Less regulatory inspections for assured farmers

ACCS, together with Assured Food Standards (AFS), has been successful in persuading both the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) that enforcement inspections should be targeted at non-assured farmers.

“This is excellent news for assured farmers,” said Tony Pexton, ACCS Chairman. “At last the credibility of the farm assurance system and the work farmers put in to meeting the schemes requirements have been recognised by regulators. This is a major benefit to ACCS members who are fed up with lots of inspectors visiting the farm to check up on them.”

With input from ACCS and AFS, the FSA evaluated the farm assurance scheme standards and concluded that they met the requirements of the new General Food Hygiene Regulations. At a series of recent training courses Local Authorities have been told to follow an inspection regime targeting 25% of non-assured farms on an annual basis and reducing this to only 2% for assured farms (unless there is additional evidence which they need to act on).

At the moment these arrangements only relate to the General Food Hygiene Regulations and are covered by a Memorandum of Understanding between AFS and LACORS, which also outlines the process for Local Authorities to feedback information on the use of the Red Tractor logo on food to AFS. AFS and ACCS recognise that this is just the tip of the iceberg and will continue to lobby organisations responsible for enforcement such as DEFRA, FSA, Veterinary Medicine Directorate, Environment Agency and Local Authorities to try to get more of them to adopt this type of approach for other legal requirements.

From the Chairman

Writing this at the end of January, we have had ample evidence of the statement that England does not have a climate: we just get weather!! Here in the East Riding we have had everything except some good hard frosts, which would not go amiss.

One role of assurance is to give our customers the assurance that what they are buying is produced and stored to standards which they accept as meeting their requirements. To this end there are not only farmers, but also representatives of our customers, millers, compounders, maltsters and crushers on the standard setting body.

As inspections for various things have increased over the years, a role has developed where assurance schemes may be able to help the industry meet its obligations without expanding the number of Government inspections that we are subject to. (I have always emphasised that we will not become Government inspectors). This may mean putting in standards that may not seem to have an immediate impact on food safety, for example, sprayer testing or secure fertilizer storage.

One of the benefits of this approach is that it shows that the industry is prepared to regulate itself, to its own benefit, for example the Voluntary Initiative enabling us to avoid the punitive proposals for a pesticides tax, and legislation on bystander safety. It also enables inspection bodies such as Trading Standards, who are responsible for policing the Food Hygiene Regulations, to identify lower risk producers, and concentrate their inspections on the higher risk, i.e. non-assured producers.

We are not in the game of introducing standards for the sake of it; any standards introduced are after consultation. If we can help to reduce the legislation and numbers of inspections that we are subject to, by showing that we are a responsible, professional industry, I believe that assurance has a constructive and valuable role to play to the benefit of us all.
Cereals – best practice for residue minimisation

Last spring ACCS produced Farmer Advisory Bulletin 1 to give guidance on the issue of residue minimisation. This has been updated and is on the ACCS website.

Below is summarised the key guidance messages from the bulletin for farmers and their advisors to review and adopt as appropriate.

Note this is not a change to current product labels or regulatory approval.

The challenge
An increasing number of end customers expect pesticide residues to be kept to a minimum, even if higher levels would be of no concern for human health. Farmers should ensure that any actions do not compromise ICM best practice, resistance management, yield and grain quality.

Targeting 3 areas will give maximum residue benefits

■ Timing the application of plant growth regulators, specifically chlormequat and mepiquat.
■ Timing the application of glyphosate used pre – harvest.
■ Optimising use of the storage insecticide pirimiphos methyl.

THINGS YOU CAN DO
Farmer and advisor planning and implementation

Chlormequat – “timing is more important than dose to help residue minimisation”

■ Review the key cultural and management options to help minimise lodging – location and aspect; drilling date and seed rate; final plant population, nutrition and alternative product choice. (See Figure 1)
■ Confirm acceptance of usage on crops grown under contract.
■ Strictly adhere to all label recommendations
■ Do not use more than a total of 1612g chlormequat per hectare (equivalent to 2.5 l/ha of a 645 g/l formulation) to any crop.
■ Apply products containing chlormequat before GS 32 (2nd node detectable) – unless justified by crop risk and label recommendations allow.
■ Ideally target GS30 (stem elongation – ear 1cm) for stem shortening effects in wheat, barley, rye and triticale. For oats the optimum growth stage is slightly later at GS31-32. In all cases be aware of the weather conditions at the time of application, as crops should be actively growing and that soil conditions may restrict when applications can be made.
■ Remember that spring crops move much more rapidly through these growth stages.
■ Confirm acceptance of usage on crops grown under contract.
■ Strictly adhere to all label recommendations.
■ Optimum timing is generally between GS 32 and 39 (second node detectable to flag leaf ligule just visible). Aim to treat at GS33-37 to balance efficacy and minimise residues.
■ Remember that spring crops move much more rapidly through these growth stages.
■ Review the HGCA guide “Avoiding lodging – a practical guide.”

