

Guideline **General Regulations**



Version: 01.01.2026



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Note: The Guideline General Regulations is written in German and translated into English. In case of discrepancies between the translation and the German version, the German original is valid.

1 Fundamentals

The goal of the QS scheme is the assurance of process quality along all stages in the supply chain.

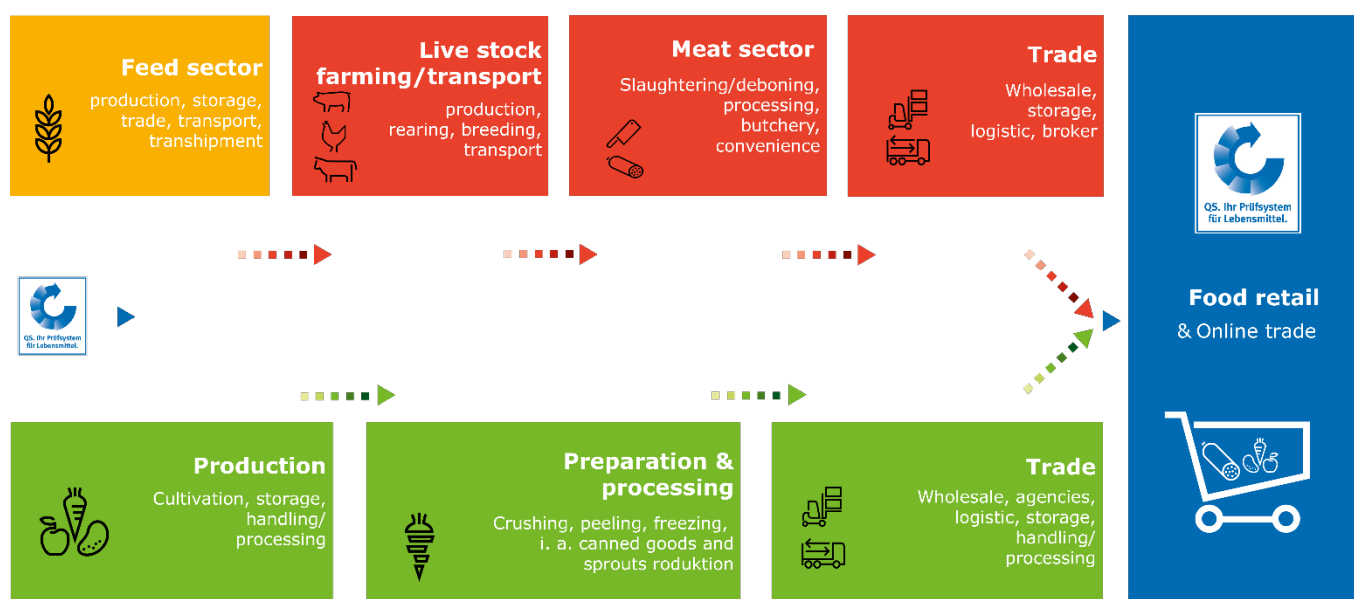
QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH is the scheme owner and holder of the QS certification scheme for foods. The standards defined by QS lay down strict, verifiable production criteria for all stages of the value-added food chain. The cross-stage check of these criteria, as well as the traceability of agricultural products and the foods made from them, are the distinguishing features of the scheme.

1.1 Scope

The guideline applies to all participants in the QS scheme:

- Companies of the supply chain meat and meat products
- Companies of the supply chain fruit, vegetables and potatoes

SUPPLY CHAIN MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS



SUPPLY CHAIN FRUIT, VEGETABLES AND POTATOES

Figure 1: Supply chains of the QS scheme

1.2 Scheme Manual

The scheme manual comprises all valid **guidelines** and **checklists for independent inspection** of all production stages in the QS scheme (normative documents). On the QS website www.q-s.de/en/ the currently valid versions of these normative documents can be downloaded without charge. An overview of the scheme manual documents with brief explanations is published under **documents of the scheme manual**.

The **Guideline General Regulations** explains how to participate in the system. The inspection system includes all documents of the independent control and monitoring programmes. These include the **Guideline Certification**, the **Inspection System QS-GAP**, the **audit checklists** and the **Guidelines to the monitoring programmes**. The **stage related guidelines** describe criteria and requirements for the production and marketing of meat and meat products or fruit, vegetables and potatoes.

