Inspection System

QS-GAP

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Contents

Notice: *The Guideline Certification 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

QS. Quality Scheme for Food represents quality assurance from farm to shop. Products originating from the QS scheme are produced, processed and marketed according to clearly defined requirements in all stages of food production. The processes are documented consistently and inspected independently. The QS certification mark gives a clear signal for the purchase of safe food from reliable suppliers.

1.1 Scope

The following stipulations and rules are described in this guideline:

- Requirements for certification bodies
- Requirements for auditors
- Training and information events
- Rules for independent inspection
- Measures under the scheme integrity system.

These provisions are subject to regular examination and can be updated at any time at the sole responsibility of QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH.

2 Requirements for Certification bodies

Scheme participants get inspected by independent certification bodies which are approved by QS. Important prerequisites for approval are compliance with the requirements mentioned below as well as the signing of a framework agreement with QS, which regulates the execution of independent inspection activities and the declaration of agreement and commitment of the Code for Conduct for the QS Scheme.

The declaration of agreement and commitment of the Code for Conduct for the QS Scheme is located in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors at **www.q-s.de.** It must be signed by the head of the certification body and by all employees within the certification body, who are significantly involved in the QS scheme (e.g. the contact person and the substitute, releasing person).

2.1 Approval of a certification body

Upon written request, QS will check the eligibility of a certification body for initial or renewed approval within the QS scheme or for an extension of the existing approval to include other standards. The examination is subject to a fee. Details can be found on the application form and in the *scale of fees for certification bodies*. The fees for the inspection are to be paid by the applicant certification body even if the eligibility is not established.

Once eligibility has been established, the certification body concludes with QS a *Framework Agreement on Neutral Control Activities in the QS scheme.*

2.1.1 Approval requirements and procedures

To verify eligibility for approval, at least the following documents must be submitted:

- Quality management manual (if necessary as a draft) for the implementation of the auditing and certification activity, which takes into account the requirements of the QS inspection system. It contains at least the following topics, listed in bullet points:
  - General regulations, e.g. on legal responsibility, legal independence and economic independence of the certification body, protection by suitable measures (e.g. legal protection, liability insurance)
  - Definitions of the organization and responsibilities, including the naming of responsible persons (contact person QS), implementation of the 4-eyes principle, handling of documents, crisis management
  - Contract design with customers, including specific content depending on the QS supply chain or QS standard
  - Ensuring impartiality, regular risk assessments
  - Ensuring the qualification of the personnel deployed (in particular for auditing and certification activities)
  - Regular self-monitoring measures incl. documentation
  - Incident and crisis management
  - Complaint management
- Declarations of consent and declarations of commitment to the code of conduct for the QS scheme from all persons involved in activities related to the QS scheme

- Declarations of consent to data protection, to the publication of the certification body with contact details on the QS website
- Recognition of the GLOBALG.A.P. Integrity Programme is required

In the further course of the approval procedure, a chargeable office audit will take place to check the implementation of the requirements of the QS scheme manual. The audit can be carried out on-site, remotely or in combination of both methods and is carried out either by the staff of the QS head office or by persons commissioned by QS. The costs of the office audit are based on the scale of fees and will be invoiced to the applicant certification body after conclusion of the office audit.

2.1.2 Accreditation

Requirements for the certification body

For the QS-GAP standard/scope, evidence of accreditation according to DIN EN ISO/IEC 17065 must be provided by the responsible accreditation body. Written evidence of accreditation must be submitted to QS within six months of signing the Framework Agreement on Neutral Control Activities without being requested to do so.

Provided that the other approval requirements are met, QS can grant preliminary approval for the QS-GAP scope until accreditation is provided. The prerequisite for preliminary approval of the certification body is that

- written evidence is provided to QS that a corresponding application for accreditation/scope extension has been submitted to the responsible accreditation body,
- the certification body is already accredited for another food-related scope according to DIN EN ISO/IEC 17065.

