

Friday 14 October 2022

Prepare for your FQAS inspection

Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS) participants will be aware that farm surveillance inspections take place every 18 months. On an annual basis 5% of participants will also have a spot check inspection. The better prepared you are for the NIBL FQAS inspection the smoother the inspection will go on the day.

The NIBL FQAS was set up in 1991 and officially launched in 1992. NIBL FQAS was developed to give consumers assurances about the farm end of the production chain of their food e.g. the quality of the production methods used, the quality of care for animals, the quality of the farm environment, and above all the quality of concern for the customer in producing beef and lamb which is wholesome and safe. The LMC ensure that the standards required by the NIBL FQAS reflect these pillars that are valued by customers/consumers.

- NIBL FQAS participants that comply with the standards can gain access to premium markets for beef and sheep meat products. NIBL FQAS ensures that processors can serve retail and food service customers who by their very nature and success are the most financially secure and users of high volume.
- NIBL FQAS also ensures access to the UK Red Tractor Assurance Quality Mark, which is extensively used to market farm products to consumers in GB. This mutual recognition with Red Tractor Assurance enables certified NIBL FQAS beef and lamb to be labelled with the Red Tractor logo.
- Achieving NIBL FQAS approved status allows producers to keep their options open when marketing their animals (cattle and sheep).
- NIBL FQAS provides best practice standards for husbandry, welfare, nutrition and environment. This helps to assist farmers with better record keeping and traceability of inputs. As a consequence of this, NIBL FQAS helps producers to prepare for cross-compliance visits.

The farm inspection consists of a farm walk and visual assessment with the inspector asking questions along the way to assess compliance with the standards. Once this element is complete, the inspector will review the paperwork such as herd/flock records, veterinary medicine records, feed records, animal health plan etc... Farm inspectors are employed by the accredited independent certification body contracted by LMC to provide certification services for NIBL FQAS. Inspectors are independent of LMC and NIBL FQAS and the certification body has robust policies and procedures in place to ensure that all inspections are conducted professionally and consistently across the scheme membership. Participants should note that there is a zero tolerance policy regarding any behaviour towards inspectors deemed inappropriate.

It is important that participants of the scheme make themselves available for inspections. It is not acceptable to delay inspections. If inspections are cancelled then scheme participation may be suspended.

If during an assessment the farm is found to be non-compliant against a standard, the participant has 28 days to address the issue and provide evidence to Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification (NIFCC) to show that they have taken steps to be fully compliant. NIFCC are the current contracted Certification Body responsible for undertaking registration, inspection and certification functions of FQAS. If the participant provides this documentary evidence within the specified timeframe their certification will continue. If the participant does not send in suitable documentary evidence, then the participant will be suspended from the scheme.

Full requirements/rules are in the FQAS Standard and Rules 2022 available at www.lmcni.com.

Many of the FQAS requirements are legislative however there are also requirements developed by industry to provide the assurances in our supply chain that customers and consumers require for quality assured and traceable beef and lamb. FQAS aims to protect the integrity of the beef and lamb produced by compliance with these standards. Better preparation ahead of the inspection will provide a better opportunity for compliance. For assistance before or after a FQAS inspection, LMC's Farm Liaison Officer Terry White is available to talk through the FQAS Helpline on (028) 92633024.

ENDS

Notes to Editor

The Livestock and Meat Commission may take photographs and videos at announcements and events to publicise its work. Photographs, interviews, videos or other recordings may be issued to media organisations for publicity purposes or used in promotional material, including in publications, newspapers, magazines, other print media, on television, radio and electronic media (including social media and the internet). Photographs and videos will also be stored on LMC's internal records management system. LMC will keep the photographs and recordings for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which they have been obtained. LMC's Privacy Policy is available on our website.

For more information contact LMC on: 028 9263 3000

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