

PROPOSAL FOR EUROPEAN WIDE QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN WATER REED PRODUCTION

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The recent visit to Lower Saxony in Germany, to discuss early decay in roofs thatched in water reed, has enabled us to focus on the evidence of changes over the past twenty years. The experience in Norfolk in the 1980s and subsequent changes in reed bed harvesting and post harvest storage management has eliminated the problem in UK home grown reed.

Current "just in time" imported reed production practices leads us to conclude that a critical area of reed production control across Europe, common to all users, might be in reed harvesting, shipping and storage. If results show a positive correlation between rapid reed harvesting and quick shipping and decay in water reed thatch, as we all purchase water reed in the same market place, the next step would be to agree acceptable harvest and storage tolerances with all those involved in the supply chain. For both home grown and imported water reed.

The occurrence of a small number of thatched properties in the UK, with early decay is not seen as a problem but rather as a condition that requires investigation and the development of appropriate controls, to prevent the condition escalating to the proportions seen in Lower Saxony.

Across Europe demand for water reed for thatching now regularly exceeds supply. This has led to "just in time" reed cutting and delivery which includes practices early on in the production process which could compromise long term reed durability.

QUALITY CONTROL

Thatchers require reed to possess two main qualities, durability and thatchability. These characteristics are primarily controlled from the management regime under which the reed crop is grown and harvested. The rationale of any operations control

system is to reduce the risk of any substandard reed entering the supply chain by capturing and recording, at an appropriate stage, any practices likely to reduce the longevity of water reed. Any proposed system must be simple to record and operate. At this point in the research into reed quality no tests have been developed that can identify sub standard reed at the point of use.

The point of any Quality Control (QC) is to adopt a Europe wide policy which aims to manage the process, raise standards and increase thatch longevity.

To be successful and to gain the benefits from a fully implemented scheme requires an understanding of the concept of recording and commitment from everyone in the business supply chain. A systems approach to quality control is efficient and concentrates control effort at the critical points in the reed production and thatching process. It provides a systematic approach to the identification of those stages in the process which are deemed critical to the durability of water reed for thatching. Once control points are agreed the next step is to decide on target levels and tolerances to maintain quality.

In litigation it can be difficult to convince Courts that suppliers and thatchers have done everything possible to ensure a quality product. Any defence will be more convincing when it can be shown that an internationally agreed due diligence process has been followed.

What we are proposing is to ask for answers to a number of, what we believe to be relevant questions, on a simple delivery note. In the very unlikely event of early reed decay the information on its origins may help in determining the problem and better still a solution.

Delivery note reference number _____
Size of consignment: _____
Site of Production: _____
Date harvested: _____
Did the reed get wet from rain during cutting and harvesting? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Method of storage at production site is protected, well ventilated storage available prior to shipment? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Date of dispatch from site: _____
Quality control: _____
Describe quality control measures: _____
Bale % Moisture prior to loading: _____
Shipping Container. are there anti-condensation devices in place <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No;
A gap between the load and the container ceiling <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Ventilation <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No ?
% Moisture at delivery site: _____
Date of last inspection of production techniques: _____
Who carried out the inspection?: _____

In looking at quality control in reed production sites, the accompanying table shows how and why the critical control points have been identified. Feedback from members would be appreciated. Could it work for you? Please let me know if there are any potential problems with implementing such a recording scheme