Guideline

Certification

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Contents

Notice: *The Guideline Certification is written in German and translated into English. In case of discrepancies between the translation and the German version, the German original is valid.*

1 Fundamentals

QS. Quality Scheme for Food represents quality assurance from farm to shop. Products originating from the QS scheme are produced, processed and marketed according to clearly defined requirements in all stages of food production. The processes are documented consistently and inspected independently. The QS certification mark gives a clear signal for the purchase of safe food from reliable suppliers.

1.1 Scope

The following stipulations and rules are described in this guideline:

- Requirements for certification bodies
- Requirements for auditors
- Training and information events
- Rules for independent inspection
- Measures under the scheme integrity system.

These provisions are subject to regular examination and can be updated at any time at the sole responsibility of QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH.

2 Requirements for Certification bodies

Scheme participants get inspected by independent certification bodies which are approved by QS. Important prerequisites for approval are compliance with the requirements mentioned below as well as the signing of a framework agreement with QS, which regulates the execution of independent inspection activities and the declaration of agreement and commitment of the Code for Conduct for the QS Scheme.

The declaration of agreement and commitment of the Code for Conduct for the QS Scheme is located in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors at **www.q-s.de.** It must be signed by the head of the certification body and by all employees within the certification body, who are significantly involved in the QS scheme (e.g. the contact person and the substitute, releasing person).

2.1 Approval of a certification body

2.1.1 Accreditation

The certification body must be accredited by the responsible accreditation body for the scope QS in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065. Written evidence of accreditation for each respective scope within the QS scheme (scope extension if applicable) must be provided to QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH within 6 months after signing of the framework agreement on independent inspection activities without special request.

QS can grant provisional approval until accreditation has been obtained. The prerequisite for the provisional approval of a certification body is that:

- written evidence can be provided to QS to show that a corresponding application for accreditation/scope extension has been submitted,
- the certification body is already accredited for another food-related scope in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065

For as long as no appropriate accreditation is on hand, a maximum of 10 non-accredited certificates may be issued for the respective QS scope.

The accreditation body appointed with accreditation must be a signatory of the Multilateral Agreement (MLA) for product certification bodies of the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA) or the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) which is also for product certification bodies of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

2.1.2 Independence and objectivity

The independence of the certification body and objectivity of the certification must be ensured. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, the certification body and the auditors commissioned:

- May not perform inspections for any companies with which a contractual relationship exists or to which any of its staff or auditors are related.
- May not perform inspections for any companies for whom its staff or auditors are currently providing, consultancy, training, custodial or administrative services or have done so within the last

24 months. Excluded from this are companies in which the certification body provides comparable inspection services (laboratory services, classifications etc.). The certification body may perform inspections in companies of this kind provided that the objectivity of the certification is ensured.
- May not maintain any relations under corporate law or interlocking of personnel with standard owners if it is to be assumed that relations and interdependence of this kind would or could jeopardise the independence of the certification body and objectivity of the certification.
- May only operate in strict accordance with rules of the Code of Conduct for the QS Scheme.
- May not perform any coordinator functions parallel to its activities in the QS scheme, that is in conflict with the ability to perform independent and objective inspections.
- May only use the checklists provided to the certification bodies by QS for the purpose of conducting QS audits und QS inspections. The use of different checklists requires the advance written consent of QS.

Upon request, proof is to be provided to QS in which manner the compliance with the aforementioned guidelines is guaranteed. Disregard of the aforementioned principles may result in extraordinary termination of the framework agreement.

2.1.3 Organisation and responsibilities

The certification body must appoint an executive individual as the responsible contact person as well as a deputy for all activities connected with the QS scheme. At the same time, the certification body must request approval by QS of at least one auditor and one releasing person.

Activities for the QS scheme must be regulated in such a way that requirements of the QS scheme are inspected in accordance with uniform rules. In addition to this, the certification body must ensure that the auditors are notified about technical and legal requirements in each field of activity.

4-eyes principle and release of audit reports in the QS database
The certification body must ensure that the decision on certification and the release of the audit reports is reached by at least one qualified person (releasing person) who must be approved by QS. The audit report must not be released by the person who performed the conformity assessment, i.e. the 4-eyes-principle must be complied with.

After certification decision has been made, the audit report must be released in the QS database. The certification body must create the internal technical prerequisites to ensure easy data entry into the QS database (**https://qs-platform.info). Only** approved auditors and releasing persons of a certification body are given access to the entry and release of audit results.

Crisis management
QS implemented a profound crisis management system to support scheme participants in crisis situations and to prevent danger for human, animal, environment, property assets and for the reputation of the QS scheme. The certification body has to inform QS - and if legally required the responsible authorities - immediately about crisis situations. This includes among other things all insights, which may lead to a review or an adjustment of the existing certification, issued by the certification body. The certification body is obligated to support QS in clarification of crisis situations. In addition to that the certification body must assure that it is granted access to premises and necessary documents of scheme participants in case of crisis.

A functional, documented crisis management procedure must be implemented within the certification body (e.g. emergency numbers to assure availability, flowcharts) and it needs to be regularly verified.

Each certification body has to name a crisis contact person (including the telephone number), who can be contacted also outside usual business hours.

2.1.4 Handling of documents

The certification body is obliged to document the results of controls for each location in detail and without any gaps, to enable easy access at all times. Within the scope of the obligation to exercise due diligence and produce evidence, the records must be kept according to legal requirements.

Records must be handled in such a manner that the confidentiality of the processes they contain and the protection of data are guaranteed at all times.

2.1.5 Customer satisfaction analysis and complaints management

The certification body must determine the quality of its activities by means of customer satisfaction analyses.

According to the complaints management process required in **ISO/IEC 17065** the certification body must at least be able to produce the documentation of the measures taken and evidence of their implementation in the event of legal proceedings.

2.1.6 Access authorization and perusal of documents

QS reserves the right to commission an appointed person/organisation to check compliance with the certification requirements. The certification body is obliged to grant QS or a person/organisation commissioned by QS access to all documentation relating to its activities for the QS scheme.

QS or a person/organisation commissioned by QS can verify the activities of the certification body for the QS scheme at any time, also in the form of witness audits. The certification body must ensure that a witness audit can be carried out in every business to be audited.

2.1.7 Use of QS certification mark

The QS certification mark may only be used as prescribed in the style guide. On certificates it must be used as shown in the sample certificates and confirmations.

⇒ Style Guide for the QS certification mark

2.1.8 Overview of the approval procedure for a certification body

Table 1: Approval process for certification bodies

Process Stage		Paperwork and Documents	Responsibility
1	Application of the certification body for approval by QS	Record sheet for certification bodies (Application form) Accreditation certificate/evidence of corresponding application to the accreditation body Record sheet for at least one auditor and one releasing person per scope	Certification body
2	Examination of the application documentation to ensure fulfilment of all requirements	Record sheet for certification bodies (Application form) Accreditation certificate/evidence of corresponding application to the accreditation body Record sheet for at least one auditor and one releasing person per scope	QS
3	Nomination of the responsible contact person and its deputy	The declaration of agreement of the Code for Conduct for the QS Scheme	Certification body
4	Approval of the certification body after returning the signed framework agreement and approval of at least one auditor and one releasing person per scope	Framework agreement on independent inspection activities within the QS scheme (incl. scale of fees and style guide.)	QS/Certification body
5	Establishment of access authorizations for certification bodies and auditors for the QS	Sending log-in data Publication on the homepage **www.q-s.de**	QS

Process Stage	Paperwork and Documents	Responsibility
database and the partner section on the QS homepage		
6 Proof of "QS" scope expansion when necessary no later than 6 months after the approval of the certification body	Accreditation certificate	Certification body

2.2 Preserving the approval of a certification body

The following points must be satisfied in order to preserve approval as a certification body:

- Evidence of the successful conducting of monitoring appraisals by the responsible accreditation body at least every 2 years.
  The certification body forwards the reports of the accreditation bodies and/or monitoring appraisals (head office and witness audits where necessary), to QS in a timely manner without special request. Reports or parts of reports which only concern compliance with other standards are exempted from this and do not have to be forwarded to QS. A QS employee or a person commissioned by QS is entitled to participate in accreditation and/or monitoring appraisals conducted by the responsible accreditation body.
- Evidence of at least 10 performed audits per calendar year for each QS-approval stage.
- The certification body must have at least one approved auditor and releasing person each QS-approval stage.
- Participation in the annual information event organised by QS.

2.3 Cancelling the approval of a certification body

The approval of a certification body is withdrawn in case of:

- Improper work or violation against the scheme manual
- Forfeiture of accreditation in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065.
- Missing evidence of accreditation for the scope QS six months after the framework agreement on independent inspection activities within the QS scheme has been signed.
- Lack of objectivity and independence

⇒ Chapter 2.1.2 Independence and objectivity

- Performing less than 10 audits per calendar year and scope in the QS scheme
- Lack of cooperation with QS.

Infringements against the framework agreement on independent inspection activities within the QS scheme result in sanctions and ultimately the exclusion of the certification body. In case of infringements against the Code of Conduct for the QS Scheme suitable measures will be initiated. In the event of both ordinary and extraordinary termination, as well as warning, QS has the right to notify all scheme participants who have concluded contracts with the certification body within the framework of the QS scheme of the termination or warning.

