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30th October 2008

Dear Guy

**Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
Consultation on Food Supply Chain Quality Schemes and Branding**

Please find the Environment Agency's response to the above consultation.

In any review of assurance schemes the Agency would like to see better coverage of environmental standards so that environmental management is built into production. Once satisfied that assurance schemes drive good environmental performance there is potential for us to reward farmers by reducing their regulatory burden. Consequently any plans to unify assurance schemes would enable that potential to be more readily realised.

Through effective branding and promotion, there is an opportunity to raise consumer understanding of how farming meets minimum environmental standards, as well as product quality. However, the Agency would only endorse environmental branding if the scheme/s genuinely deliver good environmental standards.

Background

Risk based approach to regulation

The Environment Agency adopts a risk based approach to its regulation of farms enabling us to target our resources where we can deliver the best environmental outcomes. In establishing the risk of a farm we take account of both the **location** and, where known, the **operator (farmer) performance**. We believe that whilst membership of a farm assurance scheme indicates good 'operator performance' in many aspects of production, environmental standards remain poorly covered.

Pilot use of assurance schemes to support EA regulation

We are currently working with the pig and poultry industry and certifying bodies to explore how the Environment Agency can better use assurance scheme audits to support our role as an effective and efficient regulator. The pilot is looking at intensive farms permitted under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (formally Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations). We have worked with certifying bodies and assurance scheme owners to develop an Environment Agency owned module which covers the requirements of the Environmental Permitting Regulations. Many of the principles such as good management of resources (energy and water), good accident planning and good farm management are about best practice and could readily transfer to other schemes giving them environmental credibility.

Please could you acknowledgement this response. We look forward to being involved in future developments of assurance schemes.

Yours sincerely

Jane James
Agriculture Policy Manager

Any queries please contact : clare.blackledge@environment-agency.gov.uk