



**Red Tractor  
Assurance**

# **CONSULTATION DELIVERING LIFETIME ASSURED BEEF**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Cattle are currently considered “assured” under the Red Tractor scheme if they have spent a minimum of 90 days on an assured farm holding/s before dispatch to the abattoir.

NB : An assured farm holding is one which has been independently assessed and holds a current certificate demonstrating it meets the beef farm standards.

In order to meet the expectations of consumers, Red Tractor Assurance (RTA) has agreed to move to deliver lifetime assured beef. This move is essential to help protect the reputation and integrity of the UK beef industry and its farmers.

This consultation seeks the views from key UK beef industry stakeholders on the proposed ways to deliver this.

## 2 RECRUITMENT OF STORE/SUCKLER PRODUCERS

The recruitment of store/suckler beef producers is challenging but essential for delivery.

To achieve this, a Cattle Rearing Register (CR Register) is proposed which after two years is replaced with a Cattle Rearing Assurance Scheme. Both systems would be tailored to cattle store/suckler farms/production systems and will help recruit the critical mass of farmers needed to assure beef /supply chain demands.

### 2.1 Cattle Rearing Register

The proposal to introduce a Cattle Rearing Register (CR Register) provides a transitional system that introduces non-assured breeding and rearing farmers to the concept of assurance.

#### **How would a CR Register Work?**

- Farmers would need to complete a short self-assessment application form (draft available upon request)
- Farmers would be registered for two years (no annual renewal)
- CR Registered farmers would be provided with identity documentation (e.g. stickers).
- After two years the CR registered farmer will have the option of :
  - Transitioning to the Cattle Rearing Scheme (CRS) **OR**
  - Applying to become fully Farm Assured

It is proposed that the CR Register is owned and managed by an Industry Ownership group consisting of representatives from across the UK beef supply chain. This demonstrates commitment to the concept and ensures **clear distinction** between CR Registered and Red

Tractor assured farmers. (Membership of Red Tractor is based on independent assessments and accredited schemes.)

### **Costs of joining the CR Register**

A decision on the cost to farmers of joining the register is needed. The **advantages** of “no cost to farmers” are:

- Farmers more likely to apply, so less disruption to the market
- Simpler and cheaper administration process
- Allows opportunity for stakeholders to help coordinate applications if they wish to

The **disadvantage** of no cost is perception and feeling from assured farmers who have to pay to be assured (**NB** the Cattle Rearing Scheme set out in 2.2. would not be free)

### **What is good about the CR Register?**

- It will help non-assured farmers understand the requirements of assurance and allay fears about assurance systems (i.e. standards and assessments)
- It will provide transparency of the non-assured farms that rear cattle for assured markets
- We will have a directory of CR registered farms to communicate with and recruit into the Cattle Rearing Scheme (CRS).

#### **IMPORTANT TO NOTE**

***A CR Registered farmer would not be classed as farm assured and cannot sell livestock as assured. They would also not be eligible for earned recognition by enforcement bodies.***

*More details about how the CR Register would be operated are available.*

## **2.2 Cattle Rearing Scheme**

It is proposed that the Cattle Rearing Scheme (CRS) replaces the CR Register. The CRS would be aimed at cattle breeding and rearing farms who do not sell livestock directly for slaughter.

Farmers would be required to meet standards (CR Standards) - these would need to be written and be appropriate for breeding and rearing production systems (i.e. focused on animal welfare and traceability)

### **How would a CR Scheme work?**

- Farmers would register and pay a fee
- The farm would have an initial assessment against the CR standards and would need to comply to be accepted as an assured member

- On-going membership and assessments would be based on a member risk assessment. Risks would include :
  - Ability to maintain conformance to the standards
  - Size of operation
  - The risk the farm poses to RT integrity

**NB:** The assessment frequency and renewal fees for low risk members **could** be once every three years

RTA would develop the exact details of how the scheme would work and the standards with input from industry stakeholders via the RTA Beef & Lamb Technical Advisory Committee. The detail would be subject to a consultation before an implementation date of April 2017.

### IMPORTANT TO NOTE

***CRS farms would not be permitted to sell livestock as assured for slaughter***

***Both the CR Register and CRS will only apply to movements prior to the last 90 days of the animal's life***

## **3 LIFETIME ASSURED BEEF – IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS**

Once the CR Register and subsequently the CR Scheme are in place, there are **two implementation options** for delivering lifetime assurance. The difference between the two options is the flexibility that the RTA farm assured members have to source cattle.

### **3.1 Option 1 – Batch System**

Option one would require assured farmers to **only buy all cattle** from:

- Assured farms
- CRS farm or
- CR Registered farm.

This would not stop assured farmers from selling their cattle into non-assured markets **BUT** it would prevent them from buying or having any non-assured cattle on farm.

#### **What is good about the batch system?**

- Simple clear system for all/farmers to follow i.e. an assured farm - farm purchasing chain
- **No additional requirement** to check **individual animal** movement history at points of animal purchase (know the assured farm selling cattle had to buy assured animals)

**NB:** The assurance checks at the point of sale would be the same as now (i.e. check the farm is farm assured or on the CR Register).

