Newly elected NFU president, Peter Kendall has wasted no time in pledging his full support for Red Tractor assurance. As part of a wider campaign that promotes the importance of British food he urged farmers to consider the Red Tractor scheme as a valuable way of differentiating their products. Building on its longstanding commitment to the mark, the NFU has launched a nationwide car-sticker campaign, arming its members with 200,000 Red Tractor car stickers and leaflets and is encouraging members to help ensure consumers are aware of the benefits of buying Red Tractor food. This spring campaign will be the forerunner to a busy summer of NFU-led Red Tractor activity at shows and events throughout England and Wales.

For any queries relating to Assured Produce standards contact:
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Tel: 020 8979 8966
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EMAIL liz@aekerrigan.demon.co.uk
WEBSITE www.assuredproduce.co.uk

For all other Red Tractor Scheme queries contact:
Assured Food Standards (AFS)
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16 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JJ
Tel: 020 7630 3320
Fax: 020 7630 3321
EMAIL enquiries@redtractor.org.uk
WEBSITE www.redtractor.org.uk

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

On 20 April the Prime Minister launched the nation’s first official Red Tractor Day, posing for TV crews and photographers by a full size red tractor in Downing Street on the eve of the event.

In a statement, he urged shoppers to actively look out for the Red Tractor logo as the trusted symbol for conscientiously UK-produced food found on a wide range of fresh foods in all major supermarkets.

The Prime Minister also met Assured Food Standards’ Chairman, Colin Smith, and senior representatives of the alliance of food producers and retailers who have supported the independent Red Tractor scheme and helped to raise food standards.

During Red Tractor Day celebrations the following day, shoppers were encouraged to look for the Red Tractor logo in a nationwide PR blitz covering TV, radio and regional press. The day was given an extra boost by Tesco, who featured Red Tractor Day stickers on packs of British meat and produce.

Food industry must act now to prepare for gangmaster licensing

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) has welcomed the news that the Government has announced that the new gangmaster licensing regime – the Gangmasters Licensing Act - will apply to the provision of labour across the entire food sector¹ and urges the industry to act now to prepare for licensing.

From October this year, labour providers will need a licence if they supply labour to any farm, packhouses or food processing and manufacturing facility.

Says ETI director Dan Rees, “The Government’s announcement is exactly what the food industry wanted – a level playing field across the entire sector with the licensing applying to businesses that supply an estimated 600,000 workers to the sector. Licensing imposes new checks on employers to verify that workers are employed legally; for example, paid the minimum wage, work reasonable hours and in safe conditions. From 1st October 2006 it will be an offence for any labour provider to operate without a licence and from 1st December 2006 it will be illegal for any business in the sector to contract the services of an unlicensed gangmaster. Labour users should ensure that their labour providers know about this legislation and are intending to apply for a licence.”

Further information is available from Dan Rees/Julia Hawkins, ETI, 0845 602 5020.

¹ All labour providers that supply permanent, temporary and contract labour to other businesses in agriculture, horticulture and the food packaging and processing industry are included.

Good Food Show

The Red Tractor enjoyed top billing at the BBC Good Food Show thanks to the support of leading levy boards and marketing groups. 130,000 people visited the Red Tractor stand at the NEC in November where they sampled food supplied by Red Tractor partners and sponsors.

During the five day event, the Great British Food Theatre, sponsored by Red Tractor, played host to the nation’s favourite chefs who entertained visitors with fabulous British ingredients sourced from assured UK suppliers. Yorkshire TV’s flying chef Rachel Green demonstrated the versatility of peas in her recipes, promoting the Yes Peas! campaign and urging the audience to look out for the Red Tractor logo whenever they shop.

Positioned at the heart of the Great British Food Festival, the Red Tractor pavilion proved a hit with show-goers who were treated to freshly-made treats from a range of industry partners. Red Tractor staff and Board members were on hand throughout, issuing information and recipe leaflets about assured British produce. As a result of this unprecedented support, the Red Tractor was voted one of the most memorable exhibitors at the show.

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From the Chairman

By Professor Chris Payne
AP Chairman
An important event for us in recent months was the first Assured Produce Conference which we held at Warwick University on 9 November 2005. For this inaugural event we had invited delegates from a wide range of stakeholders, including those from the production and retail sectors as well as others from Government agencies and departments. Our main objectives were to inform and consult. The consultation part of the programme took the form of a number of workshops where our 70 delegates had the opportunity to offer their views and comments on a range of key subjects including food safety and environmental standards, audit quality and our international links with EUREP GAP and other assurance schemes. The valuable comments received during these sessions are now being incorporated into our next 3-year plan, which was presented as a draft to the Assured Produce (AP) Sector Board at our meeting on 25 March 2006. Amongst the key issues for the next three years, will be for us to:

- work even harder to improve the harmonisation of standards between AP and other assurance schemes and standards, so that the audit burden for our members can be reduced;
- progress the concept of audit spot checks, and post-audit questionnaires for scheme members, and help monitor and improve audit quality;
- to review our income and expenditure to enable us to finance key activities, while keeping membership costs as low as reasonably possible.

During the last few months I have been keeping a watching brief on a number of issues that are likely to impact on our membership. In January, I attended a meeting on NRoSO, where I stressed the need for additional ways in which spray operators in our sector could gain CPD points. EUREP GAP are currently reviewing their fresh produce standards, and I have been monitoring the progress of this, as any changes will impact on AP if we continue to ensure that the EUREP GAP standards are embedded in our scheme. I have also had a meeting with Defra to discuss the potential impact on our members of the recommendations in the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution’s Report on Bystander Exposure to Pesticides.

