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As Red Tractor goes risk-based in pig, dairy and poultry sectors : your questions answered

The first unannounced inspections of Red Tractor farms took place on pig farms during February. The spot checks are part of a new risk-based approach to farm assurance rolled out in the pig sector last November and the dairy and poultry sector in April. The changes have raised a number of questions from producers which are tackled here.

How has Red Tractor decided on the weightings of each standard?

Each standard is weighted according to how critical it is to the performance and reputation of Red Tractor's members and the scheme as a whole. The process involved all sector chairmen. The team looked at each standard and considered, if it was breached, how much of a reputational risk would it pose and how Red Tractor would be able to defend it. For example, tending to sick or injured livestock promptly and handling animals in a way that minimises stress would be considered high risk, whereas having a farm map or a complaints record would be considered as lower risk. This is not to say that some standards are not important, as all have to be complied with, but standards have to be weighted for the risk-based approach to work.

Why do the standard weightings not reflect a major or minor non-conformance?

As outlined above, this is a new approach based on the nature and number of non-conformances found at routine audits. Existing 'key' standards and 'major' and 'minor' non-conformances remain with their existing purpose and function, but play no part in the risk assessment of members.

Why is Red Tractor not publishing the methodology and weightings of individual standards?

The methodology is an internal process carried out by Red Tractor. Serious consideration was given as to whether the methodology and standard weightings should be published in the interests of transparency. However, Red Tractor's Standards Committee agreed that the merits of not publishing outweighed those for transparency. There were several reasons for reaching the final conclusion, but the most important was felt to be the importance of maintaining the independence of assessors – they do not know how the standards are weighted, and so they remain completely impartial.

Why does the risk-rating approach not allow me to close simple non-conformances on the day, or within 28 days, to potentially reduce my risk rating?

The purpose of the risk-based approach is to encourage producers to comply with every standard, every day. Red Tractor's objective is for farms to not have non-compliances at the time of the audit, not to wait for the audit to raise non-compliances which then need to be corrected.

I'm concerned about assessor inconsistency. Has Red Tractor considered this in the context of this new risk based approach?

With the rollout of the risk-based approach we recognise it is now even more important that inspections are consistent and fair to all members, regardless of the scale of the farming operation. Red Tractor has been asked to consider whether the risk-based approach is unintentionally biased against larger farms. We will shortly be commissioning some analysis in this area to ensure that the risk-based approach is applied consistently, regardless of farm size. Some standards have a degree of tolerance already built in, such as slot and slat widths, but as part of the normal standards review process, Red Tractor will consider whether tolerance should and could be built into other standards to ensure pragmatism is applied consistently to the standards during the inspection.

Could missing paperwork now be viewed as more significant than the condition of my pigs?

Generally the higher risk weighted standards are the more practical ones but paperwork is important and all standards must be complied with. In the pig sector, the recording of antibiotic use in the eMB is a vital standard which makes the Red Tractor scheme world-leading and the only way to demonstrate compliance is by presenting eMB records (either physically or on a screenshot). Another important piece of paperwork is up-to-date records of staff deemed competent to carry out husbandry tasks such as tail docking in pigs.

Can assessors tell farmers at routine audits whether they are going to be classified as high risk?

Assessors do not know how the standards are weighted or how a farm's risk rating is calculated so are not in a position to be able to advise farmers of their risk rating. The farmer will be informed if they fall into the high-risk category once the Red Tractor system has received details of the visit. Neither the assessor nor the farm's advisors – such as vets – will be consulted to decide the outcome of the risk rating. Receiving an unannounced inspection does not mean it's a bad farm – it just means certain improvements need to be made to improve overall compliance.

I'm not always on site so how can you expect me to be there if you turn up unannounced?

We recognise there are some impracticalities around unannounced inspections. Farms due to receive an unannounced audit will be asked to complete a questionnaire and return it to their certification body within 28 days of receipt, to ensure the inspector has all the information required to reduce the risk of disruption or no-one being available.

In addition, emergency contact details for at least three people who can be contacted should no-one be present on the farm will need to be provided. Emergency contacts should include individuals who may know the whereabouts of the farm manager/owner and/or are able to accompany the assessor at the audit. Members will need to notify the certification body if anything subsequently changes. Assessors will wait up to an hour for someone to arrive or get in contact and be able to start the audit. Producers need to be aware that if an unannounced audit cannot be carried out it is classed as failed and the cost will be charged to the producer.

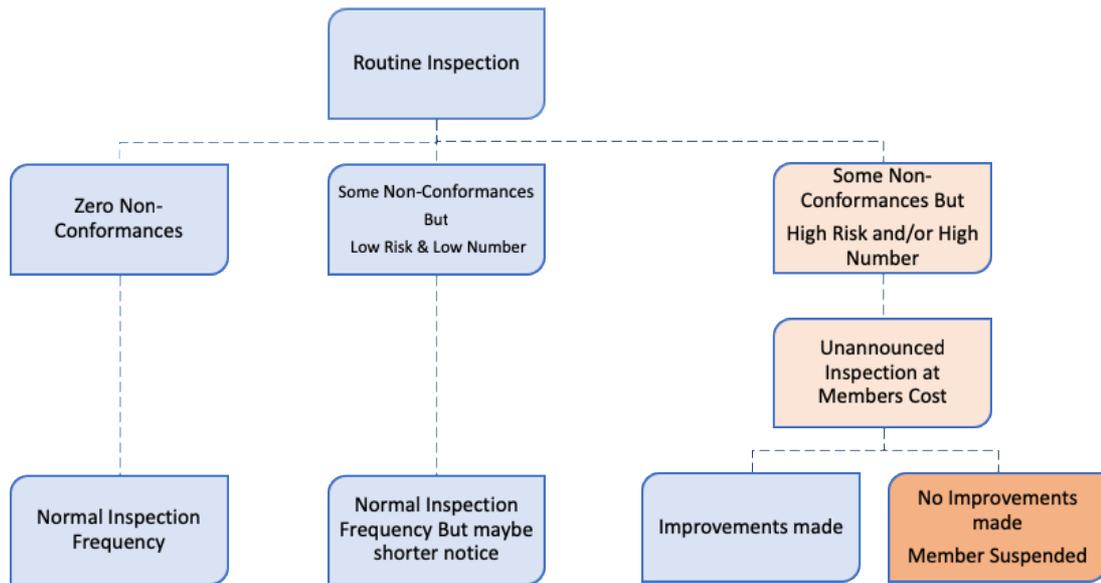
What form does an unannounced audit take?

Each unannounced inspection will take the form of a focused spot check, so shorter than a routine announced audit. If non-conformances are identified they will be reported back to Red Tractor in the normal way and the member will be categorised in the same way as at the routine audit, and the certification body will be notified of the outcome and any necessary action. The focused spot check

could include an assessment of any one of the standards, including paperwork standards, so we encourage all producers to have their paperwork up to date at all times.

What can I do to avoid being categorised as high risk and receive unannounced inspections?

Farms upholding all the Red Tractor standards every day will notice no change to their Red Tractor inspection regime. The best way to avoid receiving an unannounced audit is to ensure you are compliant with all standards at your next routine inspection. Overall, this risk-based approach will ensure that the reputation of our members who are conforming to all our standards is maintained.



What is the appeals process so I can dispute my risk score and who makes the ultimate decision?

Appeals against non-conformances found during routine inspections (if the member does not agree that it was a non-conformance) will still be dealt with by the farm's chosen certification body. If a producer wishes to appeal against their risk rating, this should be done directly to Red Tractor. The Red Tractor Appeals Procedure can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y4kmuacf>