The original documents are in German with a translation into English. In the case of discrepancies between the English translations and the German version, the German original is valid.

Changes (so-called revisions) in the scheme manual are scheduled for 1 January every year. In the light of current developments, changes to the QS documents are possible outside the regular revision dates. The date in

the version notation marks the validity date. All changes are summarised in the paragraph "revision information", that is located at the end of every document.

The changes for the new year are provided for annotation for two weeks every year in October, so that interested people can participate in the further development of the QS scheme manual.

Note: As a supplement QS provides the scheme participants, certification bodies and laboratories with supporting documents (e. g. documentation aids, checklists for self-assessment and interpretation aids). They are not mandatory; they are intended to provide users with orientation and support in implementing the described requirements. You can find these on the QS website, e. g. in the **document overview** on the subpages of the corresponding levels under >further documents.

1.3 Control system

The control system is made up of a mandatory self-assessment of operations, independent inspection by approved certification bodies and recognised laboratories, and the measures of the internal scheme integrity system (QS SIKS).

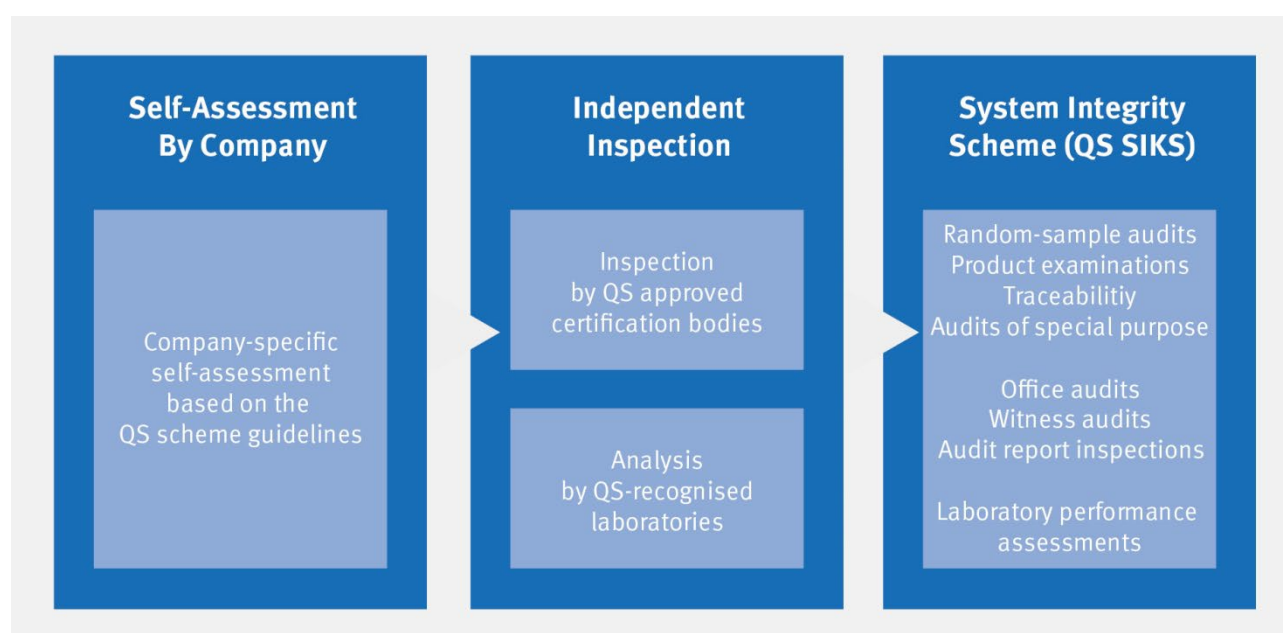


Figure 2: Control System

Self-assessment by the company

The scheme participants conduct and document a self-assessment based on the guidelines to be used for the production, processing or marketing stage.

Independent inspection

Independent certification bodies regularly check all scheme participants for compliance with requirements. A risk-based approach (the better the result of the inspection, the longer the duration of the certificate) produces incentives to improve process quality in the companies. Definite deadlines for the correction of established defects are determined with the agreement on corrective actions.

The laboratories approved by QS conduct the product tests in the monitoring programmes.