As long as the corresponding accreditation has not yet been obtained, a maximum of ten non-accredited certificates may be issued for QS-GAP.

The non-accredited certificates may not contain the logo of the accreditation body.

When terminating the framework agreement on independent testing activities, the certification body shall inform the relevant accreditation body. The certification body shall maintain the accreditation until its last certificate has expired. The certification body shall bear the responsibility for this until the certificates expire.

Requirements for the accreditation body

The commissioned accreditation body must be a signatory of the Multilateral Agreement (MLA) for product certification bodies of the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA) or the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) for product certification bodies of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

In addition, the accreditation body must sign a joint declaration with QS for the QS-GAP standard.

New accreditation bodies that have not yet issued accreditations for the QS-GAP standard are invited to the annual training for auditors.

If the accreditation body is not subject to a national accreditation law, the following applies:

- The accreditation document contains information on the factual scope of accreditation including relevant restrictions (factual or spatial) and refers to the QS-GAP inspection scheme and the documents of the QS scheme relevant to QS-GAP.
- As part of the initial accreditation, at least one accompanying audit must be carried out by the accreditation body.
- The accreditation body must conduct an accompanying audit at each of the certification bodies accredited by it for the QS-GAP standard at least every four years.

2.1.3 Impartiality and objectivity

The impartiality of the certification body and objectivity of the certification must be ensured. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, the certification body and the auditors commissioned:

- May not perform inspections for any companies with which a contractual relationship exists or to which any of its staff or auditors are related.
- May not perform inspections for any companies for whom its staff or auditors are currently providing, consultancy, training, custodial or administrative services or have done so within the last 24 months. Excluded from this are companies in which the certification body provides comparable inspection services (laboratory services, classifications etc.). The certification body may perform inspections in companies of this kind provided that the objectivity of the certification is ensured.

- May not maintain any relations under corporate law or interlocking of personnel with standard owners if it is to be assumed that relations and interdependence of this kind would or could jeopardise the independence of the certification body and objectivity of the certification.
- May only operate in strict accordance with rules of the Code of Conduct for the QS Scheme.
- May not perform any coordinator functions parallel to its activities in the QS scheme, that is in conflict with the ability to perform independent and objective inspections.
- May only use the checklists provided to the certification bodies by QS for the purpose of conducting QS audits und QS inspections. The use of different checklists requires the advance written consent of QS.

Upon request, proof is to be provided to QS in which manner the compliance with the aforementioned guidelines is guaranteed. Disregard of the aforementioned principles may result in extraordinary termination of the framework agreement.

QS must be informed immediately of any circumstances that can affect the impartiality of the certification body (e.g. withdrawal of accreditation, change of business activities).

2.1.4 Organisation and responsibilities

The certification body must appoint a permanent executive individual as the responsible contact person as well as a deputy for all activities connected with the QS scheme. The responsible contact person or their deputy must have the qualification as 'releasing person' or as auditor. The responsible contact person or their deputy is responsible for reporting on the performance of the internal quality management system for the purpose of management review and system improvement. QS must be informed immediately if there is a change in the designated persons.

At the same time, the certification body must request approval by QS of at least one auditor and one releasing person.

Activities for the QS scheme must be regulated in such a way that requirements of the QS scheme are inspected in accordance with uniform rules. In addition to this, the certification body must ensure that the auditors are notified about technical and legal requirements in each field of activity.

Document maintenance in the databases
The certification body must enter all relevant information in the QS database in a timely manner and keep it up to date. The information from the QS database must match the information required in the GLOBALG.A.P. database.

4-eyes principle and release of audit reports in the QS database
The certification body must ensure that the decision on certification and the release of the audit reports is reached by at least one qualified person (releasing person) who must be approved by QS. The audit report must not be released by the person who performed the conformity assessment, i.e. the 4-eyes-principle must be complied with.

