

*Use of remote audit by a UK voluntary third party assurance (vTPA) scheme, approach and lessons learned ...*

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**SPS Thematic Session on**  
**remote audit**  
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# OVERVIEW



- ★ Red Tractor develops standards for the entire food chain, based on science, evidence, legislation and best practice.  
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- ★ Standards cover food safety, animal welfare, environmental protection, human rights and apply to every agricultural sector (except fish & eggs)  
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- ★ Conformity with standards is ensured through independent audit by certification bodies operating to ISO 17065  
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- ★ Red Tractor standards help reduce duplication and audit fatigue  
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- ★ Red Tractor was launched in 2000 to raise standards and improve safety in the food chain – today YouGov research shows UK consumers trust UK food more than any other



# THE AUDIT REGIME

RED TRACTOR CONDUCTS APPROX 60,000 AUDITS ANNUALLY  
(45K ON-FARM & 15K THROUGHOUT THE FOOD CHAIN)

AUDITS ARE DELIVERED BY INDEPENDENT, GLOBALLY RENOWNED,  
CERTIFICATION BODIES OPERATING TO  
ISO 17065 AND LOCALLY ACCREDITED

THE REGIME IS RISK-BASED ...OPERATOR PERFORMANCE AT  
ROUTINE AUDITS, PLUS EXTERNAL INTELLIGENCE MAY DRIVE  
ADDITIONAL UNANNOUNCED AUDITS

PRE-COVID, PHYSICAL AUDITS WERE UNDERTAKEN BY ASSESSORS  
SEEKING CONFORMITY EVIDENCE THROUGH VISUAL APPRAISAL,  
RECORD KEEPING AND INTERVIEWS

STANDARDS & THE AUDIT REGIME ACHIEVE EARNED  
RECOGNITION BY THE REGULATOR AND GOVERNMENT BODIES

COVID CAUSED MAJOR SUPPLY CHAIN CHANGES, DRIVING  
INCREASED RISKS AND THEREFORE INCREASED NEED FOR  
ASSESSMENT AND CONFORMITY – SO A NEW APPROACH HAD TO  
BE FOUND ...

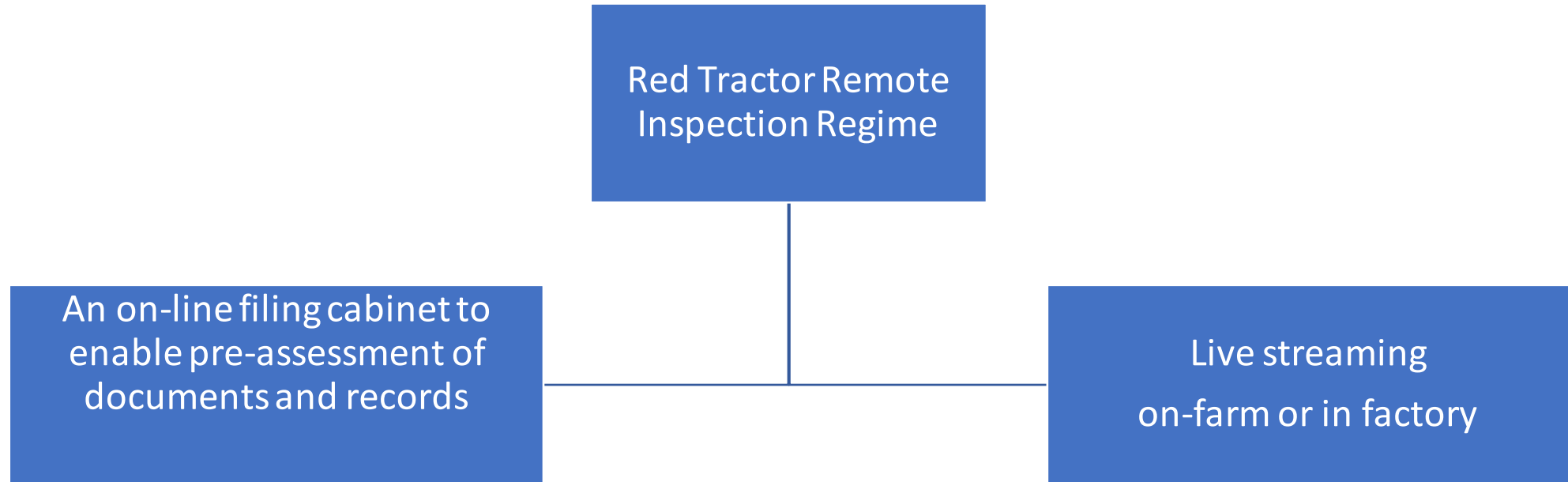
# THE REMOTE AUDIT REGIME – OBJECTIVES AS AT MARCH 2020

- Ensure continued conformity with standards at a critical time when food safety is paramount
- Enable new members to become assured, reflecting changes in the supply chain
- Retain earned recognition by the regulator and Government bodies
- Avoid a substantial inspection backlog

