

Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme

What's Changed and Rationale



What's Changed?

Over the course of the last 18 months, the Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Standards Setting Body (comprised of farmers, processors, and representatives from stakeholder organisations) have undertaken a full review of the QMS Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards.

Following a governance review of how we undertake standard reviews and communicate any proposed changes to our members, our Cattle & Sheep Standards Setting Body has now reviewed all the feedback received and approved the updated QMS Cattle & Sheep Scheme Standards. These changes will apply from 1st January 2026.

The Standards Setting Body reviewed all feedback before submitting the final standards to the QMS Board for approval. As part of the standards review process, a benchmarking exercise was conducted comparing the QMS standards with those of our competitors, as well as a market insight analysis to ensure that the standards continue to offer consumer reassurance in key areas of consumer importance. This ensures that the QMS schemes continue to help you meet evolving supply chain demands; ultimately supporting your business profitability.

Where food comes from (provenance) is of real importance to both consumers and retailers. These standards also help underpin the Scotch Brand Marketing Campaigns by providing a strong verification and evidence base to claims made, keeping quality assurance at the heart of brand messaging whilst helping QMS to market the products as effectively as possible.

Key Changes

A key focus of the latest review, following feedback from members and stakeholders, was to streamline and consolidate the information to simplify the process. We have worked with our standards-setting body to make the requirements clearer, to reduce duplication, which has lowered the number of standards by 15% with no impact on the scheme’s robustness, and provided additional wording for guidance and clarity.

Find out about the main changes and why they were made in the summary on these pages:

Section 1 Assurance Status and Traceability

Standard 1.3

Split into two separate standards for clarity.

Previously, all related requirements were grouped under standard 1.3. However, feedback from both assessors and members highlighted that this was causing confusion. As a result, standard 1.3 has been updated to focus specifically on the holdings where livestock are kept and the requirement to notify County Parish Holding (CPH) numbers for traceability purposes.

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
Revised 1.3	Members must ensure that all CPH numbers on which cattle and sheep are likely to be located are timeously notified to the approved certification body (CB). Landless keepers with a CPH number ending in 7000 must provide their nominated permanent CPH. For information on how to contact the Certification Body, please visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/cattle-sheep-standards	All recording for cattle located in Scotland must be captured on or to ScotEID. The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) is no longer available to Scottish keepers; however it still applies to keepers south of the border. Members that have holdings more than 15 miles by road from main holding may require an additional membership. For more information, please refer to how the scheme works document available at: www.qmscotland.co.uk/cattle-sheep-standards

Standard 1.4 has now been introduced as a separate standard addressing new sites (holdings) only. It only applies to land let under tenancy or contract arrangements lasting more than 365 days.

Short-term grazing, herbage agreements, or wintering arrangements are excluded, as they are more variable and cannot be assessed consistently. The 365-day threshold aligns with common land agent practices and policy guidance.

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
New 1.4	When adding new sites to their memberships, members must have taken steps to review the previous use of the site. This will only be applicable to land that is let on a tenancy or contract from more than 365 days.	This includes where relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Previous use of site.• Any recent application of chemicals and soil improvers (including sewage sludge and poultry manure).• Evidence of physical hazards and injurious weeds which may compromise the health and safety of their livestock.

Rationale

Assessors and members fed back that both elements of the current standard 1.3 were not clear. The Standards Setting Body recognised that while the risk is low, there is potential for unknown land use to impact livestock health – for instance, if poultry manure (hen pen) had recently been applied and this wasn’t known to the new grazier, it could increase disease susceptibility in the livestock.

Previous Standards 1.6 & 1.7 Food Chain Information

Following feedback from members and assessors as part of a wider review of the health plan section, we are removing these as stand-alone standards. Broken needle policy will now be included within the health plan standard only.

Rationale

Following a wider review of the health plan section - which the committee looked to streamline to reduce the assessment burden on farmers – we are removing these standalone standards to avoid duplication.

Section 3 Health Planning

Animal Health and Welfare Plan

Following significant feedback from members, assessors and stakeholders we have conducted a thorough review of the health planning standard. As part of the Standards Setting Body discussions, we looked at bringing standards 3.3 and 3.4 together. However, on balance, the standards setting committee felt that it was clearer that they remained as two separate standards. Revised Standard 3.3 now 3.1 (see below) refers to what needs to be included within the animal health plan. The animal health and welfare plan can be written by a farmer, a Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) or a vet.