3 Requirements for auditors and releasing persons

The approval of auditors and releasing persons can only be requested by a certification body.

Auditors and releasing persons get approved by QS. Auditors inspect compliance with QS requirements and are thus of special importance. The prerequisites for the approval as QS auditor and releasing person are described in the following chapters.

The auditor/the releasing person proves his integrity through submitting the declaration of agreement of the Code for Conduct of QS Scheme. The declaration of agreement of the Code for Conduct of QS Scheme is located in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors at www.q-s.de.

Moreover, consent for the collection and storage of personal data is required for approval in the QS scheme.

3.1 Requirements for auditors

Auditors are qualified experts for each respective stage in which they are approved for activities in the QS scheme. In addition to that, further rules of conduct and defined audit principles must be complied with according to DIN EN ISO 19011. In every audit, the auditor is obliged to compile evidence that verifies compliance of the scheme participant with QS requirements (positive approach). Certification bodies are obliged to only deploy auditors in line with their approval, qualification and knowledge.

3.1.1 Technical qualifications

Auditors must prove that they have specific knowledge as defined by the standard ISO/IEC 17065. The basis is training in the agriculture or food sector. These specialised qualifications complemented by an auditor training enables the auditor to record and evaluate the implementation of requirements professionally and uniformly.

Professional skills are:

- Profound product and process knowledge of the stage to be audited
- Knowledge of agricultural, animal feed and food laws
- Comprehensive knowledge of the scheme manual
- Mastery of auditing techniques

In addition to the technical qualification a proven sector-specific professional experience of at least one year on a fulltime-basis (certificates etc.) in accordance with the requested stage of approval is required.

Examples for specialised qualification according to the different stages are listed in table 2.

A lack of technical qualification or sector-specific professional experience can be replaced by suitable training measures or sector-specific audit experience. This is to be agreed with QS in individual cases. QS reserves the right to check the success of the measures (e.g. by witness audits). Costs arising from this are to be borne by the certification body.

Table 2: Overview of specialised qualifications		Meat and Meat Products							Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes				Crop farming	Pet food
		Compound feed production (Additive/premix production, in-spection of mobile feed milling and mixing plants, private labelling)	**Feed Material** (inspection of small scale feed material producers)	**Trade/Storage, Transshipment and Transport of feed**	**Agriculture** (cattle, pigs, poultry)	**Slaughtering/Deboning** (animal transport)	**Processing** (butchery)	**Meat Wholesale, Food Retail**	**Production / QS-GAP** (Preparation/Processing at the	**Wholesale**	**Preparation/Processing**	**Food retail** (Processing)	**Production**	**Pet Food** Manufacturing and trade
Graduate Agricultural Economist	Animal production	x	x	x	x									
	Plant production								x	x			x	
Graduate Horticulturalist									x	x			x	
Miller (Master craftsman) (+ special knowledge per area)		x	x	x										x

Table 2: Overview of specialised qualifications	Meat and Meat Products							Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes				Crop farming	Pet food
	Compound feed production (Additive/premix production, in-spection of mobile feed milling and mixing plants, private labelling)	**Feed Material** (inspection of small scale feed material producers)	**Trade/Storage, Transshipment and Transport of feed**	**Agriculture** (cattle, pigs, poultry)	**Slaughtering/Deboning** (animal transport)	**Processing** (butchery)	**Meat Wholesale, Food Retail**	**Production / QS-GAP** (Preparation/Processing at the	**Wholesale**	**Preparation/Processing**	**Food retail** (Processing)	**Production**	**Pet Food** Manufacturing and trade
Agricultural Technician/Master craftsman Agriculturist/Agriculturist + special knowledge	x	x	x	x				x				x	x
Gardener (Master craftsman)								x				x	
Veterinarian				x	x	x	x						x
Graduate Food Technician/Chemist, Food Technician		x	x		x	x	x			x	x		x
Graduate Nutritionist					x	x	x			x	x		x

Table 2: Overview of specialised qualifications	Meat and Meat Products							Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes			Crop farming	Pet food
	Compound feed production (Additive/premix production, in-spection of mobile feed milling and mixing plants, private labelling)	**Feed Material** (inspection of small scale feed material producers)	**Trade/Storage, Transshipment and Transport of feed**	**Agriculture** (cattle, pigs, poultry)	**Slaughtering/Deboning** (animal transport)	**Processing** (butchery)	**Meat Wholesale, Food Retail**	**Production / QS-GAP** (Preparation/Processing at the	**Wholesale**	**Preparation/Processing**	**Food retail** (Processing) **Production**	**Pet Food** Manufacturing and trade
Graduate Biologist (+ special knowledge per area)				x				x				
Butcher (Master craftsman)					x	x	x					x

3.1.2 Auditor course

Initial approval as an auditor in the QS scheme can only be granted if evidence of an auditor training, which is lasting several days, is proven. Topics such as the Fundamentals of Quality Management**, DIN EN ISO 9001, DIN EN ISO 19011, ISO/IEC 17065**. Communication and Auditing Techniques, should have been dealt with in the course. It is the responsibility of the certification body to verify applicants' specialised skills and knowledge.

3.1.3 Internal training by the certification body

Prior to approval as a QS auditor, evidence on participation in an internal training by the certification body must be provided. Contents of internal training courses are the stage-specific documents of the scheme manual (incl. the bases of valuation), the QS inspection system as well as the General Regulations and the Code for Conduct. In addition to that, an introduction into the QS database and the compilation of audit reports is given. Proof of participation in an internal training is the prerequisite for registering an auditor for the initial training by QS.

⇒ Chapter 4. Training and Information Events

3.1.4 Audit experience

Sector-specific audit experience must be proven when requesting approval and/or extended approval as auditor. For each approval stage, evidence of at least 10 independent performed audits for the corresponding stage within the last 24 months must be produced (on the agricultural stage this evidence has to be presented per species). As a proof of audit experience also accompaniments of QS regular audits or audits of other standards can be taken into account. An overview of the standards approved for this purpose is published in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors.

⇒ Audit experience – approved standards

Three of these ten audits must be carried out independently and as QS regular audits, after having participated in the auditor course and the internal training but under the supervision of an auditor approved for the respective stage. Completed audits are documented in the QS database by the auditor who is already approved.

3.1.5 Trainings by QS

Every auditor must participate in an initial training organised by QS and successfully pass a basic test prior to approval. To take part in an initial training, all necessary approval documents must be submitted to QS at least six weeks before the training.

⇒ Record sheet for auditors and releasing persons

Besides the basic test, a stage specific test must be conducted for each stage on which approval is requested.

If the stage-specific test is also passed alongside the basic test, the auditor is issued with provisional approval for the stage in question entitling him or her to conduct audits. The passed stage-specific test must not be older than 12 months at the time of approval.

An auditor who fails a basic test three times in succession cannot obtain permanent QS approval. Approval for the scope in question is also not possible if a stage-specific test is failed three times in succession.

An auditor loses his provisional approval if he does not take part in a stage-specific training offered by QS within twelve months of the initial training.

An auditor without provisional approval is also obliged to take part in a stage-specific training offered by QS within twelve months of the initial training and to write the test required for the relevant stage of approval. Otherwise, QS reserves the right to cancel the application process.

3.1.6 Specific approval requirements

Requirements for auditing at the feed sector stage
The following additional evidence must be provided for authorisations within the feed sector stage:

- Knowledge and skills in the assessment of quality management systems
- Knowledge and skills in the assessment of HACCP concepts

Furthermore, an approval at the stage of trade, storage, transhipment, and transport of feed is only possible in conjunction with an approval at the stage of compound feed or feed material production.

Requirements for auditing the meat wholesale/food retail meat sector

For authorisation at the meat wholesale/food retail meat stage, at least three of the ten audit certificates to be submitted must be for one of the following types of production:

- 61 Central warehouse (meat and meat products)
- 80 Meat wholesale
- 86 Food retail warehouse meat and fruit, vegetables, potatoes
- 87 Storage of meat and meat products
- 88 Own storage of meat and meat products
- 880 Brokers (meat and meat products)
- 93 Butchers (sales outlets only)

of which at least one of these audits must be carried out independently (accompanied by an auditor already approved for this level).

Requirements for the auditing of coordinators

Separate approval is required to carry out coordinator audits. The prerequisite for this is an existing approval as a QS auditor at the stage agriculture or production of fruit, vegetables, potatoes/QS-Gap as well as passing a separate test.

A qualification that deviates from this can also be recognised in exceptional cases after examination by QS.

Requirements for auditing the "preparation/processing" of fruit, vegetables and potatoes

Separate approval is required to carry out audits in the area of "preparation/processing" at the production stage. The prerequisite for this is authorisation at the FVP/QS-GAP production stage and the passing of a separate test.

The performance of audits at the "preparation/processing" stage is also subject to separate approval, whereby approval at the wholesale fruit, vegetables, potatoes, processing, food retail meat and meat products or food retail fruit, vegetables, potatoes stages and the passing of a separate test are required.

Requirement for auditing the arable farming, grassland, forage stage

Authorisation for auditing at the arable farming, grassland, forage stage can be granted for an existing authorisation at the agriculture or fruit, vegetables, potatoes/QS-GAP production stage.