QS works with certification bodies and accredited laboratories in Germany and abroad. The approval of the certification bodies, including the auditors and recognition of the labs, is granted by QS in accordance with clearly defined criteria and qualification requirements. The cooperation between QS and the certification bodies and/or laboratories is regulated per contract.

The rules of independent inspections are outlined in the **Guideline Certification** and in the **monitoring programme guidelines**.

Scheme Integrity System (QS SIKS)

The Employee of the QS head office checks the functioning of the QS scheme regularly and comprehensively. The checks are geared towards the reliability of the work of the certification bodies, auditors and laboratories, as well as constant and consistent compliance with requirements by the scheme participants. In addition to the examination of the status quo, they simultaneously serve the continuous further development and optimisation of the processes in the QS scheme.

The measures involved in the scheme integrity system are outlined in the **Guideline Certification**.

2 The Way to Scheme Partnership

The scheme participants are contractually obliged to adhere to the standards defined by QS and have them checked. They sign a system contract or a declaration of participation and power of attorney. Detailed information on scheme participation can be found on the QS website under the keyword "QS agreements".

2.1 Scheme agreement with QS

Businesses with a scheme agreement are:

- Feed producers* and dealers (*feed material, compound feed, additive and premix producers)
- Hatcheries
- Slaughtering and deboning businesses
- Meat processing businesses
- Convenience product manufacturer
- Broker meat and meat products
- Fruit, vegetable and potato wholesalers
- Preparation and Processing companies of fruit, vegetables, potatoes
- Coordinators who combine businesses and branches and bind them per contract to the QS scheme in the fields of agriculture and production, fruit, vegetables, potatoes, logistics, butchery and food retail, pet food producers
- system gastronomy and communal catering.

After their registration and certification, the businesses sign a scheme agreement with QS. They receive approval by QS which makes them eligible to deliver into the QS scheme.

Registration of companies

The companies/scheme applicants register online in the QS database www.q-s.de/softwareplattform/en/. The coordinators additionally register their bundled companies.

After registration, each scheme applicant automatically receives confirmation of registration with their QS identification number (QS-ID) via e-mail.

Independent inspection

After registering, the scheme applicant commissions a certification body approved by QS to conduct the independent inspection at each location in accordance with the **Guideline Certification or Inspection System QS-GAP**.

Every location that is to be approved must be inspected. The businesses bundled together in the food retail sector are checked once a year using a random sample method.

The complete audit report with result is entered into the QS database by the certification body.

Approval

After the successful certification of the registered location and a final check of all approval prerequisites by QS head office, the scheme applicant receives a contract offer (scheme agreement) for participation in the QS scheme. The **scheme agreement** regulates participation in the QS scheme, use of the QS certification mark and the imposing of sanctions for violations of the requirements of the QS scheme.

The scheme applicant is approved for participation in the QS scheme with the signing of the agreement. He/she is then eligible to deliver and can be looked up in the QS database under "**Scheme participant search**". The scheme participant is given authorization to use the QS certification mark in accordance with the provisions of the **Style Guide**. For more on this, see

⇒ Style Guide for the QS Certification Mark.

Scheme participants are charged annual fees in line with the **scale of fees**.

The **scheme agreement**, the **Style Guide for the QS Certification Mark** and the **scale of fees** of QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH and QS Fachgesellschaft Obst-Gemüse-Kartoffeln GmbH can be found on the QS website in the [document search](#) under the keyword scheme agreement.

The extension of approval to include another of the scheme participant's locations or product scopes requires the successful certification of that location or product scope and subsequent granting of eligibility of delivery by QS head office.

The scheme participants must be able to always provide evidence of compliance with requirements. In order to maintain approval, they must allow their businesses to be checked regularly by an independent certification body approved by QS.

If violations of the scheme agreement or requirements of the QS scheme (e. g. non-compliance with K.O. criteria) are determined with a scheme participant, a sanction procedure is opened in the course of which sanctions extending to loss of eligibility of delivery can be imposed. For more on this, see

⇒ Annex 5.1 Sanction Procedure Regulation.

2.2 Participation via coordinators

Coordinators are an important link between companies and QS.