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
KEY Revised 3.1	A written animal health and welfare plan (AHWP) must be in place for all Cattle & Sheep enterprises.	The plan must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disease prevention.• Biosecurity plan which includes:• Incoming livestock (including any imported stock if applicable)• Equipment.• Vehicles.• Farm visitors.• Husbandry procedures and justification.• Euthanasia Policy.• Colostrum Policy.• Isolation Policy.• Broken needle policy.• Dog Worming Policy. A template can be found at: www.qmscotland.co.uk/cattle-sheep-standards

Revised Standard 3.4 now 3.3 (see next page) refers to what the vet is required to review. By separating these standards out, it clarifies which part the vet must be involved in.

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
KEY Revised 3.3	A written annual livestock health & welfare review must be undertaken by the nominated vet or vet from nominated vet practice.	<p>The vet will be expected to review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regularly occurring problems and key issues, any new concerns and making recommendations to improve identified issues.• Medicine records and data, including anthelmintic use and flukicide use.• The use of antibiotics, including the Highest Priority Critically Important Antibiotics (HP-CIAs) (if any), estimating average use as mg/kg (as per industry standard parameters).• Relevant disease prevention strategies.• Biosecurity.• Livestock records for numbers born, numbers culled, numbers dying and suspected reasons for deaths. <p>Where husbandry procedures (listed in Appendix 3) are carried out, their necessity must be reviewed annually, refined where possible and justification recorded.</p>

Rationale

Significant feedback was received regarding the Animal Health and Welfare Plan and the livestock health and welfare review, particularly around the requirement for sign off by the vet. It was recognised the value that wider animal health professionals bring, such as SQPs for well-rounded livestock health planning, and the challenge in some parts of Scotland that the veterinary profession have in servicing health plan delivery. However, the new requirement as part of the veterinary attestation within export health certificates and the earned recognition the assurance schemes have with DEFRA to satisfy this, means that we have to maintain vet involvement.

We have looked to streamline the section around health planning, reducing duplication in other areas of the standards which should make this section easier to assess, reducing the assessment burden on farmers.

Section 4
Animal Medicines

Throughout this section several of the standards have been combined where possible, resulting in the standards within this section reducing from nine to six. The content remains the same, however it prevents duplication across this section.

Rationale

Following feedback from members, assessors and stakeholders we looked to reduce duplication where possible and ease the assessment burden on members.

Section 6
Livestock Accommodation & Handling Facilities

Standard 6.12 – Handling and Loading Facilities

Following discussion at the initial Standard Setting Body, changes have been made to the wording of existing standards for clarity and consistency across the wider QMS Assurance Schemes.

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
Revised 6.12	<p>HANDLING AND LOADING FACILITIES</p> <p>Facilities on the farm must allow for the safe movement of livestock with the minimum risk of injury and stress to livestock, farm staff and any visitors.</p> <p>Animals must be handled calmly and systematically in an unhurried manner.</p> <p>Handling aids used on, and off site must be suitable for the species and used appropriately.</p>	<p>Handling and loading facilities (Including crush, race and pens) must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be well maintained, structurally sound and stable.• Have no sharp edges which can cause Injury to stock.• Have secure gates and barriers to prevent livestock escaping.• Have adequate lighting available. <p>Examples of handling aids that can be used on and off site are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flags (used as an extension of the arm to guide livestock).• Wooden sticks with no sharp points (used as an extension of the arm to guide livestock).• Goads must not be used.

Rationale

Following discussion, it was felt that the addition of these requirements adds clarity for members and also ensures the Cattle & Sheep standards are consistent with other QMS assurance schemes referencing the handling of livestock.

Section 7
Feeding & Water Provision

New Recommendation

7.5R	It is recommended that any soya purchased is from a sustainable source.
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Rationale

The inclusion of a recommendation for purchasing sustainably sourced soya is critical for promoting environmental responsibility, reducing deforestation, and supporting ethical supply chains. Soya production, particularly in regions such as South America, has been linked to large-scale deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and significant greenhouse gas emissions. By recommending sustainably sourced soya, we aim to:

- Mitigate Environmental Impact.
- Support Ethical Supply Chains.
- Align with Consumer Expectations.
- Contribute to Corporate Sustainability Goals.

It is a recommendation only therefore members will not be assessed against this.



Standard 7.6R – By-products from Food Industry

New Recommendation

Following feedback received following the proposed changes being sent out to our membership, the Standard Setting Body decided against making this a standard and instead making it a recommendation to gauge what impact this would have on our membership should it be brought in the future.