Requirement for auditing at the food retail stage (combined approval)

The prerequisite for the auditing of food retail outlets and food retail stores for meat and fruit, vegetables, potatoes (production types 6003 and 86) is an existing approval at the food retail meat/meat wholesale and food retail fruit, vegetables, potatoes levels.

3.1.7 Specific requirements

Requirements for auditing on the stage feed sector

Additional evidence of the following must be produced for approval in the feed sector and for feed material production:

- Knowledge and skills in the evaluation of quality management systems
- Knowledge and skills in the evaluation of HACCP concepts

Furthermore, an approval at the stage Feed Material or Compound feed production is required in order to receive the approval for the stage Trade/Storage, Transshipment and Transport of feed.

Requirements for auditing wholesale meat and meat products/retail

For approval at the stage wholesale meat and meat products/retail, at least three of the ten audits to be submitted must be for one of the following production scopes

- production scope 61 central warehouses (meat and meat products)
- 80 meat wholesale
- 86 food retail warehouse meat and fruit, vegetables, potatoes
- 87 storage of meat and meat products
- 88 own storage of meat and meat products
- 880 brokers (meat and meat products)
- 93 butchery (only points of sale))

of which at least one of these audits must be carried out independently by the auditor (accompanied by an auditor already approved for this stage).

Requirements for auditing of Coordinators

Special approval is required for the conduct of coordinator audits. The prerequisite for this is an existing approval as QS auditor for the stages agriculture or production of fruit, vegetables, potatoes/QS-GAP as well as the successful passing of a further test.

In exceptional circumstances another qualification may also be recognized after evaluation by QS.

Requirements for auditing Preparation/Processing of Fruits, Vegetables and Potatoes

A separate approval is required for auditing the preparation/processing at the stage Production. The requirements for this approval comprise an approval for the stage Production/QS-GAP and the successful passing of a further test.

The conduction of audits at the stage Preparation/Processing requires a separate approval as well, which assumes an approval for the stage Wholesale Fruit, Vegetables and Potatoes, Processing or Food retail and the successful passing of an additional test.

Requirements for auditing Crop Farming

An approval for the stage Crop Farming can be given on condition that the auditor is approved for the stage Agriculture or Production/QS-GAP.

Requirements for auditing Food retail meat and meat products and fruit, vegetables and potatoes (combined approval)

A special approval is required for auditing the food retail and the respective warehouses for meat and fruits, vegetables and potatoes (production scopes 6003 and 86). This approval can be given on condition that the auditor is approved for the stages meat wholesale/food retail and food retail fruits, vegetables and potatoes.

3.1.8 Overview of the approval procedure of an auditor

The approval process for auditors is presented in the table below.

Table 3: Approval process for auditors

Process Stage		Paperwork and Documents	Responsibility
1	Written application of a new auditor via an approved certification body with the necessary paperwork	Record sheet for auditors and releasing persons (Application form)	Certification body
2	Examination of the auditor's application relating to compliance with requirements	Record sheet Proof of qualification Declaration of agreement of the Code for Conduct of QS Scheme	QS
3	Participation in internal training by certification body	Proof of training	Certification body
4	Participation in initial training by QS Successful passing of the initial training test and optionally the stage-specific tests.	Registration for initial training	QS/Certification body
5	Provisional Approval of the auditor after successful participation in initial training and the stage-specific test	Confirmation of participation	QS

Process Stage		Paperwork and Documents	Responsibility
6	Establishment of access authorizations for certification bodies and auditors for the QS database	User data Confirmation of approval	QS
7	Participation in stage-specific training within 12 months after initial training Successful passing of a stage-specific test	Registration for stage-specific training Confirmation of participation	QS/Certification body

3.2 Preserving the approval of an auditor

3.2.1 Proof of minimum number of audits

In order to maintain approval for a particular stage – with exception of the agricultural stage – 20 audits must be conducted independently in the last 24 months (record date is the 30th June of each year). On the stage agriculture, evidence of 20 independently conducted audits for each species (cattle, pig, poultry) in the last 24 months must be provided. On a limited basis the independently conducted audits of other standards can also be recognized as audit experience. An overview of the recognized standards can be found in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors.

⇒ Sample template Evidence of minimum number of audits – form sheet

With a missing proof of the minimum number of audits the result is a loss of the approval of the auditor for the corresponding stage.

⇒ Elucidation Procedure in the event test is failed or insufficient evidence of QS audit

3.2.2 Conduct of witness audits

The qualification of auditors must be reviewed by the certification body at regular intervals on the basis of witness audits. The frequency of witness audits has to be risk-based. An according system must be documented in the certification body. Every auditor has to be witnessed during the performance of a regular audit at least once per level of approval within three calendar years. The result of the witness audit has to be documented and forwarded to QS upon a request. The audits have to be witnessed by qualified persons (usually responsible employees of the certification body) who guarantee that the implementation of the audit is evaluated objectively.

3.2.3 Annual stage-specific auditor training by QS

All auditors must attend a QS stage-specific training course every year for their approval stages. Auditors who do not attend the training courses lose their approval for the approval stage in question.

3.2.4 Evidence of internal training by the certification body

Evidence of annual participation in at least one internal training course on the QS scheme organised by the certification body must be produced in order to retain approval as an auditor for the QS scheme. If an auditor gets approved for different QS approved certification bodies, the certification body shall take appropriate evidence to ensure that the auditor has attended an internal training possibly by another certification body.

During annual internal training, recent changes in the QS scheme and relevant alterations of normative documents should be addressed among others.

3.3 Cancelling the approval of an auditor

If there is an indication of insufficient audit quality, auditors can be obliged to participate for example in supplementary training measures. QS reserves the right to check the success of the measures (e.g. by witness audits).Any costs incurred in this respect shall be borne by the certification body.

Nevertheless, QS may temporarily or permanently cancel the auditor's approval due to technical reasons and, in such cases, is entitled to inform the certification bodies about the suspension of the approval for which the auditor in question was approved.

⇒ Chapter 6. Measures of the scheme integrity system

3.4 Requirements for releasing persons

Proof of the specialist qualification of the releasing person for the applied-for stages of approval must be provided to QS in writing. The precondition for working as a releasing person is agricultural or food-related training.

Before being approved as a releasing person, applicants must attend an internal training course by the certification body as well as an initial training course held by QS.

⇒ Chapter 3.1.3 Internal training by the certification body

For a person to attend the initial training course, QS must be in possession of all the necessary documents for approval at least six weeks prior to the date of the training course.

⇒ Record sheet for auditors and releasing persons

In addition to taking the basic test, applicants must also complete a stage-specific test for each stage for which approval has been applied for.

If he or she passes both the basic test and the stage-specific test, the releasing person is granted approval for the stage in question. The passed stage-specific test must not be older than 12 months at the time of approval.

A releasing person who fails a basic test three times in succession cannot obtain permanent QS approval. Approval for the scope in question is also not possible if a stage-specific test is failed three times in succession. If the approval as releasing person is applied for by an auditor already approved for the respective scopes, both the basic test and the stage-specific test are omitted.

3.5 Preserving the approval of a releasing person

3.5.1 Proof of a minimum number of audit report releases

10 audit report releases for the stage in question during the last 24 months are required to maintain approval as a releasing person (the cut-off date is the 30th June of the year in question). In the agriculture stage, proof must be provided of 10 audit report entries per species (cattle, pigs, poultry) in the last 24 months.

This requirement does not apply, if the releasing person is also approved as auditor for the respective stage of approval.

3.5.2 Proof of audit supervision

Every two calendar years, at least one regular audit must be supervised by the releasing person for each stage of approval. Audit supervision of audits under other standards can be recognised. You can find an overview of the recognized standards in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors.

This requirement does not apply, if the releasing person is also approved as auditor for the respective stage of approval.

3.5.3 Proof of an internal training course by the certification body

The releasing person must attend at least one annual internal QS training course by the certification body and must provide proof of a corresponding internal training course to QS on request.

4 Training and Information Events

Training courses and information events are organised by QS and the certification bodies.

Events organised by QS – trainings prior to approval as well as annual professional trainings - mainly concentrate on specialised technical contents of each respective stage and related harmonisation in the conducting of the audit.

In addition to auditor training courses, QS organises annual information meetings for the responsible persons of the certification bodies. Against the background of the dynamic development of the QS

scheme, these meetings promote the mutual further development of controls and provide an opportunity to exchange experiences. Participation in these meetings is obligatory for certification bodies.

The certification body qualifies its auditors and releasing persons for their activities in the QS scheme both, prior to their QS approval and by means of annual internal training courses.

Table 4: Events for certification bodies and trainings in the QS scheme

Type of training	Content	Organiser
Initial training prior to QS approval	Introduction into the QS scheme Requirements for auditing and certification Introduction into the QS database	QS
Annual stage-specific training for auditors by QS	Recent revisions Current professional topics Improvement of audit quality Harmonization of auditing	QS
Information meeting for responsible of certification bodies	Current issues in the QS scheme Recent revisions Improvement of audit quality Harmonization of inspections Early detection of error sources Further development of the QS scheme	QS
Internal training courses – prior to initial training	General and stage-specific introduction into the QS scheme (theoretical and practical)	Certification body
Annual internal training courses	Changes in the QS scheme and relevant innovations Exchange of experiences Improvement of audit quality Harmonization of auditing	Certification body

5 Rules for Independent Inspection

The certification body is commissioned by scheme participant with conducting independent controls. The scheme participant and the certification body conclude a written agreement on this. Certification bodies are recommended to publish the costs associated with certification and inspection.