There has been one change in the membership of AP’s Sector Board since our last newsletter. Nigel Williams retired from the Board when he left Asda at the end of 2005, to join National Britannia as their Operations Manager. Nigel’s commitment to AP and his combined technical and retail experience were great assets to our Board. In welcoming Dr Theresa Huxley (Sainsbury’s) as Nigel’s replacement, I am pleased to note that Theresa’s skills and experience look equally relevant.

This is the last newsletter item that I shall be writing, as I retire as Chairman of AP at the end of July. I have greatly enjoyed my five years in the post, which has always been stimulating, and frequently challenging. Through your efforts in meeting and often exceeding the scheme’s production standards, I am convinced that UK producers of fresh produce and potatoes lead the world. Over the last year in particular, I have also seen increasing awareness amongst customers and consumers that this is the case, helped in no small part by the reinvigorated Red Tractor marketing programme. I wish you every future success with your businesses.

Before signing off, I would also like to relay my thanks to AP’s Council, Board and Technical Advisory Committee members and our Crop Protocol authors for their guidance and commitment. Finally I would individually like to thank our excellent Scheme Manager, Liz Kerrigan for her continued dedication to AP, and to Martin Gibbard who has led our Pesticide Residue Minimisation project.

Security of Fertiliser Storage on Farms

In these days of increased awareness of terrorism the security services are taking a keen interest in the security of fertiliser stored on our farms. You will remember last year that all producers were sent a copy of the leaflet called Security of Fertiliser Storage on Farms which was produced in conjunction with the NFUs, AIC and National Counter Terrorism Security Office. It contains some simple dos and don’ts such as:

- do store fertiliser in a locked building, but if that is not possible, devise some method such as sheeting the stack so that it is clear if the stack has been tampered with, and;
- don’t store fertiliser where there is public access or where it is visible from a public highway.

It also highlights the need to notify the police immediately if you suspect your fertiliser has been tampered with or any has been stolen.

The security services have asked the assurance schemes for help in improving storage practice and we are agreed that as responsible schemes we have a duty to “do our bit” in the fight against terrorism, and we have agreed that we will introduce some standards for the storage of fertiliser on farm at the next scheme revision. This will not be expensive or onerous for you to do, but we, and the security services, believe it will raise awareness of the issues involved.

Catering sector

Today’s consumers are increasingly interested in the provenance of the food they buy, not just in the supermarket but also in restaurants and food service outlets.

Since the introduction of a new Red Tractor licence for restaurant chains, Assured Food Standards has been working with a growing number of wholesalers, distributors and caterers who are interested in sourcing Red Tractor food. Meanwhile, in the public sector, AFS staff have been working with Defra to develop clearer guidelines for public food procurement, establishing Red Tractor assurance as a national benchmark for eligible fresh ingredients.

For further information about these new opportunities please contact AFS at enquiries@redtractor.org.uk
Legal use of pesticides

Farmers and growers must ensure they always use legally approved crop protection products.

In recent years there has been an increase in the trade of crop protection products which are not legally approved for UK use. Such trade includes illegal imports in products where no UK approval exists, as well as generic materials being “passed off” as bona fide under the parallel imports approval scheme.

If growers are found to be handling such products, the assurance schemes have the following possible sanctions:

- Require the products(s) to be legally disposed of with written evidence of disposal provided
- Remove the assured status from any crops treated with such products
- Suspension of the grower for up to six months

It is therefore essential that growers ensure that they only purchase legally approved products for use on their crops. If anyone is in any doubt they should insist on written confirmation of the legal approval status of products on purchase from the supplier. If this fails they should buy elsewhere.

Minimising pesticide residues – posters

You will have received a copy of the “Minimising Pesticide Residues” poster sent to all Assured Produce members.

The poster, developed with HDC and BPC, was produced as an outcome of a project to develop Good Agricultural Practice which aimed to further reduce pesticides on fresh produce, crops and potatoes. We hope that having the poster on display has attracted attention and is keeping this important work in the forefront of everyone’s mind.

If you would like additional copies of the poster please contact the AP Secretariat on 020 8979 8966 or email: liz@aekerrigan.demon.co.uk.

Auditor choice

You are reminded that you have a choice of four certification bodies (CBs) that are licensed to audit to Assured Produce (AP) Standards. These CBs are accredited to a number of different assurance schemes and can therefore offer a matrix of assessments to meet the needs of an individual business, which are completed in a single visit.

All of the CBs are required to apply a consistent approach to the audits and to follow the Assessor Guidance Notes and Certification Guide produced by AP.

The aim of offering producers a choice was to keep pressure on costs and to save growers’ time as you need only prepare and allocate time for a single audit visit. Licensed auditors are as follows:-

- **CMi Certification**
  Tel: 01993 885 610
  www.cmi-certification.com

- **EFSIS-FABBL**
  Tel: 01908 844 156
  www.efsis.com

- **National Britannia**
  Tel: 02920 856 505
  www.natbrit.com

- **PAI Ltd**
  Tel: 01423 878 878
  www.thepaigroup.com

Further details and the full consultation package can be found on the FSA website at: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/Consultations/ukwideconsults/residueguides.