Mepiquat – “timing is more important than dose to help residue minimisation”

■ Review the key cultural and management options to help minimise lodging (see chlormequat and Figure 1).
■ Confirm acceptance of usage on crops grown under contract.
■ Strictly adhere to all label recommendations.
■ Optimum timing is generally between GS 32 and 39 (second node detectable to flag leaf ligule just visible). Aim to treat at GS33-37 to balance efficacy and minimise residues.
■ Review the HGCA guide “Avoiding lodging – a practical guide.”

Case study

The guidance given in this newsletter is designed to help farmers minimise the residues of a small number of crop protection products that leave low but fairly regular residues in cereals. This short case study is designed to give a flavour of how one grower has set about minimising residues for a specific market, not detailed guidance or recommendations.

Some market sectors demand that any residues be very low. Such a case is the baby food industry where supplying wheat for the manufacture of rusks is governed by a European baby food directive requiring no individual residue to be greater than 10 parts per billion. This was the challenge faced by David White who farms 260ha of cereals around Treversham, Cambridge and his advisor Bob Mills from Frontier Agriculture.

A new crop protection programme has been implemented by Bob Mills where no or only a little PGR is used and certain more persistent fungicides have been deleted. No pre-harvest glyphosate is used nor grain storage insecticides to either the crop or the building.

Big changes have also come in David White’s level of planning and crop management. Currently the winter wheat variety used is Robigus which is reasonably resistant to Septoria tritici and has the added benefit of resistance to orange blossom midge. This is sown at a lower rate of less than 100 kg/ha at the end of September or early October. The crop receives a lower amount of total nitrogen with later applications to feed the grain and not earlier growth that is likely to lodge the crop. 49 ha of crop are grown in this way and also 30ha of Optic spring barley (also requiring the use of prescribed inputs) destined for export malt to Japan. This totals around 30% of the cereal hectares which then allows more conventional practices to be utilised on the remaining crop.

As David White comments “the growing of the baby food crop does require a premium payment and the practices I have to adopt are more extreme than if one was just targeting the minimisation of residues. However in growing such a crop with a very different input regime has given me some useful practices and ideas which we can use on the remainder of the farm.”

Always read the label. Use pesticides safely.

2
Cultural and management guidance for lodging control

| Soil type – although a major factor contributing to lodging, there is no easy opportunity to alter the land being farmed and therefore the inherent risk of lodging. | Low |
| Field location, aspect, wind speed and rainfall – farm records and management history will help to identify those fields or parts of fields that are prone to lodging. Action can be taken to minimise any adverse effects utilising other headings from this table. | Medium-High |
| Rotation – there are obviously some opportunities, but the need is to capitalise on a 1st wheat for yield and quality after a break crop. These crops will always be more prone to lodging than a 2nd wheat crop. | Low-Medium |
| Drilling date and seed rate – it is important to drill the appropriate rate depending on the time of drilling. Earlier drilling and milder winters are leading to the lowering of seed rates that can help reduce lodging. The final plant population can determine the likelihood of root or stem lodging. | Medium |
| Variety – growers have some flexibility to use varieties with a better resistance to lodging, but customer demand for a specific variety will always be an over-rider. | Medium-High |
| Nutrition – this is a key area where the amount of residual nitrogen needs to be understood, and then correct rates, timing and application to the crop can have a major impact on the crop's potential to lodge. End markets may also dictate the nature of the nutritional regime. | High |
| Mechanical – the use of techniques like rolling to help control root lodging although important on some soil types is not significant overall. | Low |
| Plant growth regulator – it can be seen from the list above that the control of lodging cannot be left to cultural and management methods alone. The risk is often unacceptably high and therefore the use of a justified and well-timed PGR is both an agronomic necessity and management tool in delivering yield, quality crops, aiding harvest, minimising the need for drying and aiding establishment of the following crop. | High |

Ensure to record all actions for future use or refinement.
This document should be read as guidance notes on best practice and are not recommendations. Consult with your crop protection advisor on how these guidelines can be adopted into your farming practice. For further information on:
Chlormequat and mepiquat contact BASF Technical Services Hotline tel. 0845 602 2553
Glyphosate contact Monsanto (UK) Ltd tel. 01223 849540
Pirimiphos-methyl contact Syngenta Crop Protection UK Ltd tel. 0800 169 6058
Always read the label. Use pesticides safely.
Whole chain assurance in the combinable crops sector

There is now a comprehensive system in the UK of assurance throughout the marketing chain for combinable crops.

