

## FQAS Membership Fee Changes April 2012

The Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) has been in operation since 1991. It is one of the longest established of all the Farm Quality Assurance Schemes, not only in the UK but probably worldwide.

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, safe and free of unnatural substances.

In October 2011 there were 9781 active members of the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme with 95% of the price reported prime cattle kill qualifying for assured status. Farm Quality Assurance is now one of the pre-requisites for bonus payments for cattle/sheep in major meat plants with an 8p/kg price incentive for in spec Farm Quality Assured cattle.

During the period of April to August 2011, FQAS cattle were attracting around £40 per head more at the factories than non-quality assured stock.

Current fees for FQAS producer members are £35 + VAT for annual renewal and £50 + VAT for joining the scheme. For the last number of years FQAS has been operating at a managed loss as historic FQAS reserves were utilised and this has enabled membership fees to be held at a constant level for 10 years (since annual renewals were first introduced). However, within recent years total fee income has decreased as producers exit the industry, and the proportion of fee income from producers has also slipped away from the previously agreed 50% contribution to scheme running costs. In order to bring the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme income and expenditure into alignment and to re-balance the 50:50 ratio of funding proportion between producers and processors, membership fees for the scheme will be increasing with effect from 1 April 2012.

The new membership fees to be implemented on 1 April 2012 to coincide with the new financial year, as agreed by the FQAS Industry Board, are as follows:

The initial registration fee (for new scheme members) and annual renewal fee will both become £55 + VAT.

In comparison to other equivalent Quality Assurance schemes within the UK, the

proposed fee changes for 2012 still represent extremely good value for money, as most UK schemes have fees in excess of £100. For example Red Tractor Scheme can cost between £110 and £130 + VAT per year, depending on certification body, Quality Meat Scotland charge anything between £59.88 + VAT to £213.53 + VAT depending on the numbers of livestock present on the farms and Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Scheme charges £104.

If you have any queries regarding the increase in renewal fees or would be interested in joining the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, please contact the Farm Liaison Officer at the LMC Helpline on 028 9263 3024 for advice or to request an application pack.

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## Shortage of DARD CoGAP (Code of Good Agricultural Practice)

It is a requirement, in order to comply with the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS) Product Standard published in April 2010, that all producers must adopt a positive attitude towards the countryside by complying with current environmental legislation and codes of practice. The code of Good Agricultural Practice (CoGAP) for the prevention of pollution of water, air and soil must be followed. All relevant farm staff must have access to a copy of the code. As part of the farm inspection as completed by NIFCC (Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification), the inspector will check that you as an FQAS participant have a copy of the CoGAP and that it has been signed to indicate that it has been read and understood.

However, this DARD code is out of print and is currently being reviewed and updated. Further copies of the CoGAP will not be available until after the updates have been completed. For the purpose of a farm inspection by NIFCC you are advised to access the August 2008 online version found at:

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/ruralni/index/environment/countryside/cogap.htm>

Please note that there have been changes to some legislation included in the code since it was produced in 2008.

As not all participants will have access to an online copy of the CoGAP it has been agreed between LMC, DARD and NIFCC that the following options will be acceptable for demonstrating compliance against the FQAS Product Standard:

- A completed request form for the DARD CoGAP obtainable from your local Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO)
- A written request by the producer to DARD/DVO asking for a copy of CoGAP
- An electronic copy of CoGAP obtainable from the above web address (this can be in the form of a printed copy or opened up on your computer screen in the presence of the NIFCC inspector to demonstrate awareness)



## Transfer of herd numbers and Farm Quality Assurance Status

A characteristic of Northern Ireland's farming sector has been the important role of the family farm, whereby farms pass from one generation to the next over time and where production for the market is achieved almost exclusively by family labour. Traditionally when a farmer died or passed the farm to a successor his/her herd number also transferred but changes to legislation means that this is no longer possible and as a result the new herd keeper must become registered and thereby obtain their own herd number.