The certification body periodically conducts audits (so called regular audits) at scheme participants. Audit results are documented in an audit report and entered into the QS database by the certification body. A successfully passed regular audit is the prerequisite for the certification of the scheme participant.

5.1 Regular audit

During a regular audit it is verified whether a company satisfies the technical, organisational and contentual requirements necessary for participating in the QS scheme. The objective is to inspect company-specific processes and to identify opportunities for improvement. Audits are conducted using a stage-specific checklist.

Regular audits at one location may only be conducted three times in succession by the same auditor. This applies regardless of whether the auditor is approved for various certification bodies. The

counting of the regular audits conducted in succession is not interrupted by the conduct of another type of QS audit (e.g. random sample audit).

Auditing of coordinator´s locations
Regular audits carried out at agricultural coordinators primarily serve to examine and improve work processes. For this reason, the first audit of newly approved coordinators is conducted at the earliest six months after the signing of the contract with QS but at the latest one year thereafter.
Sub-organisational structures of the coordinator ("sub-coordinators") must be inspected accordingly. This means that during the audit, either the coordinator is in possession of all of the required documentation (declaration of participation, procedure of forwarding information etc.) or the sub-organisation(s) must also be audited.

5.2 Conducting audits

The basis for the content of an audit is formed by the stage and product-specific requirements defined in the current valid version of the scheme manual (see for reference **www.q-s.de)**.

Audits should be conducted in the national language of the company to be audited. In case it is not possible to conduct the audit in the national language, the certification body and the company to be audited must reach a clear written agreement on the language in which the audit and the certification process will be conducted. The certification body must ensure, that the assigned auditor has the necessary knowledge of the agreed audit language. If necessary, an independent translator must be involved. If necessary, the documents to be reviewed must be translated independently, ideally in advance of the audit. The language skills of the auditor or translator (if applicable) must be proven to QS, if requested (e.g. qualified language certificates, contract with translator, curriculum vitae). The audit report shall be written in German or English.

The certification body must also ensure that the auditor to be commissioned has adequate knowledge of the relevant local legal regulations.

When entering an audit report, comments must be provided in either English or German.

5.2.1 Audit preparation

The organisational preparation of an audit includes:

- Coordination of dates and audit schedule. The certification body has the discretion to decide whether to refrain from preparing an audit plan provided that prior forwarding would not be expedient due to the unannounced performance of the audit or if the relatively low level of complexity of the structures at the location that are to be evaluated render this unnecessary.
- Potential request of company-specific documentation (e.g. HACCP plan, QM manual, work instructions, inspection reports). If company-specific documentation has been requested prior to the audit, the e available documentation should be checked with regard to completeness, correctness and actuality. A list of unclear or dubious documents should be prepared in advance and systematically assessed in the course of the audit.

Nevertheless in case of unannounced audits the requirements regarding the advance notification have to be respected.

⇒ Chapter 5.6 Unannounced audits

- Examination of checklists and other form sheets for completeness and check of relevant inspection equipment for proper functioning.
- Knowledge of the results of previous audits including the agreed corrective actions and their implementation.

5.2.2 On-site audit

The condition for conducting a regular audit is met, if the company-specific processes can be comprehensively evaluated at the site (e.g. when animals are placed or slaughtered; close to harvest in the field of plant production).

An on-site audit includes:

- Comparison of the planned scope of testing with the actual conditions on site
- Inspection of appropriate documentation and its control
- Recording and assessing the implementation of the requirements of the scheme manual in operational practice (among others, a complete site and field inspection, incl. corresponding measurements/testing)

- Recognition of errors and nonconformities
- Documentation of evaluations, nonconformities and agreements on corrective actions.

At the beginning of the audit, an introductory discussion is held, in which the audit procedure, the graduation of evaluations and, if necessary, changes to the audit schedule are explained. In the concluding discussion at the end of the audit, evaluations and preliminary audit result are discussed with the companies contact person. At the audited company a signed copy of the first page of the audit report and of the corrective actions report are to be left, if corrective actions were to be agreed in the relevant audit. The complete audit report should be sent to the audited operation in a timely manner upon its completion.

In general, an audit has to be entirely conducted, by checking and evaluating every requirement. An audit is not to be terminated prematurely. This applies as well in case that during the audit a passing turns out to be unlikely.

Cross-audit delivery note checks (cross-checks)
In order to check the identity and traceability of the products in the QS scheme, cross-audit delivery note checks are carried out in the supply chain fruit, vegetables, potatoes.

⇒ Document "Cross-Checks Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes

Auditing at the stage Production
In principle, the date of the audit has to be chosen risk-orientated and the audit therefore be conducted regularly during the vegetation period of the crops (cultivation work is carried out), the harvest or the handling processes with harvest products (contains relevant processes regarding the food safety and hygiene, not only the storage).

Initial audit/subsequent registration of crops
The harvest or handling processes of the registered crops have to be checked. In the case a producer applies for the certification of several crops, which are not harvested at the same time, the audit date should depend on the harvest of the main crop. Crops, which have not been checked during the harvesting period, should be checked during an unannounced audit (spot audit) and/or during the follow up audit within the next harvesting period.

In the case that the crops, which need to be certified, differ essentially regarding their harvest and handling processes, the certification body decides, whether a further on-site or document check needs to be conducted in order to certify all respective crops. This procedure applies as well, if additional crops need to become certified, which differ essentially from the crops already registered.

During an initial audit the documentation, which resulted from the registration for the QS participation and QS-GAP certification by the coordinator or which arised up to three months before the first harvest, needs to be evaluated retrospectively, depending on which time period is less recent.

Conduction of remote checks
In principle, the QS scheme provides for on-site audits to be carried out. However, for types of production scopes where the audit is carried out exclusively in the form of a document check, system audits can be carried out remotely as a pure document check using the complete system audit checklist. The decision not to carry out the audit on site must be documented in the audit report. For the other procution scopes, the specifications for carrying out remote controls must be taken into account.

Document "Conduction of remote checks”

5.3 Audit report

The audit report contains information on the company, the audited scope as well as evaluations of the inspected requirements, the preliminary audit result and the corrective actions report, if corrective actions were to be agreed in the relevant audit. It must be prepared by the auditor or an employee of the certification body. If any changes occur after the review of the audit report by the certification body, the certification body has to notify the company concerned in writing and without delay.

As a final step before entering the audit report, the auditor checks in the QS database whether the master data required for the audit report have been entered correctly. If the master data is correct, the auditor enters the audit report into the QS database.

The audit result is generated automatically in the database.

5.3.1 Evaluations

Individual requirements are evaluated on the basis of degrees to which they have been fulfilled.

Table 5: Evaluation based on degrees of fulfilment

Evaluation	Degree of fulfilment
A	The requirement is completely fulfilled.
B	The requirement is almost completely fulfilled.
C	The requirement is partially fulfilled.
D (K.O.[1])	The requirement is not fulfilled.
E	The requirement is not applicable.

[1] Requirements that could have a critical influence on food safety in case of non-compliance or that are very important for the scheme for other reasons, are defined as K.O. criteria. Non-compliance with one of these criteria could lead to the opening of a sanction procedure and could result in a loss of the eligibility of delivery. D-evaluation of a K.O. criterion is called K.O.-evaluation.

A repetitive D-evaluation during a follow-up audit may be evaluated as K.O. (see 5.3.2 Corrective actions).

A general K.O. is applied in the event of a break-off or a refusal of the audit by the enterprise.

A general K.O. must also be applied if, during the audit, the auditor establishes that there is an acute threat to the safety of humans, animals, the environment, feed or food, that this threat emanates from a part of the location that is not included in the inspected scope, and the urgent threat in the QS scheme cannot be averted by other means (ultima ratio).

The enterprise must be informed by the certification body in writing without delay of the consequences of the general K.O. Proof must be provided to QS on request that information has been provided to this effect. If a criterion is not rated A, this must be justified in the audit report in a comprehensible and meaningful way.

Ccorrective actions and deadlines for their implementation have to be designated for C and D evaluations. Especially K.O. assessments should be documented by means of suitable evidence (e.g. photos, copies) and proved to QS upon request. For criteria which are marked with an asterisk (*), all evidences and/or test objects which were used to prove the compliance must be given regardless of the evaluation (e.g. measured values, calculation results, random samples). For certain stages, the requirements for comments set out in the annex to the guidelines must be observed.

⇒ **Annex 8.3 Evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk**

5.3.2 Corrective actions

The audited business must propose corrective actions with implementation deadlines to the auditor for C and D evaluations. Corrective measures are to be agreed individually and appropriately in terms of both substance and time. The determination of corrective actions comprises the following steps:

- Determination of causes
- Rectification of causes
- Suitable measures to prevent a recurrence of the problems (preventive measures)
- Documentation of the implemented measures

The evaluations, related remarks and proposed corrective actions, including deadlines for their implementation and responsibilities, must be documented in the corrective actions report. If the corrective actions report is not prepared during the audit, it must be submitted to the certification body by the audited company and finally agreed with the auditor no later than 14 days after the audit.

