

## **Protocol for the completion of NIBL FQAS farm inspections during COVID-19 Restrictions**

### **1) Introduction**

The production of safe wholesome food is an essential service and the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) is a critical part of this. FQAS is a scheme concerned with giving assurances to customers (abattoirs, wholesalers, retailers and consumers) about the production standards of farms on which Northern Ireland quality assured beef and lamb is produced, and thereby assurances regarding the safety, wholesomeness and integrity of the product. However, without safeguarding the people who are central to food production the supply chain simply cannot operate.

This protocol has been produced to allow FQAS farm inspections to be conducted safely outdoors in line with government guidelines and industry best practice, minimising the risk to both farmers and inspectors. It is critical that both farmers and inspectors read, understand and most importantly follow this protocol.

### **2) Commencement Date and term**

- This protocol must be implemented with immediate effect and will remain in place until further notification is received from NIFCC Management.

### **3) General Principles**

- Safeguarding your own safety and that of others is paramount.
- Government guidance on how to prevent the spread of coronavirus can be found [here](#). This guidance must be followed at all times.
- Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be worn at all times when on farm.
- Inspectors and farmers must adhere to social distancing guidance at all times.
- If at any point during the inspection process either the inspector or the farmer do not adhere to this protocol concerns must be raised immediately and the inspection stopped if necessary.
- Inspections will take place outdoor and inspectors will not enter the farmer's home or farm dwelling house.
- Inspectors must minimise contact with other members of public before, between and after inspections.

### **4) Prior to Inspection**

- Prior to the inspection, the inspector must contact the participant by telephone to explain the amendments to the inspection process and give a brief overview of this protocol.
- The inspector must also take this opportunity to verify if the farmer or any members of their household have not had any of the COVID 19 symptoms.
- Inspectors must contact Management at NIFCC immediately if they are displaying any of the COVID 19 symptoms.
- Inspectors will advise participants that they can forward scheme documentation for review prior to the inspection (see Section 5 (c) below).

## 5) Farm Inspection

### a) On Arrival

- The inspector must telephone the participant confirming that they have arrived on farm and reassert the importance of social distancing and ask the participant to meet at an agreed location.
- Inspectors will be issued with disposable gloves, face masks and hand sanitiser. Upon arrival to the farm and prior to exiting the vehicle, the inspector must put on a face mask and gloves. The inspector must then put on the rest of their protective equipment in the usual manner (coat, boots and waterproof leggings).

### b) Farm Inspection

- **This must only involve the inspector and one representative from the farm business.** Children, spouses etc. must not be in the vicinity of the farm inspection.
- Inspectors must not enter dwelling houses or any buildings not essential to the farm inspection process.
- Inspectors must maintain a minimum distance of 2 meters between themselves and the farm representative at all times. Consideration may need to be given to the inspection of certain areas, for example if the medicine cabinet is in a small tool shed, the Inspector may request the farmer to unlock the cabinet and exit the shed prior to inspecting the cabinet and its contents.
- Avoid touching surfaces unless absolutely necessary.

### c) Review of Documentation

- In normal circumstances the paperwork part of the inspection is usually carried out in the farmer's dwelling house or a farm office, neither option is permitted at present.

#### Option 1

- The farmer will be asked to bring all documentation to an appropriate point, for example: a work bench in the machinery shed, the inspector would then carry out a review of the documentation in the usual manner and with the farmer maintaining a 2 meter distance (minimum) – explain any non-conformances arising. If farm records are stored online or on a home computer a screenshot or copy of the records must be printed and presented to the inspector on the day of the inspection.

#### Option 2

- The farmer will be asked to forward the documents to the inspector's NIFCC email prior to the inspection – the review of the documentation would take place during the inspection and the inspector may need to verify some points during the inspection process. For example, if anaesthetic has not been recorded in the veterinary medicine book, is this because the farmer has omitted to record it or because no disbudding has been carried out. If farm records are stored online or on a home computer a screenshot or copy of the records must be emailed to the inspector in advance of the inspection.



## **6) Travelling to out farms**

- Travelling to out farms should be avoided. If it is absolutely necessary the inspector must use their own transport.

## **7) Non-Conformance Report**

- Until further notice and while restrictions are in place – Non-Conformance Report slips will not be printed, signed and left on the farm in the usual manner.
- The inspector is required to print the Non-Conformance Report, when off the farm, and then forward to the farmer. The preferred option is to forward this to the farmer's email address, using the inspector's NIFCC email. If this is not possible then other options such as attaching to a SMS message or Whats App message should be used.
- As a signature is not being obtained from the farm representative it is important that any objections to the inspection findings are recorded in the comments box at the end of the inspection – providing as much detail as possible.

## **8) Leaving the farm**

- At the end of the inspection, the inspector must remove gloves and face mask and place in a plastic bag in the boot of their car and sanitise hands prior to getting into the vehicle. Used PPE must be disposed of at the earliest opportunity.
- New PPE must be used at each inspection.