**What is not so good about the batch system?**

- Assured farmers can only purchase cattle from other assured farmers

**3.2 Option 2 – Individual Animal System**

Option two would mean that assured farmers can buy assured and non-assured cattle but when selling an animal as assured the whole assurance history of the animal itself is required to be checked (i.e. to ensure that the animal was born and reared on an assured, CRS scheme or CR registered farm)

**What is good about the individual animal system?**

- Assured farmers can purchase/trade assured and non-assured animals freely

**What is not so good about the individual animal system?**

- Ensuring understanding of the definitions of assured and non-assured animals across the whole industry - it is not an easy one to explain or communicate
- The additional checks associated with verifying the assurance status of an animal each time it is moved/sold would incur time and costs at each point
- There is currently no live GB national animal movement database identifying the assurance status of the animal.

**IMPORTANT TO NOTE**

***RTA must not impose a checking system which burdens the industry with additional cost***

***For more information on how a farmer declaration system could be adopted, see Appendix 1.***

*(More details on the beef assurance standards changes for both these options are available)*

## 4 PROPOSED TIMETABLE

An indicative timetable is summarised below based on the proposals outlined.

<b>Consultation on Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Jan-Mar 2015</b>
<b>Decision on Implementation</b>	<b>May 2015</b>
<b>Cattle Rearing Register</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership Group appointed</li> <li>• Appoint service provider &amp; set up register systems</li> <li>• Launch &amp; open registrations</li> <li>• Close applications for CR Register</li> <li>• Final CR Register expires</li> </ul>	May 2015 May – Aug 2015 Sept 2015 Aug 2017 Aug 2018
<b>Change Beef Assurance Standards</b>	July 2016
<b>Cattle Rearing Scheme</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop detailed standards &amp; draft a risk based membership &amp; assessment operational system</li> <li>• Consultation of standards</li> <li>• Agree final standards</li> <li>• Develop Assessor training &amp; set up new scheme</li> <li>• Launch &amp; open Cattle Rearing Scheme to applications</li> </ul>	Mar-Nov 2015  Dec-Feb 2016 July 2016 Sept'16 - Mar '17 April 2017
<i>A more detailed timetable is available</i>	

## 5 CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

**Question 1.** Do you consider that the proposal to implement a Cattle Rearing Register and a Cattle Rearing System is a reasonable and practical solution for the industry? If not, please identify why not and any thoughts you have for an alternative approach

**Question 2.** In your opinion, should joining the Cattle Rearing Register be offered free of charge to farmers? If not, why not and how should we determine the charge?

**Question 3.** In your opinion, which of the two implementation options (1- Batch or 2 – Animal) would you like to see RTA adopt and why?

**Question 3b.** If RTA adopted implementation option 2 (individual animal checking), would you consider the Producer Declaration set out in Appendix 1 as an acceptable approach? If not, why not and can you suggest an alternative approach?

**Question 4.** What are your thoughts on the proposed delivery timetable - is it practical? If not, why not and can you suggest an alternative timetable?

**Question 5.** Have you any other observations on the assured beef/lifetime assurance proposal?

**Question 6.** Cross industry support and involvement will be fundamental to the successful delivery of lifetime assured beef. What role could you play in supporting RTA and the associated industry communication programme?

**Please complete the Response Form and return by Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015.**

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **IMPLEMENTATION OPTION 2: INDIVIDUAL ANIMAL SYSTEM**

#### **PRODUCER DECLARATION**

##### **BACKGROUND**

Option 2 requires checking at point of sale whether an individual animal has been purchased by the vendor from an:

- Assured Farm
- CRS Farm
- CR Register

There is currently no live GB national animal movement database identifying the assurance status of the animal.

##### **HOW WOULD A PRODUCER DECLARATION WORK**

###### **Step 1: The RTA Standards**

###### **Beef & Lamb Standards**

RTA would amend standard T1.c to require assured farmers selling an animal as assured to declare at the point of sale that the animal was purchased from a RTA farm, a CRS farm or a member of the CR Register.

The standard would require that farmers provide the details of assurance membership (membership details of that previous farm). The CRS standard would also mirror this requirement.

###### **Meat Processing Scheme and the Livestock Market scheme**

RTA requires members of these schemes to have systems to check the assurance status of the farmer selling the animal to them.

###### **Step 2: Farmer Documentation**

The purchasing farmer would keep the declaration form/details of previous farms assurance membership and pass it on when the animal is sold. The declaration would detail which farms the animal resided on from birth and include the assurance status of each of those farms.

Transactions would include:

- Farmer to farmer
- Through auction markets – information would be printed on the invoice as part of the current assurance information for each animal.

### **Step 3: RTA Ensuring Compliance Checks**

To ensure the integrity of the scheme it is vital that RTA put in place some auditing of the systems and declarations, for example:

- During farm assessments, check farmers paperwork to ensure correct declarations have been made (e.g. movement records, birth registers and market receipts)
- During farm assessments, look at completed declarations and check that farmers who sold the animals were assured at the time of the sales
- During audits of both livestock auction markets and meat processing plants, assessors could collect copies of farmer declarations and check farmers have completed them correctly.

