

**Food Standards Agency response to consultation for industry stakeholders by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board on food supply chain quality schemes and branding.**

The purpose of this consultation by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) is to determine the views of industry stakeholders on the scope, use and financing of quality schemes on branding of AHDB sector products. The consultation takes the form of a questionnaire, but since a number of these questions are intended to be answered by industry stakeholders, the Agency has addressed the issues more generally.

The Agency has decided to respond since membership of a quality scheme, specifically an accredited food assurance scheme, can be taken into account by local authorities when determining appropriate levels of inspection for food hygiene purposes at the primary production level, unless other evidence suggests this is not appropriate.

EU legislation on official controls, Regulation 882/2004, recognises the potential value of quality/food assurance schemes as it states that “the frequency of official controls should be regular and proportionate to the risk, taking into account the results of the checks carried out by feed and food business operators under HACCP based control programmes or quality assurance programmes”.

If levy money is to be invested in supporting the introduction of a single quality framework across all sectors covered by AHDB, whether or not based on the Red Tractor scheme, then the Agency’s view is that the resulting scheme should be of demonstrably high quality, be independent from producers and follow the principles of sound governance. Rationalisation of current food assurance schemes under a single quality scheme with a distinctive logo would help to counter potential consumer confusion.

For the purpose of satisfying official controls the Agency would need to be assured that the assurance schemes within the single quality framework are fit for purpose, perhaps by way of pilot testing, periodic sample audits by independent third parties and the publication of compliance reports. With regard to the latter, it would be desirable to have mechanisms in place to enable detailed information on compliance performance to be shared with officials conducting official controls.

30 October 2008  
Food Standards Agency