



17th April 2020

Red Tractor pioneers streamed audits to safeguard UK farming's supply chain

Red Tractor is preparing to roll-out live streamed farm audits to enable new applicants to be assessed and current members to retain their status throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

All physical assessments were halted last month, in accordance with government advice on social distancing and non-essential travel. But the UK's largest food and farming assurance scheme has been working with certification bodies and key stakeholders to deliver an innovative solution to allow audits to continue - meeting UKAS requirements - without the need for assessors to travel to farms.

Red Tractor CEO Jim Moseley said: 'Members around the UK have shown great resilience and resourcefulness in recent weeks to keep the supply of great British food moving from farms to shops.

'However, the public and our members expect us to maintain the integrity of the Red Tractor scheme, even during this challenging time.

'As a world-leading assurance scheme, it was important that we developed a remote assessment option, which isn't burdensome for our members but underpins our mantra - that adhering to the standards isn't merely an option, it is a necessity - it's every standard, every day.'

Unlike other approaches, Red Tractor's remote regime is sufficiently robust to replace the routine inspection through this period where physical inspections can't be made, thereby avoiding a backlog in inspections. The assurance scheme utilises its own online portal to enable farms to upload their documents and records and has run a series of pilots using different live-streaming technologies, across all the sectors the scheme covers - Pigs, Poultry, Crops, Fresh Produce, Livestock and Dairy, to allow assessors to have 'virtual eyes' on the farm.

The next phase of the development will be the scaling-up of pilots to stress test the new protocol, in order for Red Tractor to address any issues. More than 150 farmers have expressed an interest in being a part of this next stage of the roll out, citing the benefits of an assessment protocol which is more modern and the use of accessible technology as key.

From this week, under the new remote assessment programme, farms due their assurance assessment, or new applicants, can either opt for an offline pre-assessment, followed by a live stream partial assessment using video calling or online meeting software such as

WhatsApp, Blue Jeans, Zoom. Members must send documentation to their assessor in advance, via Red Tractor's portal or other secure file transfer site, to complete the offline pre-assessment. A video call will follow at an appropriate time, allowing assessors to carry out the visual assessment of the member's site without needing to attend in person. Alternatively, members can opt to have the entire assessment, with all document reviews and inspections taking place, via a video call with an assessor.

Farmers who have successful remote assessments during this phase, will not be required to have an additional physical assessment outside of their normal audit cycle.

Jim Moseley added: 'Whilst some farmers may be daunted at the prospect of a remote assessment, those that have trialled the approach see huge benefits and many believe this could herald another approach to auditing long after the impact of Covid 19.'

'We understand that this new approach will take time to bed in, but we are committed to working with our members and certification bodies to make sure remote assessments are as straightforward as possible.'

By developing remote assessments, that keeps traceability, food safety and animal welfare right at its heart, we are able to continue to robustly monitor this, whilst ensuring that great care is taken to protect the health of our nation, farmers and assessors.'

Members will be contacted by their certification body in due course to discuss the options available to them.

Notes

- Red Tractor has conducted over 25 pilots and demonstrated both the process and the results to UKAS and other stakeholders to ensure the process satisfies their criteria and will continue to work with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) throughout the scaled-up roll out.
- Red Tractor is the first major Food & Farming Assurance Scheme to include fully remote assessments into its inspection regime.
- Red Tractor's simple guide to remote assessments can be found on YouTube [here](#).
- Routine assessments are carried out by independent certification bodies which audit farms at least once a year and farmers must be able to demonstrate to assessors that they are maintaining the standards set out by the scheme. This is done via a combination of physical inspections of important areas of the farm such as livestock sheds and chemical stores, as well as record keeping. About 450 assessors carry out in excess of 60,000 inspections every year.
- For more information on Red Tractor's advice for members during the Covid-19 pandemic, please go to <https://assurance.redtractor.org.uk/covid-19-hub>