Implementation of corrective actions must be checked by the certification body. If the verification is not performed on-site, the evidence of implementation of the corrective action must demonstrate when and how the implementation was performed. The correct and timely verification of corrective actions must be entered into the QS Database by the certification body at least four weeks after the deadline for the implementation. In case the implementation of a corrective action has an effect on the eligibility of delivery of a location, it has to be confirmed by a releasing person. Certification bodies must be able to provide proof of the verification to QS upon request.

If the implementation of corrective actions is not conducted appropriately and on time, the certification body has to decide whether the granted certification needs to be withdrawn. The certification body informs QS about this matter.

Moreover the approval of a location can be withdrawn by QS, if the implementation of corrective action is not made on time. Corrective actions implemented after the audit do not alter the audit result.

If agreed corrective actions have not been implemented in a sustainable way, so that a deviation is detected within the same requirement during the next audit, the respective requirement can be evaluated with a lower rating.

If agreed corrective actions are not sustainably implemented with the result that a subsequent audit finds a renewed nonconformity with regard to the requirement in question, a poorer evaluation may be issued for this requirement.

5.3.3 Audit result

The audit result is calculated based on the percentage of C and D evaluations for regular audits. Only applicable requirements are taken into account for the calculation.

The audit is **passed**, if the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations presented in Table 6 is not exceeded and there are no K.O. evaluations.

The audit is **failed**, if the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations to achieve Status III according to Table 6 is exceeded, a requirement received a K.O. evaluation, a repeated D evaluation or a general K.O. were given. A K.O. evaluation occurs when a D is assigned to a requirement identified as a K.O. criterion.

If the audit is failed, a regular audit has to be conducted as a follow-up audit. The follow-up audit should be carried out within a period of at the latest six weeks. If it is not possible to implement the corrective actions within this period, the post-audit may also take place at a later date.

However, the approval of a location will be withdrawn by QS no later than six weeks after the failed audit if no successful result of a follow-up audit has been released in the QS database. In all other respects, the provisions of the Sanction Procedure Rules in Annex 5.2 to the Guideline General Rules apply.

If corrective actions that have not yet been registered as "corrected" in the QS database are available at the time of the follow-up audit, these must be discussed in detail in the comments.

The follow-up audit can take place - except at the stage food retail and in the butchery (only points of sale) – announced after a previously unannounced audit.

⇒ Chapter 5.4 Audit frequency

⇒ Annex 5.2 to the guideline General Regulations

K.O. evaluations, general K.O.s, repeated D evaluations and audits where the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations is exceeded must be notified to QS by the certification body through the **immediate** entry and release of the audit report in the QS database within two working days. If the audit takes place on the stage agriculture or production, additionally the number of animal places available on the farm respectively the farm size in hectare (for each crop) is to register in the audit report and to deposit in the database.
QS then decides whether a sanction procedure is to be initiated.

If the audit is passed, the company is categorised into a QS status based on the percentage of C and/or D evaluations.

Table 6: QS status depending on audit result, depending on the percentage of C and/or D evaluations

Percentage of C evaluations	Percentage of D evaluations	Percentage of C and D evaluations	QS status
maximum 5 %	0 %	(not relevant)	QS status I
maximum 10 %	maximum 3 %	maximum 10 %	QS status II
maximum 20 %	maximum 10 %	maximum 20 %	QS Status III

Status I
Status I can only be assigned if no D evaluation occurs.

Furthermore, the share of C-evaluations in the applicable requirements may not exceed 5%. If the 5 % limit is exceeded, status I is assigned if only one C valuation exists.

Status II
In status II, the proportion of C evaluations is limited to a maximum of 10% and the proportion of D evaluations to a maximum of 3%. The total share of C and D evaluations must not exceed 10%. If the percentage with regard to the proportion of D evaluations is exceeded, status II is assigned if only one D evaluation exists and no C evaluation.

Status III
In status III, the proportion of C evaluations is limited to a maximum of 20 % and the proportion of D evaluations to a maximum of 10 %. The sum of C and D valuations may not exceed 20%.

Joint auditing of several production scopes
For individual stages several production scopes of a company can be audited together. In such cases, only one checklist is used during the audit. A requirement which is relevant for several production scopes (e.g. fertilisation, plant protection, marking and identification of livestock, stock book) is evaluated only once in the checklist. For these requirements, the lowest result determined in the different production scopes is applicable.

Table 7: Entering the audit report into the QS database when auditing several production scopes

Requirements checklist	Evaluation production scope 1	Evaluation production scope 2	Entering the audit report into the QS database
2.1.1	A	C	C
2.1.2	A	E	A
2.1.3	E	E	E

All audited production scopes are categorised into a status together so that only one status and therefore only one date for the follow-up audit exists.

5.3.4 Audit result QS-GAP

In regular audits carried out according to the QS-GAP standard, the audited company receives a score, which depends on the evaluations received. This score results from the degree of fulfilment of the requirements. An A evaluation corresponds to 100 points, a B to 75 points and a C to 50 points. No points are scored for D and E evaluations. The audit result is calculated by dividing the achieved points by the maximum total number of

points that can be achieved. Only the applicable requirements are taken into account for the calculation.

The recommendations provided in the Guideline QS-GAP Production Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes must be controlled by the certification body, but they do not have any influence on the audit result.

The audit **is passed** if the result is at least 70% and does not contain any K.O. evaluation.

The audit **is not passed** if the audit result is less than 70%, a K.O. evaluation, a repeated D evaluation or a general K.O. was given.

If the audit is failed, a regular audit has to be conducted as a follow-up audit. The follow-up audit should be carried out within a period of at the latest six weeks. If it is not possible to implement the corrective actions within this period, the post-audit may also take place at a later date.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if there is no successful follow-up audit present in the database. Furthermore, the regulations of annex 5.2 Rules of Sanction Procedure of the guideline General Regulations apply.

⇒ Chapter 5.4 Audit frequency

⇒ Annex 5.2 to the Guideline General Regulations

K.O. evaluations, general K.O.s, repeated D evaluations and audits with an audit result below 70 % must be notified to QS by the certification body through the immediate entry and release of the audit report in the QS database within two working days. The farm size in hectare (for each crop) is to register in the audit report and to deposit in the database. QS then decides whether a sanction procedure is to be initiated.

Joint auditing of several production scopes

For individual stages several production scopes of a company can be audited together. In such cases, only one checklist is used during the audit. A requirement which is relevant for several production scopes (e.g. fertilisation, plant protection) is evaluated only once in the checklist. For these requirements, the lowest result determined in the different production scopes is applicable (see table 7).

All audited production scopes receive the same audit result.

5.4 Audit frequency

The achieved status determines the time interval to the next regular audit and the period of validity of the certificate.

Table 8: Duration of approval in the individual stages, depending on the status

Stage \ QS-Status	I	II	III
Agriculture cattle farming, Agriculture pig farming, Production, Livestock Transport	3 years	2 years	1 year
Feed sector (except matrix certification), Agriculture poultry production, Hatcheries, Agricultural coordinators, Slaughtering/Deboning (livestock transport), processing, convenience, Meat Wholesale (broker, storage of meat and meat products), Butchery, Food Retail (non-coordinated), Wholesale, Logistics and Preparation/Processing Fruit, Vegetables and Potatoes Pet Food	2 years	1 year	6 months

Stage \ QS-Status	Passed
QS-GAP	1 year
Feed sector (only matrix certification)	3 years

The follow-up has to be scheduled in such way, that the subsequent certification takes place on time and thus the QS approval can be preserved.

Different audit frequencies can be determined in order to take advantage of international agreements between QS and other standard owners.

Follow-up audit after K.O. evaluations during a regular audit
If an audit is not passed, a follow-up audit in the form of a complete regular audit must be conducted on site (see 5.3.3 Audit result). The decision on the extent of the follow-up audit is in the responsibility of the certification body and has to be justified upon request.

In case of regular audits with a K.O. assessment, the certification body can decide on its own responsibility not to conduct the post-audit on site as a complete regular audit, but only to review the requirements assessed with a K.O.. In individual cases, if the requirement evaluated with a K.O. only refers to documentation needs, it is permissible to only examine the implementation of corrective measures by means of documentary evidence.

If audits are failed on the stage food retail, butchery (direct point of sale) or coordinator, the follow-up audit has to be performed as a complete regular audit, at latest six weeks afterwards.

Follow-up audit after K.O. evaluations during a random sample, special, parallel or spot audits
In the event of K.O. evaluations during random sample, special, parallel or spot audits, the follow-up audit must always be conducted in form of a complete regular audit within a time period of six weeks (see 5.3.3 Audit result).

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

⇒ Chapter 6. Measures under the scheme integrity system

5.5 Granting, preserving and withdrawal of certification

5.5.1 Certification process

The responsibility for granting, preserving and withdrawal of certification lies with the certification body.

The decision on certification must be made no later than 6 weeks after the audit was conducted. Within this period, the audit must be entered and released in the QS database by the certification body. Otherwise, the QS head office shall decide on the further procedure.

When changes that may affect certification become known, it is the responsibility of the certification body to take appropriate action. This explicitly includes changes made after certification has been granted. This applies accordingly to an extension or limitation of the scope as well as the suspension of a certification.