ACCS has been a market requirement for all the major co-operatives and users (flour millers, maltsters, feed compounders etc) of combinable crops as well as many exporters in the UK from 1997.

ACCS standards offer purchasers genuine assurance about the on farm production, handling and storage of combinable crops.

ACCS standards require maintenance of comprehensive records of producers’ activities on farm and independent certification companies are licensed to verify compliance which is assessed on an annual basis. Producers will only be certified if they can meet the appropriate standards.

The certification system requires examination of product, the production process, production environment and an assessment of the quality management system. The system is linked to a Certificate of Conformity, ‘grain passport’ stickers and approved scheme marks.

ACCS Haulage standards were revised in 2006 to ensure that they include the same requirements for farmers’ own transport as those required by TASCC for commercial haulage.

The TASCC assurance schemes (covering the storage, transport and laboratory analysis) ‘bolt on’ to ACCS to provide the next link in the whole chain assurance for combinable crops.

Finally there are the UK Malt, FEMAS and UKAS assurance schemes for maltings, feed material suppliers and feed compounders and as far as exports of combinable crops are concerned the assurance chain is ACCS, TASCC (or GTAS Gafta Trade Assurance Scheme) and/or the COCERAL GTP scheme.

Collection of NRoSo points

Concerns about the collection of NRoSo points have been forwarded to the NFU who participated in a recent NRoSO Advisory Board meeting. In response, the NRoSO Board agreed:

- NPTC would work with the industry to develop a comprehensive training course that could be delivered locally, as discussed below, or possibly online (NFU to be represented on a Terms of Reference Group, AIC, RSPB, Trainers etc.) recognising the shortfall in CPD opportunities in many areas of the country.
- AFS farm assurance auditors will be permitted to collate NRoSO CPD points during annual audit of Members, possibly at a small additional charge.
- A 12 month extension for 2004 joiners allowing for early difficulty in collecting points, certainly felt in regions where arable farming is more dispersed.
- Ability for trusted trainers to enter points directly onto the NRoSO database.
- A full review of the scheme to streamline operation of all involved and reduce its cost.

Contract farming and claims for aid payments

Merchants need to be able to make a link between non food crops received and claims for aid payments submitted by owners of land. ACCS is trying to help to facilitate this link by via the assurance member checker listing. However, in order for this system to operate effectively it is important that anyone carrying out contract farming on behalf of other producers lists all these satellite farms/units as part of his assurance registration. If farms involved in energy cropping do not appear as part of an assurance listing then it will be much more difficult for merchants to verify a claim.
Temporary and migrant workers – some tips

Going to be using temporary and/or migrant workers this season? Ask yourself:
- If supplied by an agency or labour provider, are they licensed with the Gangmaster Licensing Authority (GLA)? You can check via www.gla.gov.uk (0845 602 5020).
- Have you confirmed who is responsible for the migrant workers’ health and safety? The employing business i.e. the labour user (you) or the labour provider?
- Has a suitable and sufficient risk assessment been carried out: does it take account of language issues?
- Have the workers been told about the significant findings and given the relevant information, instruction, induction and other health and safety training?
- Have you checked that it has been understood and is acted upon?
- Are the workers adequately supervised? Can they communicate with their supervisors and can they raise any concerns about their health and safety?
- Has suitable provision for toilet and washing facilities been made?
- Is Employers’ Liability Insurance in place?
- Are the drivers suitably qualified and are the vehicles suitable and properly maintained for any transport provided?
- And don’t forget domestic gas checks, working time and accident records.

Need more detail? Contact the GLA on 0845 602 5020 or www.gla.gov.uk and health and safety advice covering all the common issues in your industry and including FREE risk assessment software can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture or by calling HSE on 0845 645 0055. If you also pack or process food, then see www.hse.gov.uk/food.

