

REPORT

—Certification

# QS certification ensures safe, traceable food

In times of critical consumers and advancing globalisation, it is absolutely necessary for all parties involved in production and marketing of fresh food to work hand in hand. Trading partners must rely on each other – also across national borders. This trust applies to the daily work of producers and wholesalers, but also to the work of the inspecting auditors. The German QS scheme ensures certified quality assurance of food along



the entire supply chain – from farm to shop. Currently, 32,000 international companies from the fruit and vegetables sector participate in the QS scheme. Thereof 13,500 producers of fresh fruit and vegetables. They cooperate with QS wholesalers, logistics companies and food retail outlets to ensure an unbroken supply chain. Within the QS scheme, the partners produce, process and market certified food according to strictly defined criteria. With the blue QS certification mark, consumers and customers can clearly recognise which products have passed the comprehensive process and origin checks – a sign of food you can trust! More and more German food retailers are therefore asking for QS products.

## VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT OF THE WHOLE SUPPLY CHAIN TO ENSURE SAFE FOOD

The QS scheme was founded in October 2001, based on experiences from the BSE crisis, as an alliance for certified quality assurance. It covers the product scopes beef, pork and poultry as well as, since 2004, fresh fruit and vegetables. Its objectives are to ensure comprehensive consumer protection and avoid possible incidents and crises via preventive measures. The requirements of the QS scheme are defined jointly by all parties involved in the supply chain. QS guidelines describe the rules and requirements, for example:

- **Producers must comply with requirements regarding the use of fertilisers or plant protection products as well as hygiene and traceability.**
- **Wholesalers must meet criteria regarding storage and transport conditions, hygiene and traceability.**
- **Requirements for QS retailers relate to hygiene, proper storage and product control and correct labelling.**

The scheme participants contractually commit themselves to comply with all requirements. This compliance is verified by independent certification bodies.

## PARTICIPATING IN THE QS SCHEME

Participation in the QS scheme is open to every company. Companies participating in the QS scheme can rely on their suppliers and customers. If they purchase goods from a QS scheme participant, they can be sure that the supplier meets all scheme requirements and is regularly being audited as part of neutral checks by independent certification bodies. If a company does not comply with QS requirements, it is blocked by QS and can no longer deliver goods into the QS scheme. Since all recipient customers check the current eligibility of delivery of their suppliers, they can always be sure that they will only ever receive QS-approved goods.

