

PRESS RELEASE**20.9.23****New certification model introduced to streamline audits for Scotland's crop growers**

As part of its bid to increase the integrity of its assurance scheme, Scottish Quality Crops (SQC) is moving from an annual scheme to a product certification model. This means that audits can take place throughout the year and grain passports can be issued earlier in the year to relieve the pressure of receiving these in time for harvest.

Teresa Dougall, Managing Director of SQC, explains:

“We have been listening to SQC members’ concerns around the issue of receiving passports in time for harvest. Under the current annual scheme model, growers must be audited between 1 October and prior to harvest and successfully complete the certification process in this time to gain assurance. Only at this stage can passports currently be issued. With the move to product certification, we can provide rolling certification over 12 months meaning that passports can be issued earlier in the season and before harvest starts.

“It will allow assessments to be more evenly spread across the scheme year providing our certification body, FIA, and their assessors with more time to allocate audits and complete the certification process. It also brings SQC in line with other assurance schemes, making it easier for joint audits to take place where applicable.”

The new product certification model will start on 1 October 2023 in line with the new scheme year and distribution of membership renewals. Ms Dougall says there is no need for growers to take any different action to previous years:

“The move to product certification will still require all growers to have an annual assessment. The biggest change is that audits may take place at a different time of year and will not necessarily be at the same time every year. We are very pleased to be making this transition which will also add integrity to the SQC scheme by allowing for improved monitoring of production across the full scheme year.”

Buyers can continue to use the member checker to confirm that the grain is from an approved site. SQC have also confirmed that they will be working to improve the efficiency of their member checker next year.

This builds on SQC’s appointment of FIA last year to help growers benefit from joint audits, where possible, across four assurance schemes – Scottish Quality Crops, Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), Wildlife Estates Scotland and most recently, LEAF.

“SQC is a co-operative of agricultural stakeholders, run by farmers for farmers. Our priority is to support our growers to access the best markets and, where possible, profit potential through quality assurance, and to make the certification process to achieve this as straight forward as possible.”