5.5.2 Issue of certificates and confirmations

Certificates or confirmations can be issued by the certification body, but they do not allow direct inference to the approval of a site for the QS scheme. Only the information in the database is relevant.

When issuing certificates or confirmations the following points should be noted:

On each certificate, audit date, date of decision on certification and expiry date of certification validity must be indicated. When issuing certificates, it must generally be ensured that the data indicated on the certificate match up with the data on the approval of the scheme participant recorded in the QS database. Form and content of the certificate must comply with sample certificates and confirmations. Logos of the scheme participant

might also be inserted upon request. It is important to ensure that a misleading use of the logos is avoided.

A certificate or confirmation shall only be issued by the certification body when an eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme consists. Locations that are included on the basis of a scheme agreement in the QS scheme obtain only after the signature of the contract the eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme. The certification body is notified of this per e-mail from QS.

⇒ Annex 8.1 Sample Certificates and Confirmations

5.5.3 Validity of certificates

The certificate validity begins with the date of the decision on certification. In the case of an initial audit, the end of the certificate's validity is calculated from the audit date plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status. In the case of a follow-up audit, the new period of validity of the certificate is calculated on the basis of the end of the previous certificate plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status.

Extension of certificate validity

In justified individual cases, the certification body as an exception has the option to extend the validity of a certificate by up to 3 months. An extension may only be granted if a certification body approved by QS has already been commissioned to conduct a follow-up audit. The extension can be granted at the earliest 1 month prior to the expiry of the validity of the certificate. It must be executed and justified in writing in the QS database.

The follow-up audit and certification decision must then take place within the period of certificate extension, which can be no more than three months. If the certification decision is positive, the period of validity of the certificate begins with the day of the certification decision and ends with the final date of the previous certificate (without extension) plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status. The previous extension of the certification is not included in the calculation of the new end date. If the follow up audit was not passed, the extension of the eligibility to deliver ends.

Bringing forward the QS audit

With an audit frequency of at least one year, the follow-up audit can be conducted up to 6 months prior to the original end of the certificate's validity. If the audit is conducted within 6 months of the end of the certificate's validity, the validity of the follow-up certificate begins with the expiry of the previous certificate. If the audit is conducted earlier than 6 months before the certificate expires, the period of validity of the new certificate is calculated on the basis of the audit date plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status.

With an audit frequency of less than 1 year, the follow-up audit can be conducted up to 1 month prior to the original expiry of the certificate. If the follow-up audit is conducted within 1 month of the expiry of the certificate, the validity of the follow-up certificate begins with the expiry of the previous certificate. If the audit is conducted earlier than 1 month before the certificate expires, the period of validity of the new certificate is calculated on the basis of the audit date plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status.

In deviation from this, the audit in companies in the Fruit Vegetable Potato Production stage with an audit frequency of at least one year can be brought forward by up to nine months without affecting the duration of the certificate.

⇒ Chapter 5.4: Audit Frequency

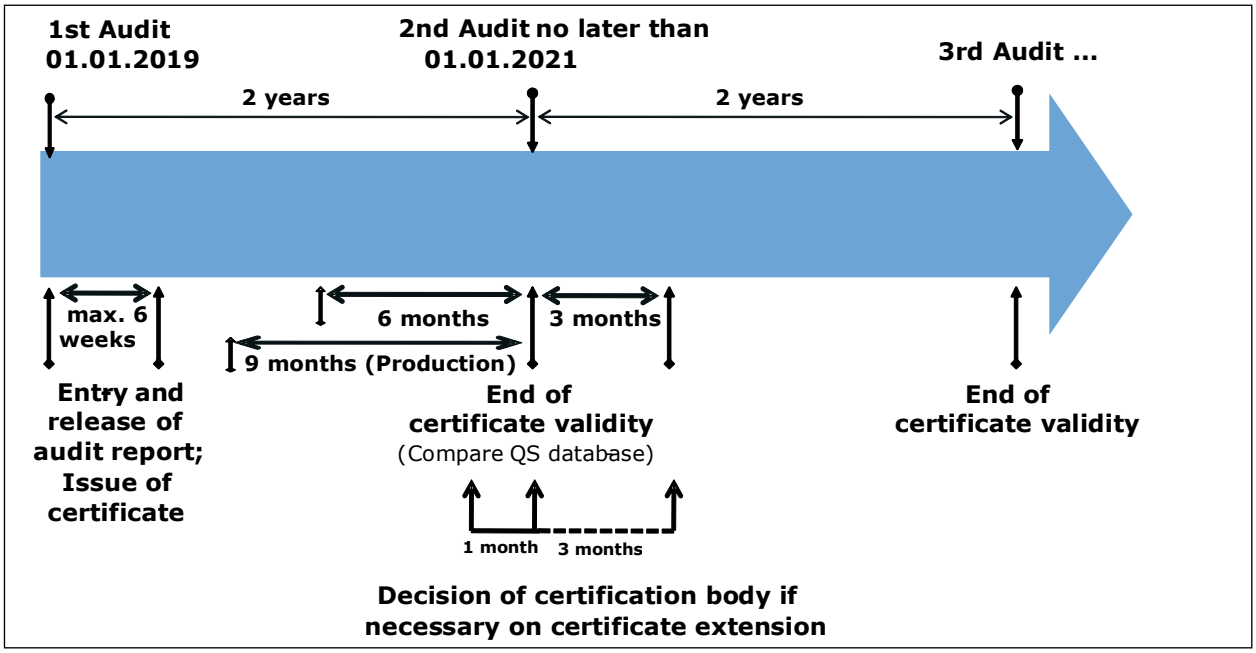

Figure 1: the issue and validity of certification as well as options to extent the certificate are shown in the illustration (example)

5.5.4 Withdrawal of certificates

Certificates must be withdrawn in the following circumstances:

- Severe violations against the scheme manual
- Exclusion of the scheme participant
- Cancellation of the scheme agreement by the scheme participant or by QS
- Cancellation of the declaration of participation by the coordinated company or by the coordinator.
- Notice of termination of the scheme participant to QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH
- Deregistration of a location from an approved matrix (feed sector)
- Change of the certification body by scheme participant
- Change of standards or premature recertification

The certification body and QS inform each other about exclusion of the scheme, cancellation or withdrawal of a certificate.

If the certificate of a matrix coordinator is withdrawn, the certificate of the entire matrix is withdrawn.

The certification body is notified by QS in the event of the exclusion or termination of a scheme participant. The certification body must notify QS whenever a certificate is withdrawn.

If a certificate is withdrawn due to the termination of the scheme participant or deregistration of coordinated company, a new audit must be conducted when and if the company re-registers.

If a company re-registers within 6 months, a follow-up audit must be conducted. Otherwise an initial audit has to be conducted once again.

If a company re-registers within 2 months of deregistering (e.g. after a change of coordinators), the same or a new certification body can examine and continue the certification decision of the preceding audit provided that the reasons for registration/deregistration do not speak against continuation and/or the transfer of the certificate.

In case of the contrary behaviour to contract, the certification body decides about the conduction of follow-up measures or even withdrawal of certificate and termination of contract with the scheme participant. At the same time the certification body contacts QS to define the further actions.

5.5.5 Decision on preserving certification

If there is a change in the ownership, structure or personnel of the responsible management of a company, in case of a scope extension, or if any other information exists which allows the conclusion that the company may no longer satisfy requirements, the certification body has to decide whether or not the conduct of a new follow up audit is necessary for the purpose of preserving certification.

Scheme participants are obligated to inform the certification body responsible for the operation immediately as well as the responsible coordinator with regard to any significant operational changes that may jeopardise the maintenance of certification. If requisite information is not passed on by the scheme participant, the QS approval may be forfeited.

5.5.6 Change of certification body

In the event of a change of the certification body by the scheme participant, certification can be transferred. To this end, the outgoing certification body is obliged to pass on all existing documents required for a transfer of certification directly to the new certification body. The new certification body is obligated to review the transferred certification within four weeks after the scheme participant has chosen the new certification body in the database. The decision of the review must be documented in the database. If the certification body decides not to accept the certification, a new regular audit needs to be conducted as well as entered and released in the data base within four weeks after the change.

If the certification body decides not to accept certification for matrix certification in the feed sector, the matrix coordinator and 33 per cent of the sites must be successfully audited and the audit reports submitted and released within four weeks of the certification being rejected.

If the certification is accepted, it must still be ensured that the newly responsible certification body – if necessary - continues to monitor the implementation of all corrective actions not remedied yet or that the change of the certification body only takes place after the complete implementation of all corrective actions. The regulations regarding unannounced audits have to be taken into account by the certification body, the location is transferred to.

If there are K.O. evaluations which have not been corrected at the time of the change of certification body, a new regular audit needs to be conducted at any rate.

The change of the certification body is not allowed if the extension on certificate validity has been conducted.

5.6 Unannounced audits

Unannounced audits are conducted on all stages of the QS scheme. The unannounced audits can be conducted as

- unannounced regular audits or as
- unannounced spot audits between two announced regular audits or as
- unannounced spot audits between two unannounced regular audits.

A list of production scopes for which unannounced audits must be conducted is annexed to this guideline.

