

The role of the farm assurance scheme in food safety



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Farm assurance

In the UK, farm assurance schemes provide consumers and businesses with guarantees that food has been produced to particular standards. Farm assurance aims at certification for agricultural products and emphasises the principles of quality assurance. All farm assurance schemes are mainly to ensure high standards of animal welfare, and it may include standards and certification for traceability, production methods, transport as well as supplies in order to monitor the agricultural food from farm to pack. This protocol is necessary to certify that all farm foods reach required standard for food safety (Gov. uk, 2012).

A typical example is the UK's Red Tractor scheme, which was started by the UK farmers, food producers and retailers and was launched in 2000. The Red Tractor is a food assurance scheme which covers production standards developed by experts on safety, hygiene, animal welfare and the environment amongst other factors. All suppliers in the red tractor food chain are inspected and certified by an independent professional body. The red tractor certifies that food has been produced to these independently inspected standards right across the food chain-from farm to pack. The Red Tractor logo on the pack means the food or drink has met these responsible production standards and is fully traceable back to independently inspected farms in the UK (Assured Food Standards, 2015).

Other schemes that are affiliated to the red tractor include soil association, quality British turkey and quality meat Scotland.

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Herd health plan

Many organisations such as soil association and RSPCA Freedom Food develop, describe and use the herd health plan as an individual farm management tool to identify and control the particular health problems of an individual farm. Thus, improving and maintaining animal welfare, gain financial as well as increase farm efficacy (Anon, 2015). Herd health plan in farm assurance schemes includes designing plan of housing, feeding and pasture management, bio-security, health recording and monitoring as well as control measures of disease. Farmers set the health plan and it is advised to get the veterinarian involved in the elaboration as a team, and as a live document it will cover a series of record keeping policies and protocols to reduce the incidences of sickness and to make a more prolific herd.

- Brief summary / outline of the minimum required content of the farm assurance scheme and dairy herd health plan

Minimum requirements for RTA dairy herd health plan T covers as a general three important aspects: A. Routine Preventive Measures; Treatment Plans and Management Procedures B. Health and Performance Monitoring C.

Health and Performance Review

The minimum set standard under the farm assurance as well as keeping an update herd held plan are as follow:

- Plans and procedures in place to ensure safe and legal food production
- Staff training with on-going courses on animal handling, welfare, hygiene etc.

- Clear identification of livestock to deliver food chain traceability
- Effective and responsible control of birds, rodents, insects and other animals to prevent contamination and food safety risk. Sick or injured animals should have good management
- Feed and water management with a good feeding programme
adequate access to clean drinking water. Records of mixing formulas should be kept to ensure that the foodstuff was acquired from another assured source
- Safe, comfortable and hygienic housing for all livestock, including young animals as well as new birth animals and stocking density should be suitable
- Appropriate and well maintained facilities, conditions are available for animals
- Effective bio-security measures to prevent the spread of disease and protect food safety and animal health
- Responsible use of medicines and veterinary treatment, prevent food contamination
- Livestock transport with adequate vehicles to maintain the welfare during transport, prevents spread of diseases
- Environmental impact evaluation and protection management of waste, to make sure no contamination, pollution or spread of disease.

(Anon, 2015)

- Outline of where the farm assurance scheme and herd health plan sits in the food chain (pre-farm; farm; post farm)

They aim to ensure that each step in the supply chain for farm production, such as meat and dairy, are food safety assured, furthermore, they provide safely produced farm food products means much lower chances of zoonotic agents present in the product when consumers purchase them.

First, the aspect of agricultural supply sector (drugs, residues and hormones) attracts consumer concerns about the food they eat.

Second, with on-farm, the production process (free range, organic), slaughter method, food safety aspects, such as farm bio-security measures, proper housing space etc are the role of assurance to provide information and satisfy consumers.

Red Tactor assurance have a range of post-farm schemes that provide effective assurance to recognised standards and a fundamental link in an integrated chain of assurance in the food chain from farms to supermarkets. It covers legislative requirements, scientific evidence, and good practice in the industry and consumer concern, such as proper vehicles, certification requirement, keep records for traceability as well as maintain sanitary conditions (Assured Food Standards, 2015).

- Highlight aspects of the farm assurance scheme particularly associated with food safety.

The farm assurance scheme has made a great contribution to food safety and protected public health from food-borne diseases. Simultaneously, it has raised the confidence of customers on agricultural production and the awareness to monitor the safety of food. The dairy industry takes food safety

seriously, pasteurization is an essential tool for ensuring that milk and dairy products are safe. Moreover, every tank load of milk entering dairy processing plants is strictly tested for animal residues. Cleanliness of farm; quality of farm flooring and walls are also the consideration factors based on the schemes ensures food safety.

- Highlight aspects of the health plan particularly associated with food safety

Food safety is also ensured via some parts of the herd health plan by preventing disease occurrence and spread via vaccination and treatment. Salmonella and *E. coli*, have caused incidences of food poisoning and infected humans from food animals. Thus, increasing control on farm there is a reduced risk of contamination of farm products. Moreover, isolation facility to reduce spread of potentially zoonotic infectious diseases. Bio-security reduces the likely introduction of potentially zoonotic infectious diseases. Named antibiotics for use in common conditions and, therefore, increases discussion with vet of use of antibiotics in food production.

DHHPs also help assess risks for both zoonotic and non-infectious diseases, as every herd at a farm has a chance of obtaining a disease. This helps VPH issues as it gives farmers and veterinarians. Furthermore, this also ensures that when the cattle reach abattoirs and food industries, the chances of them being infected with zoonotic agents is lowered.

- Highlight some limitations of the scheme

The scheme require close cooperation between farmers, government, industry and other relevant sectors, in order to find a solution which can

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minimize the negative public health impact whilst ensuring safe and effective food-producing animals.

-Difficulty in certifying compliance beyond the annual inspection

-Reluctance in farmers and vets to engage the program with genuine intentions beyond a bureaucratic paper exercise

- The relationship between credibility of quality signals and reductions in consumer' quality discovery costs still needs to be considered

- Concluding paragraph and personal opinion on the role of the scheme and the herd health plan

Farm assurance and herd health plan are the most effective measures for supervision to provide safe agricultural production to public and simultaneously the limitations are the goals that the farm assurance scheme needs to improve and achieve. Because they reduce the incidence and impact of food-borne diseases by ensuring that food reaching the consumers is safe, health, of food quality while ensuring protection of animal welfare. Therefore, they can boost consumer confidence on the farmers and food products and adherence to the scheme should be strictly enforced.

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