7.6R	It is recommended that by-products from the food industry and former foodstuffs should be sourced from a producer who is a certified participant of AIC’s Feed Materials Assurance Scheme (FEMAS) or a scheme recognised as equivalent. FEMAS members can be found: www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes.html
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Rationale

This has been included as a recommendation for the protection of feed safety. Risks can arise (e.g. copper toxicity) and the inclusion of this requirement ensures that this risk is controlled.

The majority of distilleries are already covered under FEMAS, with a checker available. It was felt that uncertified feeds pose a risk to both animal and human health, and this recommendation provides a mitigation for this. Our impact assessment has identified that there is a risk of some small distilleries not being covered under the FEMAS scheme which could lead to a reduction in draft availability. Through the consultation we are keen to understand from members whether they think they would be impacted by this, to help inform our decision-making process going forward. The majority of major distilleries ARE covered, so it is only some, smaller distilleries that are at risk.

Please note it is a recommendation only therefore there is no impact at this stage and no action is required by members.

Section 8 Farm Biosecurity & Cleanliness

Standard 8.3 Vermin Control

This standard has reverted back to the wording like the 2016 standard version. The two standards will now be just one, more simplified and reduced the requirements of members in this area.

The previous QMS standards covered additional criteria which entitled the QMS Cattle & Sheep Scheme members to earned recognition with Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU), whereby members of a recognised assurance scheme were able to purchase rodenticides without the need for additional training.

Rationale

The current QMS Standards cover additional criteria which entitled the QMS Cattle & Sheep Scheme members to earned recognition with CRRU, whereby members of a recognised assurance scheme were able to purchase rodenticides without the need for additional training.

CRRU have since withdrawn earned recognition and as a result, the QMS Cattle & Sheep Standard Setting Body felt that there was no need to maintain the records required for earned recognition if earned recognition was withdrawn.

What does this mean for our members?

As a result of CRUU withdrawing earned recognition, members of QMS Assurance Schemes or any assurance scheme under this earned recognition will no longer be able to buy rodenticide using their assurance certificate.

From January 2026, farmers will instead have to show a relevant Ofqual related training certificate and exam pass at the point of sale. This documentation must not be dated more than five years previously. Older certificates will remain valid if the purchaser is a registered member of a CRRU-approved continuing professional development scheme with sufficient up to date credits. Despite our best efforts this decision is unfortunately out of QMS' control.

Section 10 Environmental

Standards 10.1, 10.3 & 10.5 – Waste, Farmyard manure and slurry management

The Standard Setting Body discussed at length the best way to simplify the standards in this section for clarity. The three standards have been split into two that represent the use of wastes, farmyard manures and slurry management. Please see below the proposed new standards - previously 10.1, 10.3 & 10.5, now combined and split into two for clarity.

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
KEY Revised 10.1	STORAGE Livestock waste, approved organic derived fertilisers and soil improvers must be stored and handled in a way which minimises the dangers of polluting the environment, removes the risk of spreading disease to other animals or humans and conforms to current legislation.	Location of any field heap of farmyard manure must be: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least 10m away from any clean surface water, field drain or watercourse.• At least 50m from any spring, well or borehole.• As far away from residential housing as possible. Farms must have access to and follow the Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity, Code of Good Practice (PEPFAA Code).

STANDARD DETAIL		REQUIREMENT
Revised 10.2	APPLICATION Livestock waste, approved organic derived fertilisers and soil improvers must be applied to land in a manner that does not compromise the environment or the health and welfare of livestock.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specified no graze and no harvest intervals must be observed.• Members must retain evidence to demonstrate that the requirements of the Guidance Notes in Appendix 5 and Table in Appendix 6 have been met.• All applications must be made in a way which prevents the pollution of waterways, air, soil, and wildlife habitats.• Liquid AD cannot be applied using a raised splash plate or a rain gun.

Rationale

Feedback was considered from members, assessors and stakeholders around how these standards worked in practice. It was felt that there was room to streamline them, making it easier to understand what was required for compliance. The impact of this has been assessed and the core requirements of the standards are not changing – this change should make them easier to assess, therefore reducing assessment time in this area.

Section 11

Complaints Handling

Following feedback from members and stakeholders, the QMS scheme membership rules were launched in 2022 and have associated new governance process around these. Therefore, the reference to compliance with the law and scheme reputation has now been removed from the standards due to this area being managed in a different way.

Rationale

Compliance with the law and scheme reputation is now covered within the membership rules so the need to have this as a standard is now redundant.

The impact of this change on members has been assessed and there should be a positive change to how assessment of compliance with the law and scheme reputation is managed, with a clear independent appeals panel and governance structure.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Brands Integrity Team by emailing:
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