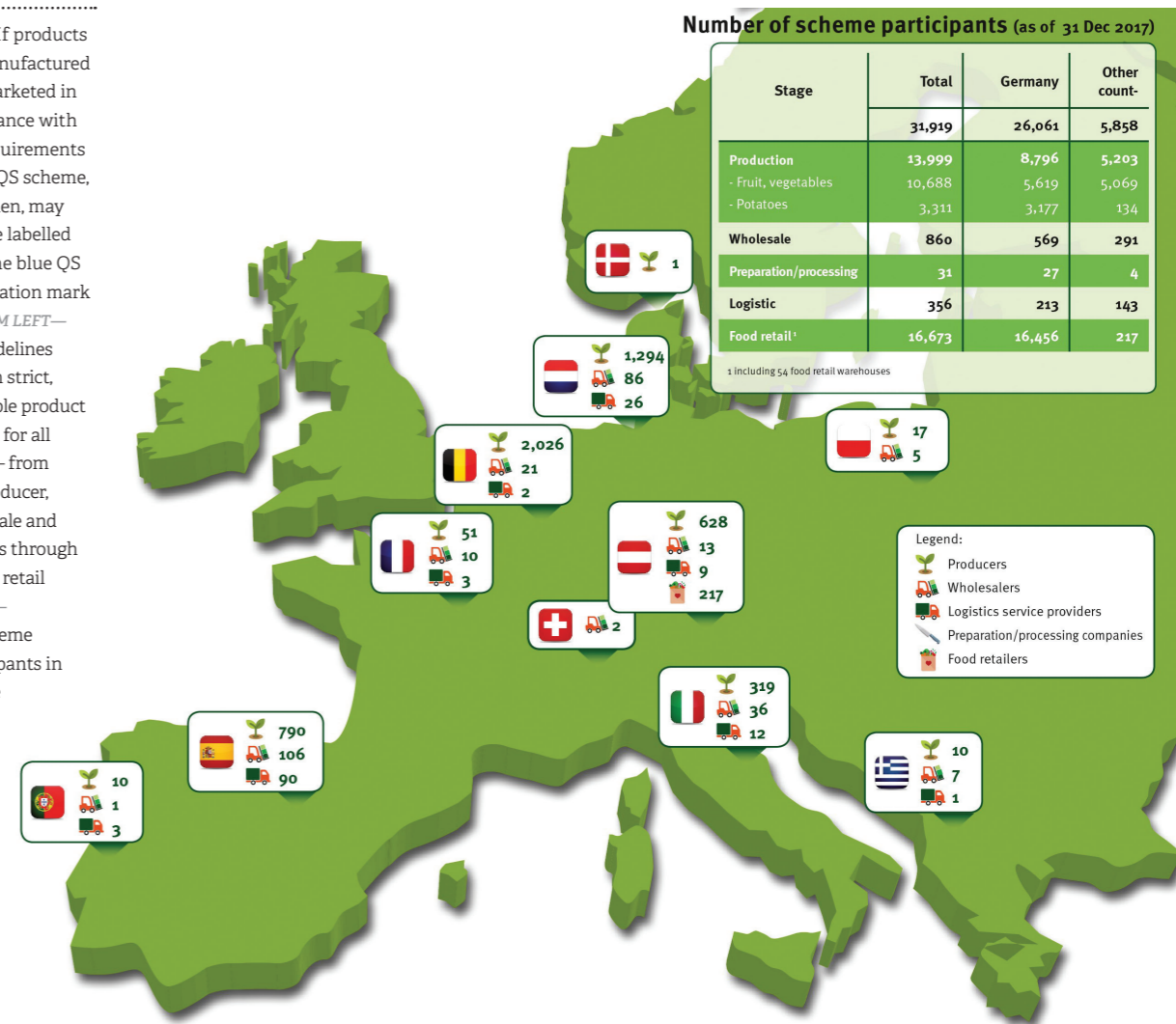
### Cross-stage quality assurance in the QS scheme



LEFT—If products are manufactured and marketed in accordance with the requirements of the QS scheme, only then, may they be labelled with the blue QS certification mark

BOTTOM LEFT—QS guidelines contain strict, verifiable product criteria for all stages – from the producer, wholesale and logistics through to food retail

RIGHT—QS scheme participants in Europe



## QS RESIDUE MONITORING

All producers, wholesalers and food retailers participating in the QS scheme automatically also participate in QS residue monitoring. It serves the purpose of controlling compliance with the maximum residue levels (MRLs)/limit values for plant protection products, pollutants, heavy metals and nitrates. In addition to this, evidence of active substances not authorised for a specific crop is checked. In case of complaints, causes are identified in order to take appropriate measures to avoid repetitions. All sample data and analysis results are recorded in the QS database. To ensure that laboratory results are comparable, only QS-approved laboratories may be entrusted with the analyses.

## EUROPEAN COOPERATION

Most of the companies participating in the QS scheme are located in Germany. However, more than one-third of the scheme participants also participate from other countries – especially Spain, Italy and the Benelux countries. QS therefore relies on cooperation with other European standard owners with the aim of ensuring a comparably high level of food safety. This facilitates the movement of goods, ensures the availability

of goods and avoids costly double auditing. At production level, there are mutual recognition agreements with the Belgian Vegaplan and Austrian AMAG.A.P. standards, as well as with the internationally acting standard GlobalG.A.P. Since 2006, producers have been able to participate in the QS-scheme if they hold a GlobalG.A.P. Option 1 Certificate (individual certification). The increased interest in the supply of QS-certified fruit and vegetables has prompted QS to further recognise GlobalG.A.P. Option 2 Certificates (group certification).

## RESPONDING IN INCIDENT AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

Especially in incident and crisis situations, the advantages of cross-stage cooperation are evident. One of the main criteria of the QS scheme is to ensure traceability.

Within a few hours, all companies must be able to gather and provide the relevant information. This applies to information about suppliers and customers. In traceability tests, QS regularly checks whether these requirements are met to be able to react quickly in cases of incidents. As all companies participating in the QS scheme register in the QS database, the information necessary for rapid traceability is available quickly. Due to the available data and reliable incident and crisis management, QS can properly inform all parties involved in the crisis, limit and resolve issues and thus create clarity. ☺

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