

Codes of Practice (CoP) - What it Means for Millers?

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INTRODUCTION

This is good news for millers. The MPOB-created Codes of Practice (CoP) are now undergoing actual field trials. We are happy to note that some plantation companies have realized the value of CoP and have volunteered to have the CoP done in their plantation, nursery, mills and kernel crushing plants. Generally, it takes about two days to carry out the CoP audit in a plantation but for others it takes only one day each by teams comprising about four people. The audit can be done fast if photocopies of all the relevant documents are in place and readily available for inspection.

Millers probably will want to know what this is all about. We shall briefly explain issues involved so that when MPOB comes and knock at your door for CoP audit you will know exactly what MPOB will be expecting from you.

To begin with, the audit is not a fault finding exercise or a consultancy service. It is just like your financial audit exercise carried out by your internal auditors or the external ones with which millers are familiar with. The CoP is a code comprising a number of good practices that a mill is expected to follow so that the palm oil industry is not ex-

ploiting either the human resources or the environment for the sole purpose of fattening the bank balance of the investor.

Three fundamental pillars form the basis of the code. They are:

- food safety;
- sustainability; and
- quality.

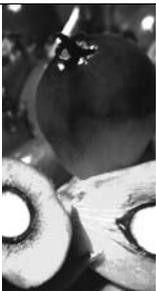
Most millers probably know these only too well but might not have taken them seriously before but the right time has come for millers to defend the industry by ensuring that they are a caring lot and Malaysian palm products are marketable. Let us now try to analyse issues involved together with the remedy in getting CoP certification for mills.

FOOD SAFETY

As the word implies, the product we market should not contain traces of elements that are detrimental to the consumer's health wherever they live. The product should not have different standard to cater for different peoples or animals of the world based on how developed or rich the countries are. The standard should be based on the concept of safe human or animal consumption.

Contamination can come from many sources like heavy metal, toxic products or microbes and all attempts should be made to prevent the entry of such products into the

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final product that is marketed. In the case of palm oil mills, the possibility of contamination by any of the above mentioned products could be minimal but a thorough examination should be conducted by the mill management to ensure that the assumptions are correct. Some of the fresh fruit bunch (FFB) contaminants could have accidentally slipped into the FFB consignment from the trader's hopper or other sources. The droppings from birds, rats, cats or dogs should be prevented by denying them access to finished products.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability can be interpreted in many ways based on the whims and fancies of the person interpreting it. If sustainability issue is taken literally every human activity in this world may have to come to a stand still as they would indirectly generate carbon dioxide in one form or other leading to global climate change. If we give up modern way of living and decide to live in the jungle maintaining solely by eating vegetables and fruits, we can say that we had a sustainable existence. So in this regard, we have to look at the big culprits that could cause major catastrophe to the conservation of the ecological balance of the land.

In palm oil mills, the use of diesel generators are considered to be a culprit that drags down the credit points generated by the steam power plants. So try not to use or reduce as much as possible the electricity your diesel generators produces or the supply imported from the national grid. In order to gain extra bonus, you may even generate and export to the grid.

QUALITY

Oil in contact with metals will pick up some of the metal and that is not encouraged. If we track the oil flow path from sterilizer onwards, the oil is in close contact with mild steel or in some special cases with stainless steel. The oil pick-up iron from a number of points: sterilizer, thresher feeder, thresher,

fruit conveyors, fruit elevators, digesters, press, oil gutter, de-sander, crude oil tank, crude oil pump, clarification tank, pure oil tank, vacuum drier, pure oil pump and even in the storage tank. The high temperatures prevailing in some places like the digester and clarification tank can also promote the iron pick-up.

It needs Herculean effort to prevent the iron pick-up. The use of stainless steel to replace mild steel could perhaps reduce the iron pick-up but does not stop it altogether as stainless steel itself is not very different from mild steel except that it contains, in addition nickel or chromium in small proportions.

Ceramic coating offers the best alternative as it is non-metal and it is inexpensive. But the industry does not seem to be too keen to adopt for reasons not too clear. It could be due to lack of knowledge or fear of high cost. Millers are urged to focus their attention in this direction and aim for as much replacement of mild steel as possible so that our palm oil is of good quality that is always marketable to any part of the world.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE AUDIT

Malaysian millers are fortunate in having the complete CoP covering six major areas of detailed audit. The selected areas are (1) oil palm nursery, (2) plantation and smallholders, (3) palm oil mill, (4) palm oil refinery, (5) palm kernel crushing plant, and (6) palm product storage and transportation. About a dozen officers from MPOB has already undergone the training to conduct the audit and they are currently undergoing field trials with the lead auditors recognized by SIRIM.

The audit comprises two parts: (a) adequacy audit during which some recommendations will be made based on observation and that need to be put in place within the next three months and (b) detailed audit is usually carried out three months after the first audit but may be vary depending

on convenience. This whole exercise is not a fault finding exercise to incriminate the management but for arming them with a tool to ensure that our palm products remains a sought-after product in the world market. It is a system quite parallel to the RESPO but more specific and focused.

During the audit exercise, the most difficult task for the management, if it can be so called, is the presentation of documentation. If the auditors ask a mill manager for the documentation pertaining to the training that was given to his press operators, the answer would be that he does not have such document. Try to answer the following:

- is there any documentation on how each and every machine in the mill is operated so that a new recruit will know exactly the correct procedure for the operation of the plant?
- is there documentation on what procedure to follow when an accident occurs to a worker?
- are all safety guide-lines clearly displayed at prominent places?
- are there any refresher courses for the workers conducted on regular basis? If so are they documented?
- are all visitors registered before they enter your mill with details on the purpose of their visit?
- what steps have you taken to prevent the entry of animals and rodents inside the mill?
- are the washroom kept clean? Does any senior officer conduct inspection on a regular basis to ensure that they are indeed kept clean?
- is there a policy in place for ensuring that the FFB purchased is from honest dealers who do not add contaminants into FFB for increasing its weight-like regular checking of the merchant's yard?
- are products leaving the mill weighed out and their particulars documented?
- are the documentations regularly inspected and monitored by senior management staff?

You will be surprised to note that in most cases the answer would be NO. This questionnaire is by no means complete. Please try to get 'YES' for all and when we visit your mill for CoP audit, you can have a big laugh!