All cattle can then be transferred to the newly registered herd numbers but it is important to note that the Farm Quality Assured status does not transfer with the cattle unless the new herd has been registered as Farm Quality Assured. If cattle are moved into a herd which is not registered as Farm Quality Assured they will lose their assured status and have to begin their 90 day residency period again before being eligible for Farm Quality Assured status. This can have financial implications for the producer when presenting cattle for sale at the markets or at the abattoir.

To avoid such problems it is important that the producer informs the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme of any changes to the herd number of a Farm Quality Assured farm. For example in the unfortunate event of the death of the herd owner or a transfer of a herd to a successor then the producer must inform the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme in writing of the circumstances surrounding the change and the details of the new herd number. This should be done before any cattle are moved into a new herd to avoid implications on the Farm Quality status of animals in the herd.

By informing the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme of any changes to herd numbers prior to moving the cattle producers can ensure that cattle will maintain their FQ assured status and where applicable their Farm Quality Pending Status, thereby preventing what could be quite severe financial implications further down the line.

If you have any queries surrounding this please contact the FQAS Helpline on 028 9263 3024 or NIFCC on 028 9263 3017. Any changes in herd number which you would like to transfer the FQ status to should be done so in writing to:

Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification  
Lissue House, 31 Ballinderry Road  
Lisburn BT28 2SL

## Transporter Authorisation Reminder

All livestock hauliers contracted by the producer must be approved participants in the ABM Livestock Transport Scheme, or an agreed equivalent (see [www.abm.org.uk](http://www.abm.org.uk) for an approved list of participants). FQAS members can haul their own livestock and the livestock of a maximum of five other FQAS members, providing the movement declaration (MC2 or MS2) accompanies the livestock. If the FQAS member exceeds haulage on this smaller scale, he/she will have to participate in the ABM Livestock Transport Scheme as they would be defined as a 'commercial haulier'.



FQAS members who wish to transport livestock over 65km in connection with an economic activity, are required to be independently assessed for competence by the National Proficiency Training Council (NTPC), this assessment is specific to the role of the transporter, journey length and the species being transported. A certificate will be awarded on completion of the assessment which must be made available to inspectors when requested. Details for this course are available from CAFRE, Greenmount Campus on (028) 9442 6666.

In the event of a FQAS farm inspection, the producer will be asked to declare who transports the livestock. If the producer employs a haulier to transport his/her livestock, the NIFCC inspector will ask for either an ABM approval number or alternatively a FQAS membership approval number of the haulier. A non-conformance will be issued if this is not available.

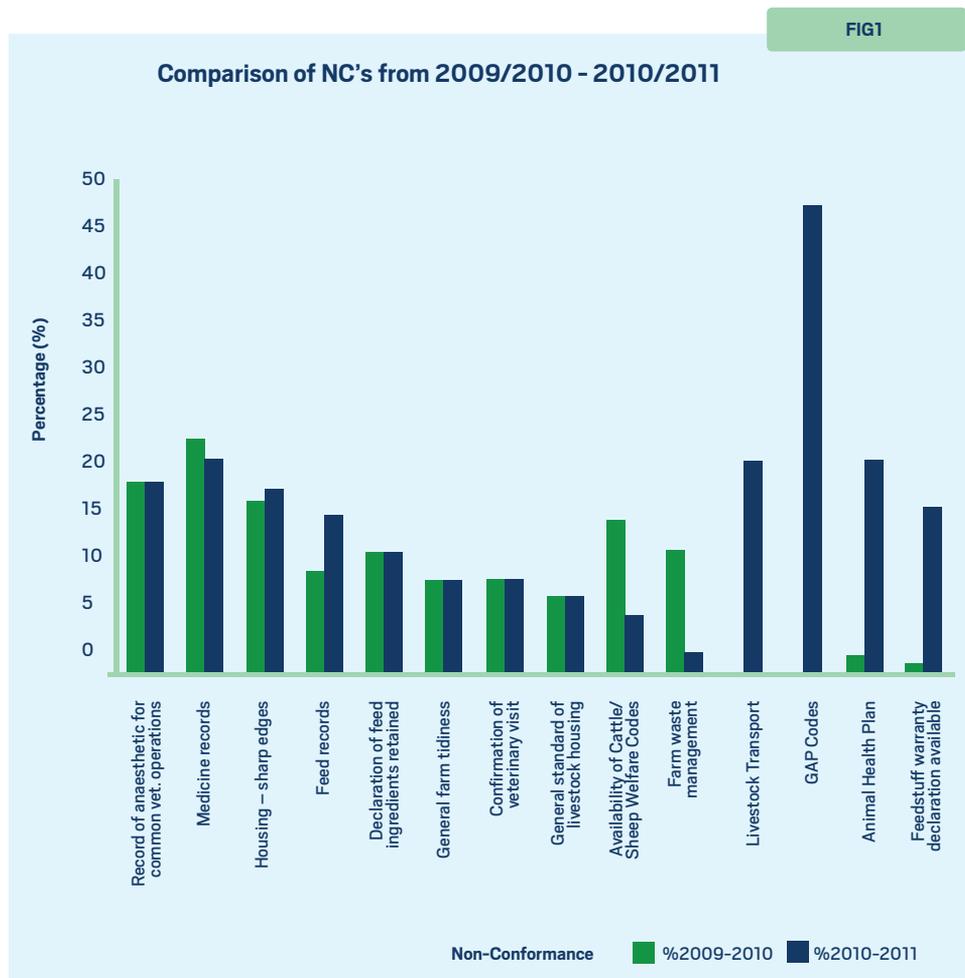
More details are available in the NIFQAS 2010 Standard, pages 26 & 64 -71, or alternatively call the FQAS helpline on: (028) 9263 3024.