The **Agriculture/Production coordinators** following business types participate in the QS scheme via Agriculture/Production coordinators:

- Agricultural businesses (cattle, pigs, poultry)
- Producers of fruit, vegetables, potatoes
- Livestock transporters
- Crop farming and grassland businesses

The businesses select a coordinator from the **list of approved coordinators for Agriculture/ Production** and conclude a written agreement with him/her (declaration of participation). Further organisation of participation is then regulated by the coordinator who also ensures that the independent inspections are conducted at each location and that the businesses participate in the obligatory monitoring programmes.

The tasks and responsibilities of Agriculture/Production coordinators are outlined in the **Guideline Coordinator Agriculture/Production**.

Food retail branches and groups of companies with several branches are combined and contractually bound into the QS scheme via **Food Retail Coordinators**. When registering the companies, the corporate structure (legally dependent or legally independent company) and type of goods procurement (supply relationships) of the food retailer must be considered.

Companies in the butcher's trade can participate via **coordinator butchery**. The businesses select a coordinator from the list of approved coordinators in the butchery trade and conclude a written agreement with this coordinator (declaration of participation and power of attorney). The registration of the businesses in the QS database and the further organisation of participation and performance of the QS audits is regulated by the coordinator.

Small feed material producers who only produce a limited amount are bound by contract to the QS scheme via **scheme coordinators for feed material producer**. Among other things, these coordinators ensure the registration and the independent inspections conducted at these production sites. The duties of the Scheme coordinators as well the participation of the producers are outlined in the **Guideline Feed Sector**.

2.3 Participation via certification bodies

The following producers and service providers are bound by contract to the QS scheme via certification bodies:

- Small scale feed material producers,
- Mobile feed milling and mixing plant operators,
- Feed transport, storage and transshipment organisations (service providers)
- Transport and transshipment service providers (logistical service providers) for fruit and vegetables and
- Storage and transport company (logistics service provider) of meat and meat products.

Small scale feed material production companies and mobile feed milling and mixing plant operators are registered by the certification bodies. The certification bodies conduct the audits at the locations and confirm eligibility to deliver into the QS scheme.

Transport, storage and transshipment service providers of feed, logistical service providers for fruit, vegetables, potatoes and storage companies of meat and meat products register themselves independently in the QS database. They choose a certification body in the QS database and conclude a written agreement for the participation with it. The certification body shall carry out the QS audit.

2.4 Participation via international agreements and recognised standards

QS has entered into mutual recognition agreements with various standard setters. Thus, companies from abroad can also participate in the QS scheme via the recognition of other standards and schemes. The current agreements and conditions of participation are published on the QS website under the keyword QS-Agreements.

3 Definitions

3.1 Explanation of Symbols

References to related documents are highlighted using bold text.

References to other sections of the Guideline are indicated by ⇒.

3.2 Terms and Definitions

- **certificate**
Attestation of a successful certification. The certification body may only issue the ~ when the scheme participant is approved.
- **Certification**
(ISO/IEC 17000:2005) Third-party attestation related to products, processes, systems or persons.
- **certification body**
(In accordance with EN 45011:1998, ISO/IEC 17:000:2005) Impartial third party that performs compliance assessment services.
- **certification scheme**
(In accordance with EU guidelines and ISO/IEC 17000:2005) Compliance assessment system that includes the selection, determination, review and certification of the scheme requirements.
- **Checklist**
standardized list of the QS requirements that are inspected during the audit.
- **combined audit**
Audit, in which the criteria for two or more different certification schemes are checked in combination.
- **compliance assessment**
(ISO/IEC 17000:2005) Demonstration that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled. The compliance assessment includes activities such as testing, inspection and certification as well as the accreditation of compliance assessment bodies.
- **coordinator**
organizational structure which gathers together companies (in the stages agricultural/production or food retail) in the QS scheme and serves as a communication platform for them.
- **coordinator, scheme ~ (feed material production)**
A ~ bundles feed material producers with low tonnage for the participation in the QS scheme.
- **Criteria**
(In accordance with ISO 19011:2002) a criterion is a set of requirements, that are used as a reference. (Audit) criteria are used as a reference to check the relevance of the audit evidence.

