

Tuesday 23 April 2024

FQAS membership fee set to change from June 2024

THE Farm Quality Assurance Scheme Industry Board has confirmed that following consultation with its key stakeholders, fees for participation in the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) will be revised from Saturday 1st June 2024 (June Renewals). Initial application and annual renewal fees for producer members will increase from £75 to £95 (excluding VAT).

Membership fees were last increased in May 2021 and since then have remained static with FQAS utilising reserves over recent years to avoid an increase in producer fee. Scheme reserves are now at a level where they cannot be depleted any further, therefore, to continue supporting the efficient running of the scheme, the FQAS Industry Board has decided that a membership fee increase must now be applied to ensure long-term sustainability. This will be accompanied by an uplift in processor throughput fee.

Commenting, Chair of the FQAS Industry Board, Colin Smith said, "It is essential that FQAS is sufficiently funded to ensure that it can sustainably deliver for the beef and lamb sector going forward.

"The increase in producer membership fees has been accompanied by a 20 per cent increase in the FQAS processor throughput fee. The FQAS funding model is unique in the United Kingdom in that income is derived from both farmer and processor contributions. This 20 per cent increase from the processor alongside the FQAS membership fee increase will help to further the work of the scheme ensuring that ongoing operational costs are met.

"Over the past three decades FQAS has established itself as a critical tool in the marketing of beef and lamb and it continues to be essential in terms of market access and is a pre-requisite of supermarket specifications. Although the FQAS logo is not always visible on some retail packs, it is a baseline requirement for retailer sourcing."

Colin went on to highlight that FQAS also presents an array of benefits for producer members. "FQAS allows the participant to maximise the outlets for their livestock to ensure they get the best return possible, many of the scheme requirements are legislative and are areas which all producers should be compliant with if they were selected for a DAERA Cross Compliance inspection."

Colin added, "In Northern Ireland, we have the autonomy to adapt the scheme in line with industry needs and requirements which are specific to NI. LMC is guided by farmers, processors and independent experts who make up the FQAS Industry Board ensuring that FQAS evolves in line with relevant industry changes. Representation from stakeholder organisations is also key to the successful operation of the FQAS Standard Setting Committee.

No FQAS Standards are devised and implemented without the full approval and support of the Standard Setting Committee and Industry Board.”

To support the Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, LMC uses separate levy funds to deliver a wide range of activities to promote and showcase farm quality assured beef and lamb. This includes a consumer focused advertising campaign, a wide-reaching education programme which bolsters FQAS messaging, consumer retail sampling, teachers workshops and key consumer engagement events throughout the year.

Producers with any queries or producers who would be interested in joining the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, should contact the Farm Liaison Officer at the LMC Helpline on 028 9263 3024 for advice or to request an application pack.

ENDS

Photo caption

001 – Cattle grazing

Notes to Editor

1. Further background information relevant to the fee increases to both producer and processor are noted below.

- The FQAS Industry Board agreed over the last number of years that FQAS reserves would be run down to allow membership fees to remain static. These reserves have now got to a level where it is no longer sustainable to run them down any further.
- FQAS fees still represent good value for money in terms of cost to the producer due to the joint producer/processor funding model which operates in Northern Ireland. In GB the cost to the producer is significantly more than in Northern Ireland as Certification Bodies are commercially competitive.
- Other assurance schemes have been applying inflationary increases to producer fees over the last number of years, LMC has been guided by the FQAS Industry Board in running down reserves to stop the producer paying any more than required.
- FQAS operates on a balanced budget and does not build up surplus funds.

2. The FQAS Industry Board is an industry stakeholder group made up of representatives from UFU, NIMEA, NSA, NBA, DAERA and NIAPA. The main role of the FQAS Industry Board is to ensure that the scheme enhances the quality of beef and lamb produced in Northern Ireland and evolves to meet the expectations of customers and consumers at all times. They have a role to engage stakeholders in the decision-making processes and advise LMC on FQAS commercial matters of the scheme, including membership fees and expenditure in order to maintain an economically sustainable scheme. Representation from these organisations is also visible on the FQAS Standard Setting Committee.

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For more information contact LMC on: 028 9263 3000

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