# Common FQAS Non-Conformances

The Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS) is owned by the LMC on behalf of the beef and sheepmeat industries. Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification (NIFCC) operates this scheme on behalf of LMC. It is NIFCC who complete farm inspections against the NIBL FQAS standard and determine whether the certification will be granted. During farm inspections the inspectors from NIFCC will potentially raise non-conformances. A non-conformance will be raised where the farm does not comply with a certain clause or requirement of the standard. These non-conformances must be rectified within the timescale provided for the farm to either become or retain its Farm Quality Assured (FQA) status.

Non-conformances have been reviewed for a 12 month period from 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011. Within this period NIFCC conducted 7427 farm inspections. The top ten most common non-conformances are listed in Table 1.

In the previous update of common non-conformances raised during inspections (Spring 2010 FQAS Newsletter), the most common non-conformance was medicine records, this has decreased by 2% as seen in Fig 1 but is still within the top five non-conformances and improvement in record keeping is still required. There have been some significant improvements noted for a few non-conformances such as: Availability of welfare codes for cattle and sheep going from 13% to 5% and also Farm waste management issues decreasing from 10% to 2%. The top three non-conformances 2010-2011 are now: GAP Code (Code of



Good Agricultural Practice) not available, Livestock Transport Assurance and issues with Animal Health Plan. In order to give some more clarification on some of these issues – articles have been drawn up and can be found in this edition of the newsletter. Some of the increases in incidences of non-conformances e.g.

Feedstuff warranty declarations and issues with Animal Health Plans have all arisen from changes to the FQAS standard in April 2010.

To assist farms to maintain their FQA status and receive the benefits associated with this, the LMC as owners of the FQAS have a Farm Liaison Officer and FQAS Helpline in place. The Farm Liaison Officer will assist participants of the scheme either prior to or after an inspection with any queries or any advice that may be needed to rectify non-conformances or preparation required for an impending inspection.

For any copies of the FQAS Standard, Rules, Veterinary Medicine Records, Feed Record Books or application packs contact the FQAS helpline which is in operation Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm (028 9263 3024).

