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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Red Tractor develops standards for the entire food chain, based on science, evidence, legislation and best practice.

Standards cover food safety, animal welfare, environmental protection, human rights and apply to every agricultural sector (except fish & eggs)

Conformity with standards is ensured through independent audit by certification bodies operating to ISO 17065

Red Tractor standards help reduce duplication and audit fatigue

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

Red Tractor Remote Inspection Regime

An on-line filing cabinet to enable pre-assessment of documents and records

Live streaming on-farm or in factory
LIVE STREAMING

• 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number remote</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crops</td>
<td>8,534</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Produce</td>
<td>1,572</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>3,599</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef &amp; Lamb</td>
<td>9,343</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td>1,933</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>2,134</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVES</th>
<th>NEGATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-assessment document review allows assessor to scrutinise in depth and prepare areas to focus during the live stream</td>
<td>o No sense of smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continue to assess conformity against all standards</td>
<td>o Limited peripheral visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessor to continue to lead the assessment and probe where required</td>
<td>o Body language and staff dynamics more challenging to interpret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Portal resulted in business being more prepared</td>
<td>o Connectivity in some scenarios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-conformities still identified</td>
<td>o Levels of non-conformities identified slightly lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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