⇒ Annex 8.2 Unannounced Audits – Production Scopes

Initial audits can - except at the stage food retail and in the butchery (only points of sale) - be performed announced. This applies analogue to follow-up audits in case of K.O. assessments from unannounced regular audits.

For certain types of production, it is possible to choose the way in which unannounced audits are conducted.

If there is a choice, the scheme participant determines in the database for each location how the unannounced audits are to be conducted. This determination includes all production scopes of a production branch. In the area of agriculture poultry, the respective coordinator is responsible for entering the data in the database. For companies that are integrated by QS inspection (e.g. small-scale feed material producers, mobile feed milling and mixing plants) the data are entered by the certification body.

A change from the option "unannounced spot audit with announced regular audit" to "unannounced regular audit" must be made at least 3 months prior to the expiry of the regular certification period. A change to the option "unannounced spot audit with announced regular audit" must be made at least 6 months prior to the expiry of the regular certification period, so that it is possible to conduct an unannounced spot audit before the next announced regular audit.

For the stages agriculture cattle, agriculture pig and for the standard QS production it is not possible to choose the way in which unannounced audits are conducted. Here, the audit option "unannounced spot audit and unannounced regular audit" applies for all locations.

Only the audit option "unannounced spot audit and announced regular audit" applies to the QS-GAP standard and to locations at the stages of slaughtering/ deboning, processing, convenience, preparation and processing of fruit, vegetables, potatoes as well as the pet food process chain (with the exception of
PA 525 Private Labelling (pet food) and PA 530 Broker (pet food).

Procedure in the case of prompt performance of other, announced audits.
The certification body shall avoid that announced audits of other standards or scopes are carried out in direct temporal proximity to the unannounced QS audit.

Combined audits (e.g. combination with other standards) are still possible if the control of all parts of the combined audit is conducted without advance notification. If conducting an unannounced audit is not possible within the other standard, the option "unannounced spot audit" has to be chosen. If there is no option (see above), no combined audits can be carried out in case of doubt.

5.6.1 Unannounced regular audits

Unannounced regular audits must be conducted prior to the expiry of certification. All criteria of the stage-specific checklist must be fully checked.

It is possible to notify the company in advance on individual stages in order to ensure that a person capable of providing information is present during the audit according to the following table:

- Feed sector: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Agriculture
  - Cattle and pigs: maximum 48 hours (2 working days)
  - Poultry: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
    for breeders maximum 48 hours (2 working days)
- Hatcheries: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Butchery: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Meat wholesale: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Production QS: maximum 48 hours and minimum 24 hours
- Wholesale
  fruit, vegetables, potatoes: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Food retail no advance notification

At the stages agriculture and production the relevant coordinators are to be informed about the upcoming, unannounced regular audit in the same time at the earliest.

In food retail, in butchery (only points of sale) and the stages of agriculture cattle and agriculture pig, regular audits must be conducted exclusively unannounced. Regular audits, which are conducted according to the standard QS production, are also carried out unannounced. An overview of the relevant audit options by stage or production scope can be found in Annex 8.2 Unannounced audits - production Scopes.

5.6.2 Unannounced spot audits

Unannounced spot audits are conducted additionally between scheduled regular audits. Even if a continuation of the certification is not intended, an unannounced spot audit is carried out in the current certification cycle, if this type of auditing is selected. The main focus of spot audits lies in the control of the production process. As a rule, only selected criteria are audited. A comprehensive check of documents or other criteria is only made if there are indications that nonconformities exist. With the exception of K.O. evaluations, spot audits have no effect on the audit frequency or the status of a company. However, if a K.O. evaluation or a general K.O. is awarded during a spot audit, a regular audit must be carried out within a period of six weeks (see chapter 5.3.3 Audit result).

In order to ensure the presence of a person capable of providing the necessary information, it is possible to inform the company about the spot audit at the earliest 24 hours (1 working day) before the planned audit date.

This information option does not exist for spot audits at locations of the stages

- slaughtering/deboning (production scopes 30 to 35)
- processing (production scopes 41 to 43)
- convenience (production scope 83)
- preparation/Processing Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes (production scopes 85) as well as
- process chain pet food (productions scopes 505 to 520)

The spot audits in locations in these scopes take place completely unannounced, i.e. no prior contact may be made.

The spot audit is performed within a certification cycle before the next regular audit. The time period must be at least two months from the regular audit (before and after) as well as from the regular expiration of the certification period. With a certificate term of six months, the time interval is at least one month.

Spot audits on the Agriculture/Production stage

Spot audits are conducted on the basis of random samples on the Agriculture/Production stage. The random sample is determined by the cut-off date of 1. July every year under consideration of the following percentages:

- Poultry: 50% of all the locations registered for spot audits by a coordinator
- Pigs: 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator
- Cattle: 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator
- Production: 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator
- QS-GAP 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator

The number of spot audits, which have to be conducted by the certification body the respective year, can be adjusted during the year in case of major changes in the number of locations coordinated by one coordinator. The locations to be audited are selected by the certification body.

Spot audits on mobile milling and mixing plants

Spot audits on mobile milling and mixing plants may be conducted on a random sample basis. Here, 10% of company plants with a minimum of one plant unit is to be inspected. In the sequence of audits conducted, different plant items are to be inspected.

⇒ Annex 8.2 Unannounced Audits – Production Scopes.

Procedure in the event that a scheme participant refuses an audit

If a scheme participant refuses to have an audit conducted, the certification body has to decide whether the refusal is justified. The decision should be documented and presented to QS on request.

In the event of an unjustified refusal, the certification body must enter the audit in the QS database with a general K.O. The scheme participant must be notified of the possible consequences of a refusal in advance and in writing (possible loss of eligibility of delivery, sanctions procedure, conducting of a complete regular audit). On request, evidence must be presented to QS that the necessary information has been provided.

5.7 Combined QS/IFS Audit

On some stages within the QS scheme combined audits for IFS and QS can be conducted. This means that the requirements of the IFS standard and those of QS are checked in one audit. The auditor must have QS and IFS approval for the corresponding stage at the time of the audit.

On the stages slaughter/deboning, processing and convenience combined audits together with the scheme IFS Food are possible. On the stage wholesale fruit, vegetables, potatoes combined audits are possible with the schemes IFS Food, IFS Cash & Carry/wholesale. A QS audit for agencies can be combined with the audit of IFS Broker.

After the combined audit the complete QS checklist is to be stored in the QS database. On this basis a status is calculated for this location and accordingly issued an eligibility of delivery.

The combination of an IFS and a QS audit is only possible, when the audit is conducted under the same circumstances (announced or unannounced). Concerning the announcement, the stricter regulations need to be applied.

5.8 Auditing of food retail producer groups and butchery (direct point of sale)

The knowledge of a company's' self-assessment system is indispensable for the conducting of audits at centrally managed branches on the Food Retail and butchery (direct point of sale) stage. For retail companies with centralised structures, the audit of the relevant QA requirements can be divided into an audit of the head office and an audit of the branches. The requirements are assigned to either the head office or the branch.

The central audits are carried out announced annually (approx. every 12 months), whereby it is at the discretion of the certification body to carry out the audit remotely. The audits are concluded with a pass/fail and there is no categorisation in status I to III.

The certification bodies must ensure that they are kept up to date with the latest requirements of self-assessment system.

Categorisation to a QS status

With multiple locations in the Food Retail or butchery (direct point of sale) sector, categorisation to QS Status I to III is made for the entire producer group. Based on the audit results of the inspected branches/points of sale, the QS database determines the categorisation of each producer group and the resulting scope of random sampling for the following audit interval (12 months). If one branch/point of sale does not

satisfy the approval criteria in the audit (minimum QS Status III), a follow-up audit is conducted within six weeks. If QS conformity cannot be determined yet again, the scope of random sampling is increased to 20% for the entire producer group during the current audit interval. Failed audits are not taken into account concerning the fulfilment of the scope of random sampling.

Table 9: Annual scope of random sampling for food retail producer groups, depending on the QS status of the average of audited branches

QS-Status	Annual extent of random sampling
I	10 %
II	15 %
III	20 %

Approval of a producer group
For initial approval or subsequent registration, a random sample of min. 10% of the registered locations of the entire producer group (but at least 3 branches/points of sale) is inspected. The branches/points of sale to be inspected are determined by the certification body. If this random sample confirms conformity with QS requirements, the entire producer group (e.g. group of companies, market chain) is approved. If one branch/ point of sale does not satisfy the approval criteria in the initial audit (minimum QS Status III), a follow-up audit is conducted within six weeks. If QS conformity cannot be determined yet again, the scope of random sampling is increased to 20% for the entire producer group. Approval of the new producer group will be granted once the branches/points of sale have been successfully audited by QS.

The audit interval starts with the date of initial approval of the producer group in the QS scheme and lasts 12 months. Subsequently registered producer groups receive the same cut-off date as existing producer groups, irrespective of the subsequent registration date. If the requested scope of audits is realised during the audit interval, approval is extended for another 12 months. The date of initial approval remains unchanged.

From the date of which the requested scope of random sampling for the current audit interval is fulfilled, a certificate for a producer group may be issued.

5.9 Matrix certification in the feed sector

For companies or groups of companies with several trading locations or with several external storage premises, as well as for companies/groups of companies that operate purely as service providers for storage and transshipment and/or transport, it is possible to carry out matrix certification under the following conditions. Several sites are certified together without each individual site having to be inspected. Compliance with the requirements is checked using a random sampling procedure (except for the matrix coordinator). Matrix certification at production sites or private labellers is not possible (see also Feed Sector Guideline).