**TABLE 1**

Product Standard Code	Non Conformance	% of inspections completed where non conformance occurred
7.2	GAP Code (Code of Good Agricultural Practice) not available	47
6.2	Livestock Transport Assurance	20
2.4a	Animal Health Plan	20
1.6	Record of anaesthetic used for common vet operations	18
2.14	Medicine Records	18
5.2	Housing, sharp edges	16
3.13b	Feedstuff warranty declaration available	15
3.17a	Feed Records	14
3.16	Declaration of feed records retained	12
7.1b	General farm tidiness	8

# Meet the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) Team



Within the last few months, there have been a few changes within the FQAS team at LMC. Recently appointed are Gillian Brown (Farm Quality Assurance Manager) and William Chesney (Farm Liaison Officer).

The role of the Farm Quality Assurance Manager is to manage and develop the FQAS in line with ongoing developments within the industry. The FQAS Manager co-ordinates the FQAS Industry Board and Standard Setting Committee.

The role of the Farm Liaison Officer is to provide an expert liaison service to both new applicants and existing participants of the FQAS. William is available to help resolve any queries that participants of the scheme may have. The main assistance given by William is usually with regards to rectification of non-conformances raised during FQAS inspections or to assist producers to prepare for an inspection.

Both the FQAS Manager and the Farm Liaison Officer liaise closely with NIFCC (Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification) as the certification body for the FQAS.

Assistance can be sought by telephone from the LMC Farm Liaison Officer/FQAS Manager using the direct line to the FQAS office. The helpline welcomes any producers who are keen to join the scheme and any producers needing advice on inspections or non-conformances. The helpline is also open for any producers who require any of the following documents for compliance with the scheme such as: Feed Record Books, Veterinary Medicine Records (VMR), Inspection checklist, copy of the FQAS Standard and rules of scheme and application packs etc... The helpline is available Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm on 028 9263 3024 or mobile 07734 282271.

## Benefits of FQAS

- **To widen the marketplace for producers** e.g. more and more retailers in both domestic and international markets now require Farm Quality Assured beef and lamb. Across the EU retail and food service, customers are becoming ever more interested in what conditions an animal has been produced to, and the more animals that come through for slaughter having been farm assured the easier it is for the meat trade to satisfy existing customer expectations and to develop business with new customers.
- **Cost benefits associated with presenting FQA cattle/sheep for slaughter.** Over the last 12 months FQA Cattle have typically received around £40 more per head, FQA Sheep have typically received £1-£4 more per head than non-quality assured stock in the marketplace.
- **Approved members of FQAS are eligible to use the FQAS logo** when marketing product.
- **FQAS is a recognised equivalent scheme to Red Tractor** and many retailers which use the Red Tractor Logo to market their meat can be readily accessed by NI beef and lamb as a result of this equivalence.
- **Provides best practice standards for husbandry, welfare, nutrition and environment.** This helps to assist farmers with **better record keeping and traceability** of inputs e.g. maintaining Feed Record Books, Veterinary Medicine Records. This consequently helps to prepare for **cross-compliance visits**.
- **Membership reduces likelihood of selection for statutory inspections** in GAEC (Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition) and Food and Feed Law.
- **We have a dedicated Farm Liaison Service;** this is manned Monday- Friday 9am -5pm. The Farm Liaison Officer works

with producers to help them prepare for upcoming inspections, helps to rectify any non-conformances issued and generally provides assistance on any matters which are concerning producers with regards to the scheme.

- **Gives customers assurances** about the source of the product and the standards under which the animals have been raised.
- **The scheme is represented by all areas of the industry** – members of Ulster Farmers Union (UFU), Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA), National Beef Association (NBA), National Sheep Association (NSA), Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and LMC all form part of the FQAS Board and Standard Setting Committee, so standards are agreed in line with best practice and stakeholder requirements
- **The scheme is linked to other key elements of the meat supply chain** e.g. livestock feeds, transport, markets, abattoirs etc...
- **Competitive membership fees** in comparison with other schemes in GB.

## How do I join?

- Any producer of beef or lamb can apply to join the scheme
- Application pack contains a copy of the standard, copy of rules, inspection checklist, application form
- Contact the FQAS Helpline (028 92633024) or NIFCC for an application pack (028 9263 3017)
- Once the application form is submitted and initial checks have been completed then NIFCC will organise a farm inspection with you at a time which suits both parties.

# LMC

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