



PRESS RELEASE

Red Tractor's remote assessments protocol proves to be a success

- More than 6300 farmer remote assessments completed
- Over 2000 farmers have signed up to the Red Tractor Online Portal
- Overwhelmingly positive feedback from members on Red Tractor's efforts to keep supply chain secure and traceable at a challenging time

The introduction of a new remote assessment regime for farmer members has proven to be a highly successful initiative, according to new figures released by Red Tractor.

Over the last two months, the UK's largest food and farming scheme, has seen 6,300 members complete remote assessments on farm. In March, all physical assessments were halted in accordance with government advice on social distancing and non-essential travel. Working with the schemes' certification bodies and key stakeholders, a new protocol was developed to meet all UKAS requirements, and to ensure that the supply chain remained secure and fully traceable. It also meets the Food Standards Agency requirements for maintaining Red Tractor's earned recognition agreements that reduce the audit burden on farmers. The Red Tractor regime for remote assessments gives assessors the ability to have 'virtual eyes' on farm and allows farmers to complete their assessments to gain or maintain their assurance status.

Members have been offered the opportunity to opt for either an offline pre-assessment of documentation, followed by a partial assessment using live-streaming technologies to provide a real-time visual inspection of the farm. Or, alternatively have the entire assessment-reviewing paperwork and documents, alongside a visual inspection streamed live with an assessor.

Red Tractor's CEO Jim Moseley said: 'With more than 6,000 remote assessments already completed since we began the roll out, and thousands more in the pipeline, we are delighted how quickly and well this new protocol has been received by members.

'Working with our certification bodies, we've continued to test the platforms and systems, and respond to user feedback, to deliver a robust regime for farmers. In doing so we have ensured that we continue to have a secure supply chain, which has every member, meeting every standard, every day.

'Increasingly our farmers are recognising the benefits of remote assessments. Not only as a viable solution for now, but as a real asset for the future- helping to overcome some of the geographic and biosecurity challenges they often face.'

Andrew Hurford, who farms alongside his brother and parents in Devon said: 'I was sceptical about the new format, but it actually worked out well.'

'We were due to have our audit a week before lockdown, but this couldn't go ahead so we were top of the list for the new online version.'

'I was apprehensive about it because I'm not very comfortable with technology and I hadn't used any video conferencing apps before. But the interaction with the assessor was very good and they clearly explained what I needed to do.'

'The thing that took the most time for me was getting all the documents together. I wasn't confident about using the technology, so I chose to show the assessor our documentation during the video call, rather than uploading it to the portal beforehand. Now that I feel more confident, I think I'll be able to use the portal next time. This will make life easier.'

Remote assessments have been made possible, largely due to the development of a unique online portal, which works as a confidential online filing cabinet. Members can upload, and store all necessary documents required to demonstrate compliance to Red Tractor standards. It's a secure and safe way for members to upload and review documents relating to their assessment and has been designed for all Red Tractor farm scheme and transport members to use. Assessors can then review the documents ahead of the assessment to save members' time. For farmers who struggle with mobile connectivity, the online portal allows them to upload documents beforehand at a time that suits them.

As the UK begins to open again, Red Tractor is now preparing to introduce the phased roll-out of physical inspections on farms. From Monday 6th July, the resumption of on-farm inspections will principally be for those who meet the following criteria:

- new applicants wishing to become Red Tractor assured
- those who have been identified as a poorer performer as part of Red Tractor's risk-based approach
- where live streaming is not a credible option, due to connectivity or technology issues.

At this stage, most inspections will continue to be conducted remotely. This dual approach to assessments for farm members, means that from the 6th July, inspections will return to being compulsory.

Jim Moseley added: 'As we move towards a semblance of normality, with the relaxing of social distancing and travel restrictions, it is important that we take a sensible and measured sustainable approach to how we deliver our inspection regimes for the health and wellbeing of our members and inspectors.'

With more than 2200 members already utilising the Red Tractor Portal and nine out of ten farmers finding it a helpful and easy to use resource, it is expected that most members will opt to use it for the paper-based reporting element of assessments.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- Physical assessments will only take place with the full agreement from the farmer and assessor, on health and safety precautionary measures to take, ahead of any visit.
- Approximate number of Red Tractor remote assessments completed by sector:

Beef & Lamb	Crops & Sugar beet	Dairy	Fresh Produce	Pigs	Poultry		
2200	2100	800	300	600	400		
						Total	6400

- A further 2,500 remote assessments are booked in over the coming weeks.