Professionalise your business
A new suite of health and safety qualifications aimed at reducing the unacceptable level of accidents and ill health in the agricultural and horticultural industries are now available from Lantra Awards and NPTC. The qualifications are available at three levels – applicable to workers on the front line, foreman, supervisors and senior managers – tackling the major sources of accidents and ill health in the sector, together with appropriate preventive measures, in a time-efficient yet comprehensive package. Undertaking these VQs has benefits for business, enabling staff at all levels to:
- Understand how health and safety affects individual and business performance
- Be aware of the main causes of accidents and ill health, and how to prevent them from occurring
- Address health and safety issues for agricultural and horticultural businesses
- Know the key elements of the law and where to get information and advice and for managers:
  - Know how to undertake risk assessment
  - Be aware of appropriate standards of training
  - Select appropriate contractors and work equipment
  - Understand the principles of good health and safety management.

Putting yourself or your staff through such training shows you are serious about your business and your commitment to your workers. Why not tell your customers what you are doing off your own bat? These nationally recognised and accredited qualifications are supported and endorsed by industry stakeholders and HSE. For more details see www.lantra-awards.co.uk or www.nptc.org.uk.

It has just been confirmed that the VQs can be used to obtain Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points.

Health and Safety advice covering all the common issues in your industry and including FREE risk assessment software can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture or by calling HSE on 0845 645 0055. If you also pack or process food, then see www.hse.gov.uk/food.

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For any queries relating to ACCS standards contact:
ACCS Secretariat, Unit 4b
Highway Farm, Horstey Road
Downside, Cobham
Surrey KT11 3JZ
Tel 01932 589 800
Fax 01932 589 800
Email liz@aekerrigan.demon.co.uk
Website www.assuredcrops.co.uk

For all other Red Tractor Scheme queries contact:
Assured Food Standards (AFS)
4th Floor, Kings Buildings
16 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JJ
Tel 020 7630 3320
Fax 020 7630 3321
Email enquiries@redtractor.org.uk
Website www.redtractor.org.uk

**Consumer website – tell your friends**

Red Tractor has launched a new consumer microsite. The site has a great new look and contains fun food quizzes and facts for children, information on what’s in season and what’s hot at the moment and great recipe ideas for every occasion.

To find out more visit www.myRedTractor.co.uk. Don’t forget to tell family and friends about it.

**Red Tractor sponsorship rolls on**

Ever since the launch of Assured Food Standards, Massey Ferguson has been playing a pivotal role in helping to promote the image and the values of the Red Tractor brand. Sponsorship activities have included events, awards, competitions and publications – with a real red tractor, supplied by Massey Ferguson, never far from the scene.

Massey Ferguson are committed to continuing their support into 2007, with red tractors already scheduled to make appearances at county shows, road-shows and photo-opportunity events throughout the year. Massey Ferguson’s own UK product advertising in 2007 is giving prominence to the red tractor logo, with ads in Farmers Weekly and Farmers Guardian now appearing.

David Sleath, Sales Director and Country Manager, UK and Ireland commented: “We are proud of our association with Assured Food Standards. We recognise too that the Massey Ferguson brand benefits strongly by being linked to the values of a positive and successful force for the good of British farming.”

**Red Tractor week**

Following the success of Red Tractor Day this years’ event will take place over a week from 9-15 July 2007. Activities will include a press launch with the Red Tractor ambassador, a survey on what people are eating, stories for consumer and trade press including stunts for regional press and in-store promotion.

Keep watching www.redtractor.org.uk for more information on what is planned.

**Sponsors this newsletter as part of our continuing support to UK farmers and growers – and our commitment to Red Tractor assured food standards.**

**BBC Good Food Show 2006**

The BBC Good Food Show 2006 received over 130,000 visitors and the Red Tractor and partners where there to greet them.

Along with the Love Pork campaign, Yes Peas, the British Carrot Growers Association, the Home Grown Cereals Authority, the Milk Development Council and EBLEX, Red Tractor sponsored the Great British Food Festival and Theatre.

The Great British Food Theatre saw delicious demonstrations from celebrity chefs’ James Martin (pictured), Brian Turner, Phil Vickery. The Red Tractor stand nearby which proved to be a great success creating a chance to sample, and talk to people about, great tasting assured British food.

**Red Tractor Information Service**

AFS has launched a Red Tractor consumer information service. The aim of the service is to provide stories, surveys, ideas to help mums with teatime and delicious recipes, to magazines including Woman’s Own and Good Housekeeping and to national and regional press.

**useful contacts**

Assured Combinalbe Crops