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GETTING YOUR DAIRY BUSINESS AUDIT-READY AHEAD OF A RED TRACTOR ASSESSMENT

Dairy chairman Angela Rhodes shares her practical experience of how to prepare for a farm assurance inspector.

Red Tractor Assurance has recently moved to a new risk-based approach to dairy farm inspections. The change means that the nature and number of any non-conformances found during a routine farm assessment will be weighted according to the reputational risk it poses to the assurance scheme.

Farms complying with every standard every day will not be affected by the new regime while those found to have significant breaches, either in nature or number, could be subject to a further inspection which is unannounced.

The move has been made to protect and enhance the reputation of Red Tractor among consumers where trust in the scheme is paramount.

Red Tractor's dairy chairman, Angela Rhodes, acknowledges the change of approach places even more importance on compliance and advises farmers to focus on planning and preparation to reduce the risk of non-conformances being identified.

"Nobody enjoys a farm inspection but we have to remember it guarantees our route to market," Angela said.

"Without Red Tractor Assurance you lose the access to these markets we all rely on."

Angela was born and raised in County Antrim spending much of her time growing up on relatives' dairy farms. She now runs a 320-cow, autumn calving herd with her husband in Warwickshire.

She is a member of Arla's UK Board of Representatives and its Joint National Council which carries out technical work on behalf of the co-operative. Angela was also involved in the introduction of the global Arlagården Farm Assurance scheme in the UK.

She said: “The consumer spotlight is increasingly focused on all livestock sectors, especially dairy, and farmers need robust farm assurance standards that we can stand behind.

“We need Red Tractor more than ever. With the current political uncertainty we could be facing even more competition on the supermarket shelves from imported products.

“Now is the time to build up the Red Tractor brand so that it becomes synonymous with safe, good quality, responsibly produced food not only in the UK, but globally. This is our window of opportunity.”

About her impending inspection she said: “It may sound simple but my approach to my Red Tractor inspection is to be as prepared as possible.

“I find that making sure I am ready for an inspector well ahead of their arrival means I have less chance of making a mistake which might lead to a non-conformance.

“For example, I will check the medicine cabinet is up to date or, if we’ve had a liner change in the parlour, I need to find the corresponding invoice to prove it’s happened.

“I have heard examples of farmers leaving it until the day before to get their vet to do their health and performance review”

“My advice is to not run the risk of something going wrong.”

Top ten non-conformances found on dairy farms:

- Structures within the dairy and milk storage area must be sound, maintained and suitable **(MP.c)**
- Housing must be constructed and maintained to provide a safe and secure environment for livestock **(HF.a)**
- Medicine records must provide an annual collation of total antibiotic used for the unit **(AM.f.1)**
- An annual review of antibiotics used must be undertaken by the vet. **(AM.f.2)**
- Milk cooling systems and storage tanks must be maintained to ensure effective cooling and washing **(MP.h)**
- Bait must be used responsibly **(VC.b)**
- The milking machine must be tested at least annually, identified faults rectified and records kept **(MP.I.2)**
- An annual herd health and performance review must be undertaken by a vet. **(AH.c.1)**
- The dairy and milk storage area must be kept clean and tidy and free from foul odours and airborne dust. **(MP.b)**
- The milking parlour must be kept clean and tidy **(MP.i)**

ANGELA'S TOP TIPS

Know what you're going to be assessed against

Find the standards and read them. You'll kick yourself if you get a non-conformance which was avoidable. There is a downloadable checklist on the Red Tractor website at

<https://tinyurl.com/yymwrgfx>

Brief your staff

Briefing any staff ensures they own the inspection too. They can help identify potential issues or rectify them.

Walk the farm

Take a member of staff and walk every area of the farm. Ask yourself how it might look to a consumer or an inspector – is it clean, tidy and well maintained?

Act sooner rather than later

As soon as you are notified that you are going to have a Red Tractor inspection, make a start on your preparation. Leaving everything to the last minute will increase stress levels and reduces the time available to remedy issues.