- database (software-platform)
The database provides the data management for the QS scheme. Through a web-based application it is the interface for scheme participants, coordinators, certification bodies, auditors and laboratories.
- Declaration of participation and power of attorney
Businesses which participate in the QS scheme through a coordinator must sign a declaration of participation and power of attorney or a declaration of commitment. In this declaration they commit to comply with the requirements of the scheme manual and empower the respective coordinator to take the necessary measures for the company's participation in the QS scheme.
- eligibility of delivery
Authorization for a company to deliver goods into the QS scheme
- fees, scheme ~
Fees to be paid for the participation in the QS scheme.
- follow-up audit
Regular audit for the maintenance of scheme participation or for the continuity of certificate.
- framework agreement
Contract regulating the rights and obligations of certification bodies and laboratories in the QS system.
- general Regulations
The Guideline General Regulations is part of the scheme manual, which applies to all scheme participants. The participation in the QS-scheme, the use of the QS certification mark, the sanctioning of violations, the incident and crisis management, as well as the structure of the scheme manual are described in the General Regulations.
- guideline
Normative document which contains the rules and requirements for scheme participants or laboratories and certification bodies in the QS scheme.
- incident and crisis management
To protect the QS scheme and its scheme participants from risks that can arise from breakdowns and mistakes during the production and marketing, an incident and crisis management system has been installed in the QS scheme. It regulates the way to proceed in the QS scheme in the event of an incident or a crisis.
- incidence form
The ~ provides information on the correct way to proceed in case of an incident and or a crisis.
- independent inspection
Inspection by independent certification bodies, whether the scheme participants comply with the QS requirements, as well as product control conducted by approved laboratories within the monitoring programs.
- initial audit
Regular audit for the initial certification of a scheme applicant.
- inspection system
The requirements and rules of all parties involved in the QS scheme are monitored via a three-stage inspection system. It includes the company's self-assessment, the independent inspection as well as the scheme integrity system (QS SIKS).
- K.O. criterion
Requirement, which has a particularly critical influence on food safety, animal welfare or the integrity of the QS scheme. Not fulfilling a K.O. criterion leads to the loss of the eligibility of delivery into the QS system and even to sanctions being imposed on the company.

- Labelling

~ serves the identification of products from the QS scheme (e.g. the display of the QS certification mark on packaging or the article-related use of the abbreviation "QS" on delivery notes or shipping documents). The labeling is not identical with the term "use of the QS certification mark".
- Laboratory performance assessment

Competence test for laboratories, in which the laboratories performance according to QS' definition is inspected. All QS approved laboratories are obliged to participate in laboratory performance assessments organised by QS. The successful participation in the ~ is a prerequisite for receiving and maintaining the QS approval.
- Licencee

Operating company, which implements the QS Concept for a specific scheme chain and to produce a product.
- Location

Company's premises
- location number

Unique number in the QS scheme for the identification of the location.
- mobile feed milling and mixing plant

Mobile plants to produce compound feed (complete and/or supplementary feed) on a farm.
- monitoring program

systematic inspection program of product parameters at particularly critical points in the production chain.
- Non-compliance

(In accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996): Non-compliance is present when specified requirements for achieving certification according to the QS norms are not fulfilled. The requirements are applied if the overall result is at least 70% and all K.O criteria are met.
- office audit

In the ~ it is checked whether the approved certification bodies comply with the QS requirements as well as with the the auditing and certification specifications. It is carried out by QS staff external auditor.
- publication of scheme participants

All approved QS scheme participants are retrievable through the public "scheme participant search" in the QS database (software platform).
- quality assurance across all stages, cross stage

Quality assurance across several or all stages of the supply chain.
- QS certification mark

Protected compliance symbol for QS. Quality Scheme for food. It indicates that products are manufactured and marketed in accordance with the QS requirements.
- QS concept

System for cross-stage and cross-company quality assurance for the production, processing and marketing of food. Implemented by QS for the supply chains meat and meat products, as well as fruit, vegetables, potatoes.
- QS concept license agreement

Contract that establishes the right and obligation of a licensee to use and implement the QS concept independently.
- QS identification number (QS ID)

Number for a unique identification of companies in the QS scheme.

