



**SCOTTISH
QUALITY CROPS**

NEWS UPDATES

May 2025

IT'S BEEN A GREAT START TO A NEW GROWING YEAR

With the recent spell of good weather and it being a busy time of year, we appreciate you taking the time to read our latest news – bringing you updates on key work, dates for assessments and, as part of a new series on the people behind assurance, an interview with the Technical Manager at our Certification Body FIA who trains and supports the Assessors.

Since the start of the year, FIA has been keeping you fully informed with

their Technical Updates which include details on changes to processes and assessment delivery. More on some of that work below.

We're also already in Show season and I hope to see many of you when we're out and about through the summer.

But, until then and as always, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Teresa Dougall,
SQC Managing Director



Change to the delivery

process of SQC Grain Passports

As you will have seen in FIA's most recent Technical Update there is a change in the way your paper passport will be issued to you this year.

Instead of receiving an envelope in the post, paper passports will be available to download via the new Member Portal. This allows you to access and print passports as required. This is not a digital passport – it is the same paper passport which is downloaded and used in exactly the same way.

This advance will save significant time, cost and resource for SQC, as well as reducing paper waste. By keeping running costs lean, it also allows SQC to keep membership fees down.

Not only is this a significant improvement in terms of the internal process but it very much aligns to the

recommendations in the recent Farm Assurance Review report, for all assurance and certification bodies to adopt technology to simplify processes and minimise disruption to growers.

This is only Phase 1 in the development of the auditee portal and our aim is to work with our growers to support a wide range of activities, 'managed at a pace to allow all members to engage with ease' as recommended in the report.

The Member Portal has been piloted by a number of SQC Members to ensure it works well for growers and we look forward to launching it soon. FIA will be issuing further guidance ahead of its introduction, so please keep your eyes open for more detail.

CHANGES TO THE SQC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

It is with great pleasure that we announce Scottish Agronomy as a new member to the SQC Co-op. This allows us to further expand the experience and technical knowledge of our Board with the introduction of Adam Christie, Scottish Agronomy's Managing Director.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish Peter Nelson of Glenmorangie all the best in his retirement. Peter represented Scotch Whisky Association on the SQC Board for many years and his support, advice and wisdom were always greatly appreciated – as was his hosting of the SQC Board at Glenmorangie a couple of years ago!

Ronald Daalmans, Sustainability Director with Chivas, has since taken over the representation of SWA on the SQC Board and we look forward to working with him as we move forward.

There are other new faces on the board as well. Neil White has taken over from Mark McCallum as a NFUS rep on the SQC Board. Mark remains on the SQC Board as Vice Chairman – with agreement that this position be treated as an 'independent role' on the Board. David Ross has taken over from Fiona Burnett as the SRUC representative on the SQC Board. Like Mark, Fiona will remain as SQC Technical Director but in an independent role'.

Keep assessment delivery on track

We are very pleased that the Product Certification Model that we introduced last year to allow assessments to be delivered over 12 months has proved very successful. It has helped the assessors and certification team to better manage their workload across the Scheme year, whilst continuing to align with other schemes to allow for joint assessments where feasible.

We would welcome your support again to allow assessments to be conducted well in advance of harvest 2025 and ask that when an assessment is booked, it is not cancelled within 48 hours of the appointment. This allows the team to plan and manage their time as best they can.

If you have not yet received your 2024-25 Scheme year assessment, an FIA assessor will make contact to arrange your next SQC assessment very soon. Securing dates in the diary for your assessment allows our team to better manage the full assessment and certification service and, as always, your support is greatly appreciated.

SQC MEMBER CHECKER

Further to feedback from merchants and buyers who are required to check assurance status for all growers, SQC has been working with ScotEID to upgrade the SQC Member Checker, its access and functionality.

The Member Checker is the digital portal that allows the supply chain to make quick online checks of the real-time certification status of grain.

The upgraded Member Checker will be launched later in June for initial piloting and iteration ahead of its full launch to merchants and buyers on 01 October 2025.



FARM ASSURANCE Review and Report – Update

The recent Farm Assurance Review has been a hot topic of conversation and SQC sees the review as a great opportunity to bring about effective change to the benefit of Members and to reduce the burden of assessments and compliance whilst robustly defending the integrity of all farm assurance schemes – including SQC.

On publication of the review report, we issued an e-update to all SQC members and since then we have held meetings with NFUS, AHDB and other key stakeholders and farm assurance schemes to discuss next steps and collaboration – where appropriate.