Approval of a matrix
For initial approval, the matrix coordinator (head office) and at least 33 per cent of the matrix locations must first be successfully audited. The matrix locations to be audited are selected by the certification body on a risk-oriented basis.

The audit interval of a matrix begins on the date of the first authorization of the matrix in the QS scheme and is three years (36 months).

The matrix coordinator must be audited at least once a year (approx. every 12 months) and thus three times in an audit interval. Each matrix location assigned to a matrix must be audited at least once during the certification period. The certification body ensures the risk-orientated distribution of audits over the term of the certificate. The matrix locations audited prior to initial authorisation do not have to be audited again in the first audit interval. The matrix coordinator must be audited at least twice more in the first audit interval after initial authorisation.

If the matrix coordinator has not been audited three times within an audit interval, the approval of the entire matrix will not be extended until the required audit scope has been fulfilled. The audit counts for the audit interval for which it was repeated. The matrix location must be audited again in the following audit interval.

In addition to the provisions under 5.3.3, the following applies: If a matrix coordinator has failed an audit, the approval of the matrix coordinator and all matrix locations that are authorised to deliver via the matrix will be withdrawn by QS no later than six weeks after the failed audit if no successful result of a follow-up audit has been released for the matrix coordinator in the QS database.

If a matrix location is deregistered from an approved matrix, a successful scheme audit must be available in the QS database within eight weeks. Otherwise, the location loses its approval in the QS scheme.

Issue of certificate

Companies that have been inspected within the framework of matrix certification only receive one certificate. This certificate contains all approved locations of the matrix. The validity and term of the certificate is three years. An extension of the certificate term is not possible.

In addition, the provisions of (sub)section 5.5, in particular 5.5.4, apply.

Subsequent registration of a location for a matrix

If a location is to be included in an already approved matrix, a scheme audit must be carried out and passed at this location in order for the location to be authorised to deliver in the QS scheme. Locations that are integrated into the QS scheme on the basis of a scheme contract only receive eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme after the contract has been signed.

6 Measures under the scheme integrity system

In order to check the functionality of quality assurance measures, QS organises systematic and interlocked control measures that focus on the quality of inspections conducted by certification bodies and laboratories, the cross-stage functioning of the QS scheme as well as on scheme participants' compliance with requirements. These control measures are designed to review the status quo and, at the same time, continuously develop and improve processes in the QS scheme. Amongst others, the following measures (integrity checks) are included:

6.1 Random sample audits

In addition to the periodic regular audits, compliance with QS requirements is checked by means of random sample audits. QS usually engages those certification bodies currently commissioned with conducting regular audits by the scheme participant to carry out random sample audits. A random sample audit must not be carried out by the auditor who has conducted the last regular audit in the respective company.

Random sample audits shall be unannounced. In order to ensure the presence of a person being able and authorised to provide necessary information, notice may be given no longer than 24 (1 working day) hours before the scheduled audit date. Random sample audits are restricted to several selected requirements, which are the focus of the audit. Unless they contain K.O. evaluations, random sample audits do not have an effect on the frequency of regular audits or the QS status. If K.O. evaluations occur, a complete regular audit has to be conducted within a time period of six weeks.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

6.2 Audits of special purpose

In suspicious cases or in the event of imminent danger, QS immediately commissions audits of special purpose at the scheme participants.

Audits of special purpose are usually performed completely unannounced. Unless they contain K.O. evaluations, audits of special purpose do not have an effect on the frequency of regular audits or the QS status. If K.O. evaluations occur, a complete regular audit has to be conducted within a time period of six weeks.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

6.3 Parallel audits

Parallel audits serve to verify the result of a previous regular audit. They are performed by QS within a maximum of six weeks after the regular audit.

Parallel audits shall be unannounced. In order to ensure the presence of a person being able and authorised to provide necessary information, notice may be given no longer than 24 hours before the scheduled audit date. Parallel audits are restricted to several selected requirements, which are the focus of the audit. Unless they contain K.O. evaluations, parallel audits do not have an effect on the frequency of regular audits or the QS status. If K.O. evaluations occur, a complete regular audit is to be conducted within a time period of six weeks.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

6.4 Office audits

In order to ensure correct and uniform implementation of the QS inspection system, certification bodies are monitored by means of office audits.

QS conducts office audits at certification bodies using its own personnel and/or externally commissioned auditors.

6.5 Accompaniment of audits

Audits conducted in the QS scheme may be accompanied by QS or a person commissioned by QS. The certification body as well as the accompanied auditor will receive a written report on the results of the accompanying audit afterwards.

6.6 Audit report inspection

Audit reports entered into the QS database by certification bodies are verified with regard to completeness and correctness. The objective is to avoid incorrect and implausible data entries and to harmonise the implementation of requirements by certification bodies and auditors.

The certification body is obliged to contribute to the rapid elimination of possible ambiguities (correction of audit report if necessary).

7 Definitions

7.1 Explanation of Symbols

Reference to related documents are highlighted by the use of **bold text**.
This symbol precedes every list of documents you are obliged to show/submit.
Notes are identified by ***Note*** *in italics*.
References to other sections of the Guideline are indicated by ⇒ .

7.2 Terms and Definitions

- Accreditation (DIN EN ISO/IEC 17000:2005)

  Confirmation by a third party which formally affirms that a conformity assessment body has the competence to conduct certain conformity tasks.

- Audit (DIN EN ISO/IEC 17000:2005)

  A systematic, independent and documented process to acquire audit evidence and the objective evaluation thereof to determine the extent to which audit criteria have been fulfilledConformity assessment (DIN EN ISO/IEC 17000:2005)
  Statement, that predetermined requirements relating to a product, a process, a system, a person or a body have been fulfilled. The conformity assessment includes such activities as testing, inspection and certification, as well as the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies.

- Audit evidence (EN ISO 19011)

  Records, statements of fact or other information which applies to audit criteria and can be verified.

- Auditor (EN ISO 19011)

  A person with the qualifications to conduct an audit.

- Certification (DIN EN ISO/IEC 17000:2005)

  Confirmation of conformity by a third party in relation to products, processes, systems or persons.

- Cross-checks

  Cross-stage and cross-audit delivery note checks which are used to check the QS requirements for traceability and product identity. Basic information and details on how to carry out cross-checks can be found in the document "Cross-checks fruit, vegetables, potatoes".

- Nonconformity (based on ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996)

  A deviation from predetermined requirements for the acquisition of certification in accordance with QS standards. The QS requirements are regarded as implemented if the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations presented in Table 6 is not exceeded and there are no K.O. evaluations.

You will find a list of general terms and definitions in the guideline General Regulations.

8 Annexes

Annexes 8.1 to 8.2 are published as an extract.

8.1 Sample certificates and confirmations
8.2 Conduction of unannounced audits – production scopes
8.3 Evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk

Revision information version 01.01.2024

Criterion	Changes
3.1.1 Technical Qualifications	Addition of the convenience scope
3.1.5 Trainings by QS	Renaming of the chapter (previously: Initial training by QS) and restructuring
3.1.6 Specific approval requirements	Renaming of the chapter (previously: Stage-specific training by QS) and clarification of the approval requirements for the respective stages
5.2.2 On-site audit	Addition of the possibility of remote checks for production scopes where a pure document check is carried out
5.3.3 Audit result	Addition to the detailed commentation on corrective actions not yet carried out in the post-audit
5.3.1 Evaluations	Cancellation of the requirement that the QS office must be contacted before a general K.O. is released and if the person responsible for the operation refuses to sign. Clarification that a meaningful justification is required in the audit report for all criteria that were not evaluated with an A. New reference to requirements for comments at certain scopes.
5.4 Audit frequency	Addition of the feed sector (matrix certification only) to "Table 8: Duration of approval in the individual stages, depending on the status"
5.5.4 Withdrawal of certificate	Addition: The certificate must also be revoked if a matrix location is deregistered from an authorised matrix. In addition, the certificate must be withdrawn from the entire matrix if the certificate of a matrix coordinator is withdrawn.
5.5.6 Change of certification body	Addition: Regulation of the procedure in the event of rejection of certification by the certification body within the framework of matrix certification
5.6 Unannounced audits	Addition of the convenience scope
5.6.2 unannounced spot audits	Specification of the effects of K.O.s in spot audits Reduction of the minimum interval between spot audit and system audit to at least one month for a certificate term of six months. Addition of the convenience scope

Criterion	Changes
5.7 Combined QS/IFS audit	Addition of the convenience scope
5.8 Auditing of food retail producer groups and butchery (direct point of sale)	Addition of the option to carry out centralised audits Clarification for subsequent notification of bundles
5.9 Matrix certification feed sector	Renaming of the chapter (previously: multi-site certification feed sector) Addition of the new regulations for matrix certification
Anlage 8.1 Sample certificates and confirmations	Renaming of sample certificate 4 (multi-site certification feed sector) to sample certificate 4 (matrix certification feed sector)
Annex 8.3 Evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk	New annex on possible evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk in the agriculture stages cattle, pig, poultry

Guideline
Certification

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