#### **IMPORTANT TO NOTE**

***Where issues are found and farmers are found to be making false declarations action can and would be taken against the farmers***

#### **What is good about making Producer Declaration a requirement of the Standards?**

Making it a requirement under RTA standards for all assured farmers to make this declaration allows for action to be taken against the farmer should they be found to be providing false information (i.e. spot checks/assurance suspended).



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section provides background information on the work RTA has done considering how to deliver lifetime assured beef. As highlighted in this document, more details on the proposals are available upon request. Email [beefandlamb@redtractor.org.uk](mailto:beefandlamb@redtractor.org.uk) or call 0203 617 3670

## HISTORY

Since beef farm assurance was initiated in the 1990's it has always been focused on the "finishing" end of the chain. Cattle which are presented for slaughter at abattoirs are considered "assured" under the Red Tractor scheme if they have spent a minimum of 90 days on an assured holding/s before dispatch to the abattoir.

The minimum residency criterion of 90 days pre-slaughter was primarily driven by food safety considerations around veterinary residues. The majority of medicines used in beef production have a withdrawal period of considerably less than 90 days and so this period allows ample time for any medicine residues to be eliminated.

Red Tractor Assurance (RTA) have been working for some time to find a practical way to move so that "assured" animals will have spent their whole life on assured holding/s rather than this limited final period.

## REASONS FOR CHANGE

**There are a number of arguments for lifetime assurance for beef:**

- Consumers purchasing Red Tractor Beef believe cattle are whole life assured – we risk their trust in the brand if we don't deliver this
- The Red Tractor integrity could be significantly damaged as we can only be certain that the last 90 days of the animal's life were spent on farms which have demonstrated good standards of welfare
- Independent reports have already drawn attention to the anomaly.<sup>1</sup> Defra's expert advisory committee the FAWC may bring focus on this area again as they consider the beef sector
- The assurance schemes for both pigs and poultry require lifetime assurance. Brand values across all sectors need to be consistent which is currently not the case. RTA recognise that the production cycle for these species is considerably shorter than for beef and that the structure of the supply chains is fully integrated unlike beef. Nevertheless this inconsistency is increasingly difficult to defend.
- There may be food safety risks other than veterinary residues that could be influenced by husbandry prior to the last 90 days. For example we have no knowledge of the origins or the safety of feed on non-assured holdings

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<sup>1</sup> FAWC Review of Farm Assurance Schemes' 2005 & 2013 & Food Standards Agency Report on Assurance schemes 2008

## **RISKS**

**RTA is fully aware that there are risks when moving to lifetime assurance for cattle including:**

- The potential that there is insufficient lifetime assured finished stock to satisfy market demand for Red Tractor assured beef.
- Negative internal industry debate about the value of farm assurance once recruitment campaign starts
- Negative consumer media coverage from the revelation of the current limited definition of cattle 'assurance'
- Pressure on the current structure of the beef supply chain

These have all been discussed extensively with stakeholders RTA believes the proposal outlined in this document reduces these risks to a manageable level but is mindful that the successful implementation will be subject to support and buy-in from all stakeholders within the beef supply chain.

## **WORK TO DATE**

**Over the last few years RTA has focussed efforts on identifying the best way forward. This work has included:**

- Market research to establish attitudes to farm assurance from both assured and non-assured beef farmers
- Abattoir Slaughter Analysis to establish the extent to which assured animals are already lifetime assured
- Consideration of different delivery mechanisms and their impact (e.g. increase residency period gradually, announce a single final date, sourcing only from assured farmers, self-assessment system)
- Discussions with retailers about the practicality of moving to lifetime assurance (including formal consultation in 2011) to establish their level of support and understand the impact on their own supply chains of such a move
- Dialogue with recognised beef and lamb schemes in NI and Wales so they have an input into the process and that any "local" market issues are addressed in any proposal
- Discussions with stakeholders across the livestock supply chain, especially auctioneers, to understand the assurance checking/verification challenges facing the industry and barriers to progress

## **IMPLEMENTATION CRITERIA**

**This work has allowed RTA to establish the key implementation criteria that must be met to ensure successful delivery. These are:**

1. **A system which will work across all UK**, including those devolved schemes which RTA do not directly operate
2. **Commitment and buy-in from across the meat supply chain** – retailers, meat processors, auctioneers, farmers - to ensure uptake and reduce risk of losing RT logo from beef
3. **Practical verification requirements** at every animal move (i.e. for farmers, auctioneers and meat processors). RTA must not impose a system which burdens the industry with additional cost of assurance checking.
4. **Recruitment of store/suckler producers** – need critical mass to avoid supply chain issues

**NB The proposed change towards lifetime assurance of beef puts the spotlight on the sheep industry. RTA has no intention to conduct a similar exercise on sheep at this time.**