We also met with Dr David Llewellyn on Monday 14 April – who was one of the review Commissioners and who has been tasked to monitor and report on implementation of the report recommendations over the next year.

We will be updating Members with the work we are doing in response to the FAR recommendations. Some SQC already had in place, some are part of future plans and the SQC strategy; and some we don't believe are relevant to our Scheme or to the benefit to Members. We will address these as well as we update and share progress with our Members and stakeholders.



Meet the people behind assurance

In 2022, SQC appointed the newly established Food Integrity Assurance (FIA) as its certification body to carry out audits and certify grain that meets the SQC standards. FIA is now the leading certification body for food grown in Scotland, which has the advantage that it can, where possible, coordinate audits in the same visit, for example between SQC and QMS.

David McHarg is FIA's Technical Manager and heads up the team of Lead Auditors, who are responsible for the training and calibration of all FIA assessors.

David grew up on an organic farm near Stranraer where the family ran a mixed enterprise including dairy, beef, pigs, poultry, vegetables and cereals, as well as a farm shop and tearoom. Finishing his degree at Auchincruive, and fully aware of assurance from his own experience on the family farm, David decided to train as a farm assessor conducting assessments for Schemes such as QMS Cattle & Sheep, Red Tractor Dairy and of course Scottish Quality Crops in between dairy relief work.

"Like many of the assessors at FIA, I was attracted to the job as it meant getting out on farm and meeting people.

"It's not always an easy job and the call from the assessor may not have farmers jumping for joy, but you build up good relationships. Ultimately, we're all working together as part of the supply chain. FIA and SQC is there to assess and support farmers to be compliant with scheme standards so they can reach as many markets as possible. In the majority of cases farmers are doing a fantastic job which provides both SQC and the supply chain with confidence in the brand integrity." Under FIA, the training for assessors has become more professionalised and supportive, which as well as being a key requirement under FIA's accreditation to international standard ISO/IEC 17065, is very important for the assessment process, explains David.

"As an assessor you need the soft skills as much as technical

knowledge, but it's a hard job to learn. You need to be good with people while also great with detail - and also committed, as most assessors are self-employed so they manage their own diaries and workload."

As well as the technical training for Scheme standards and how they present on farm, under David's lead, the training has been developed to include people skills to support farmers through the assessment process. This includes mentoring from experienced assessors and performance monitoring to identify where assessors may require focussed support to ensure consistency across the team of 45 assessors across FIA, 27 of whom carry out assessments for SQC.

"Diary management is one of the hardest parts of the job. An SQC assessor may have 20 or 30 audits to do a month so they try to coordinate farm visits to complete as many in the same area on the same day to be efficient with time resource and fuel costs. That's why we ask growers to avoid cancelling audits where they can, as it has a knock-on effect for the assessor and the certification team, and it can also make it difficult to complete all the audits within the year."

We also recognise that there is a lot of record keeping for the crop assurance scheme and we want to make it as easy as possible for growers, says David:

"Currently, assessors will offer a checklist when they call to book an appointment for a member's assessment and the SQC website has downloadable templates for every record requirement. If growers are audit ready and all the paperwork is on the kitchen table, the visits can be a quick process."

David also reiterates the merit of having one recognised, all-encompassing scheme, rather than every user from maltster to retailer visiting for their own audit.

SQC and FIA are currently developing new digital portal technology which aims to make the whole assessment process more



David McHarg
FIA's Technical Manager

efficient, cost effective and less of a burden to members. David and the FIA Team will be trialling this new technology over the summer period, so watch this space for more updates on the benefits this will bring to SQC members.

WEBSITE UPDATE

The SQC Board recently approved funding to review the functionality of the SQC website in order to develop the 'background programming' and to enhance accessibility and ease of use. Whilst undertaking this work, we will be reviewing storage and access of documents and all text across the website. Again, we will keep you posted on progress.

SOCIALS UPDATE

And finally, on the topic of comms, we have recently undertaken a review of our social media strategy and how to best reach our members.

As part of this, we decided to move away from X (formerly Twitter). SQC is now on LinkedIn ([click here for link](#)) and we will continue to share updates directly with members through email and newsletters.

For queries on assessments and certification services, FIA can be contacted on:

Telephone: **0131 609 0558** or info@foodassurance.co.uk

Website: sqcrops.co.uk (where you will find an enquiry form) or foodintegrityassurance.co.uk

For all other enquiries, please contact Teresa on: teresa.dougall@sqcrops.co.uk



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Continued Overleaf

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