

be monitored frequently, and any deviation should be properly investigated. Refer to Toolkit 12.1 - Abnormal (Non-conformant) Situation Management. There should be a specific process introduced to keep track of customer complaints or a customer satisfaction index (CSI) that is monitored on an ongoing basis.

➢ **Action and Behaviour** – Having a clear quality vision is important, but that will not evolve into a culture without specific actions driven by the leadership team to create an environment where quality (next to safety) becomes the key default operating condition:

- Quality before speed is accepted as a business principle.

- Clear quality responsibilities built into standard operating procedures (SOPs).

- Product quality measured at all levels, with recognition to compliance.

- Visual support to strengthen awareness.

➢ **Quality Specifications** – Understanding customer product requirements by doing market research (directly or working through industry bodies or agents) or engaging directly with key customers or customer groupings.

➢ **Certification** – Accepting a food safety standard and acquiring the necessary certifications (Refer to Toolkits - Production and Certification for more information.).

➢ **Quality at Source** – Quality at source refers to the empowerment of all employees to influence and control quality as part of their daily activities. Every person touching the product becomes an internal quality control resource. Accepting the concept of quality at source by empowering workers can limit external control (and costs) and improve quality compliance. Refer to Toolkits - Production and Certification.

➢ **The Cost of Quality** – Understanding the cost of quality and non-quality. The cost of quality resides within each activity and process the company have in place to ensure that the product is produced and delivered to a required specification at the point of consumption.

Cost of Quality
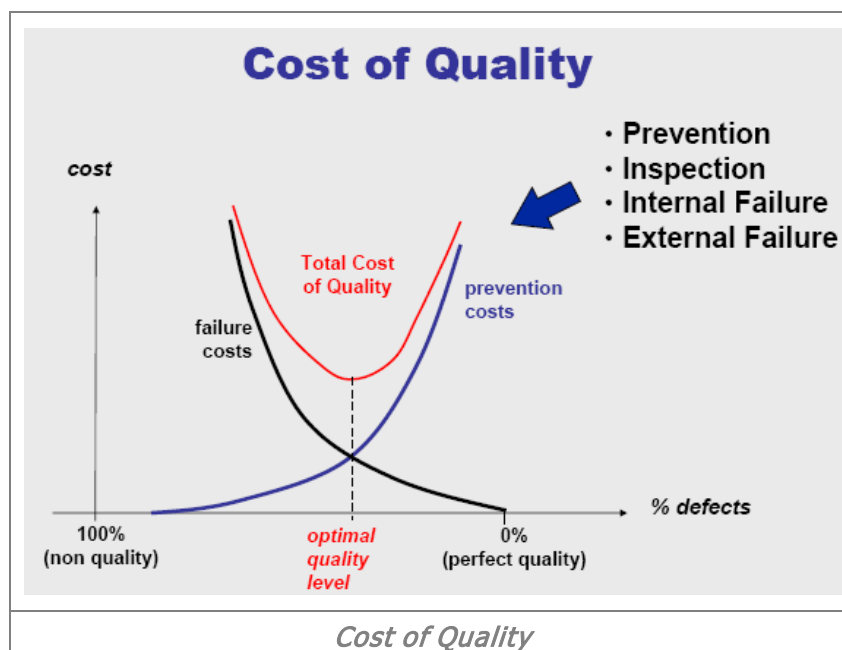
➢ **Understanding the Gap** – Understand the gap between the quality vision and the current reality and develop a high-level plan to improve.

> ➢ **What Does Good Look Like?** – A quality culture will only evolve if all role-players have a clear understanding of what they must do as well as how to do it. This will clearly require the development of SOPs (Refer to Toolkits - Production and Certification), as well as associated training.
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> ➢ **Communication** – Finally, the vision and quality focus and plans will require extensive communication at all levels all the time. Continuous quality awareness communication sustained, and it should be a standing agenda item at scheduled meetings and reviews.

execution steps

1. The leadership should run a quality strategy session to confirm the commitment to quality and food safety and develop a quality vision including:

   - Key products and markets to target.

   - End-product as well as production process and certifications standards targeted for specific products and markets.

   - Leadership commitment to assess and understand customer requirements and customer satisfaction.

   - Creating a quality culture by embedding individual accountability for product quality at each step in the value chain.

   - Commitment to continuously improve customer satisfaction and skill sets required to sustain expected quality standards all the time.

   - A commitment to work with accredited suppliers of raw materials and services.

2. Develop a process to establish customer requirements and product specifications.

3. Debate and formalise the elements and outcomes of a Quality Culture in line with the vision and develop an extensive communication plan to roll this out into the organisation.

4. Leadership to attend an awareness session around Quality at Source.

5. Launch a Quality Improvement drive given the gap between the vision and the current situation.

6. Develop and introduce a quality awareness communication plan.

7. Identify training requirements at all levels.

assessment questions

Please Note: There is no minimum / maximum amount of questions you can add

1.	Do you have formal product and certification requirements?
2.	Do you have formal product and certification requirements per market segment?
3.	Has the concept of Quality at Source been accepted and introduced?
4.	Have clear quality responsibilities been developed at all levels of the organisation?
5.	Has a Food Safety certification programme been accepted and introduced?

6.	Has certification been achieved?
7.	Is there a formalised quality vision, policy, and strategy document?

resources

1.	Voice of the Customer (VOC): A Tool for Continual Improvement Link: https://bit.ly/3ug3Yaz
2.	Cost of Quality (COQ) Link: https://asq.org/quality-resources/cost-of-quality
3.	The Top Four Ways to Assure Quality at the Source Link: https://createvalue.org/blog/assure-quality-at-the-source/
4.	Simplified steps to Quality at Source