- QS inspection
Inspection to check the compliance of companies such as small-scale feed material producers and mobile feed milling and mixing plants with defined QS requirements. If it is successfully passed, the companies receive an eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme, but they do not become QS scheme participants.
- QS products
Products, that were produced and/or marketed according to the QS requirements in a QS certified company.
- QS scheme
~ is a synonym for QS. Quality Scheme for Food.
- QS SIKS
The functionality of the QS scheme is ensured by means of inspection measures of the scheme integrity system (QS SIKS).
- random sample audit
Audit, in which the scheme participants to be audited, are mainly randomly selected, but also in a risk-oriented manner. Some selected criteria are checked.
- recognition, mutual recognition
Mutual recognition is a formal, bilateral agreement between two scheme-owners, in which it is stipulated that the audits or certification schemes are regarded as equivalent by the respective contractual partner. In the case of audit recognition, for example, external certification alternatively to the QS audit can be recognised as a basis for concluding the scheme agreement.
- regular audit
Audit to assess compliance with all requirements according to the scheme manual. A distinction is made between initial and follow-up audits (see corresponding entries).
- related documents
Independent document, binding for the fulfilment of QS requirements, referred to in the Guidelines.
- Requirement
(In accordance with ISO/IEC 17000:2005) Exigence that is stated in the Guideline and checklist and must be fulfilled by the scheme participant.
- Revision
Amendments of the scheme manual (scheduled for 1 January each year).
- sanction board
Independent QS body, responsible to penalise violations against the requirements of the QS scheme.
- sanction procedure
Procedure to penalise violations against the scheme agreement or the requirements in the QS scheme.
- scheme agreement
Contract that regulates the rights and obligations of the scheme participant in the QS scheme.
- scheme applicant
Company, that is registered for scheme participation, before receiving the QS approval.
- scheme chain
(In accordance with ISO 22005:2007) Sequence of the stages and operations integrated into the QS scheme, involved in the production, processing, distribution and handling of feed and food, from primary production to food retail.

- scheme manual
The entirety of all valid guidelines and checklists in the QS scheme. The system manual is the product standard for QS. Quality scheme for food. It is divided into the sections General Regulations, stage specific standards and the inspection system.
- scheme owner
Company operating a certification scheme.
- scheme participant
Company integrated into the QS scheme by means of an scheme agreement or a declaration of participation and power of attorney.
- scheme recognition
See recognition
- self-assessment
Each company participating in the QS scheme must regularly carry out and document its self-assessment based on the applicable guideline.
- small scale feed material producer (feed material production)
Small scale feed material producers are those cross-sectoral producers whose production volume of feed materials does not exceed 1.000 tonnes of dry matter per year.
- spot audit
Unannounced audit conducted between regular audits. It focuses on the inspection of the production process, usually including only a subset of requirements. A document revision or the inspection of further requirements only takes place if there are indications of the existence of nonconformities.
- stage (of supply chain)
Economic sector which participates in the production and marketing of food (i.e. feed sector, agriculture, slaughtering/deboning, processing, wholesale, food retail etc.).
- style guide (for the QS certification mark)
The ~ regulates the way in which the QS certification mark is used.
- supporting documents
Explanatory documents on the QS scheme manual that provide orientation and assistance to the user for the implementation of the requirements described.
- traceability check
(In accordance with ISO 22005:2007) By means of ~ QS examines the possibility to trace the movement of products produced according to QS requirements in QS certified companies across all stages of the food chain.
- use of QS certification mark
Display of the QS certification mark e.g. on products, delivery notes, shipping documents. QS scheme participants, certification bodies, laboratories and other participants of the QS scheme can use the QS test mark in accordance with the "Style Guide" if they have been expressly granted permission to use it.
- witness audit
Verification of compliance with the certification specifications as part of an audit which is accompanied by a person/organization commissioned by QS.

4 Related Documents

QS Documents see www.q-s.de/documentcenter

- Guideline Certification
- Inspection System QS-GAP

- Guideline Coordinator Agriculture/Production.
- Guidelines for monitoring programs
- Stage specific guidelines
- List of approved coordinators for Agriculture/Production
- List of approved certification bodies
- List of approved laboratories for the respective monitoring programs
- Style Guide for the QS Certification Mark
- Scheme agreement for QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH and QS Fachgesellschaft Obst-Gemüse-Kartoffeln GmbH
- Scale of fees for QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH and QS Fachgesellschaft Obst-Gemüse-Kartoffeln GmbH

5 Annexes

5.1 Rules of Sanction Procedure

Annex 5.1 is published as an extract.

Revision Information Version 01.01.2026

Criterion	Changes	Date of change
1.2 Scheme manual	Addition of the Inspection System QS-GAP	01.01.2026

Guideline **General Regulations**

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