## **However :**

- Auditing shouldn't put people's lives at risk
- Auditing shouldn't disrupt the supply chain to such an extent that people could go short of food (highly applicable in early 2020)

# REMOTE AUDIT REGIME – THE PROCESS



# LIVE STREAMING



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- Technologies that enable the business to 'show' the assessor around the farm / factory 'live' allowing them to check conformity and enable witnessing
- Assessor and business agree which technology to use and assessor helps with set up and testing
- If connectivity becomes an issue, then assessor will direct business operator to take a video of specific areas and then share with assessor immediately when there is connectivity
- Security – reassurance vital for food factories concerned about commercially sensitive information being recorded

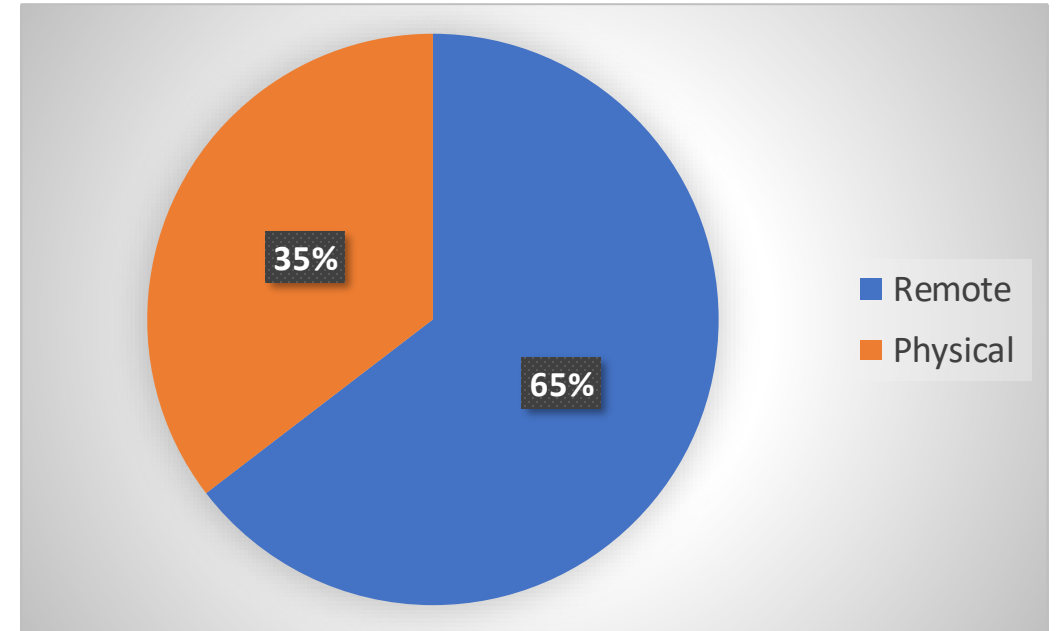
# RETAINING REGULATOR & GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE

- The regime was developed together with input from the regulator - the Food Standards Agency (FSA)
- FSA personnel witnessed a remote audit to confirm its robustness
- The regime was scrutinised by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to ensure its robustness and continued compliance with ISO 17065
- Conformity data was shared with the FSA, in line with the approach set down in the Codex vTPA guidelines

# RESULTS APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021

	Number remote	% of total
Crops	8,534	64%
Fresh Produce	1,572	86%
Dairy	3,599	48%
Beef & Lamb	9,343	62%
Pigs	1,933	84%
Poultry	2,134	95%

**28,000 remote audits**



Non-conformities continued to be identified (although at slightly reduced levels)

e.g. Dairy Farms Remote 48% members = 61% > 0 non-conformities

Physical 52% members = 73% > 0 non-conformities



# POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES

## POSITIVES

- Pre-assessment document review allows assessor to scrutinise in depth and prepare areas to focus during the live stream
- Continue to assess conformity against all standards
- Assessor to continue to lead the assessment and probe where required
- Portal resulted in business being more prepared
- Non-conformities still identified

## NEGATIVES

- No sense of smell
- Limited peripheral visibility
- Body language and staff dynamics more challenging to interpret
- Connectivity in some scenarios
- Levels of non-conformities identified slightly lower

# FUTURE AUDIT REGIME

**Physical** assessments remain the preferred audit approach and are particularly important when auditing :

- Animal welfare outcomes
- Assessment of buildings and the general farm environment
- Staff behaviours
- The business culture

**Remote** assessments enable conformity checks when physical checks are impossible but has also brought additional benefits:

- Improved focus on document assessment
- Assessors to get 'eyes on the business' quickly in crisis or emergency scenarios
- The ability to audit during disease outbreaks (Avian Influenza)
- Better rotation of assessors
- The ability to focus appropriately at different seasons / production cycles
- Easier to witness assessors to ensure capability & consistency

**A blended approach of physical and remote audit** will be used in the future to achieve ...

**INCREASED ROBUSTNESS, EFFICIENCY & FLEXIBILITY**