After certification decision has been made, the audit report must be released in the QS database. The certification body must create the internal technical prerequisites to ensure easy data entry into the QS database (**https://www.q-s.de/softwareplattform/**). Only approved auditors and releasing persons of a certification body are given access to the entry and release of audit results.

Incident and Crisis management
QS implemented a profound crisis management system to support scheme participants in crisis situations and to prevent danger for human, animal, environment, property assets and for the reputation of the QS scheme. The certification body has to inform QS - and if legally required the responsible authorities - immediately about crisis situations. This includes among other things all insights, which may lead to a review or an adjustment of the existing certification, issued by the certification body. The certification body is obligated to support QS in clarification of crisis situations. In addition to that the certification body must assure that it is granted access to premises and necessary documents of scheme participants in case of crisis.

A functional, documented crisis management procedure must be implemented within the certification body (e.g. emergency numbers to assure availability, flowcharts) and it needs to be regularly verified.

Each certification body has to name a crisis contact person (including the telephone number), who can be contacted also outside usual business hours.

2.1.5 Handling of documents

The certification body is obliged to document the results of controls for each location in detail and without any gaps, to enable easy access at all times. Within the scope of the obligation to exercise

due diligence and produce evidence, the records must be kept according to legal requirements.

Records must be handled in such a manner that the confidentiality of the processes they contain and the protection of data are guaranteed at all times.

2.1.6 Customer satisfaction analysis and complaints management

The certification body must determine the quality of its activities by means of customer satisfaction analyses. As part of the complaints management, the certification body documents at least the cause of the complaint, the measures taken as a result and the evidence of their implementation.

In the event of fundamental complaints, the QS certification body provides information.

2.1.7 Use of QS certification mark

The certification body may only use the QS certification mark on the certificates and confirmations issued by it in accordance with the annex to the certification guideline and exclusively in accordance with the style guide.

⇒ Style Guide for the QS certification mark

2.2 Preserving the approval of a certification body

The following points must be satisfied in order to preserve approval as a certification body:

- The certification body monitors its activity within the QS scheme by means of regular self-assessments, which must be conducted at least once a year. The certification body documents the results of the self-assessment, any resulting measures and their results in writing and sends them to QS by email by 31 January of each year for the previous calendar year at the latest without being asked.
- For QS-GAP Standard, the certification body also sends the reports of the accreditation or surveillance assessments (head office and, if applicable, witness audits) to QS promptly and without being asked. This does not apply to reports or parts of reports that exclusively concern compliance with other standards. An employee of the QS head office or a person authorized by QS is entitled to participate in accreditation or monitoring assessments by the responsible accreditation body.
- Evidence of at least 10 performed audits per calendar year for each QS-approval stage.
- The certification body must have at least one approved auditor and releasing person.
- Participation in the information events organised by QS.

2.3 Violations of QS requirements by the certification body

Violations of the QS scheme manual or the Framework Agreement on Neutral Control Activities will result in sanctions and, if necessary, the revocation or suspension of the approval of a certification body by QS. In case of violations against the Code of Conduct for the QS Scheme suitable measures will be initiated.

In the event of both ordinary and extraordinary termination or in the event of a sanction, QS has the right to notify all scheme participants who have concluded contracts with the certification body within the framework of the QS scheme of the termination or sanction.

3 Requirements for auditors and releasing persons

Auditors check compliance with the QS requirements on site and releasing persons check the evaluations carried out by the auditors. Their work is therefore of particular importance. The following chapters describe the requirements for approval as a QS auditor and as a releasing person.

3.1 Approval procedure

If all the necessary requirements for approval according to the QS inspection system have been met, the certification body stores the necessary documents in the QS database and uses the QS database to issue a preliminary approval for activities in the QS scheme.

QS is entitled to check the provisional approvals issued by the certification body as part of its scheme integrity system and to revoke them if necessary.

The following additional measures are required to obtain final approval:

1. Participation in the information event "QS for beginners" held by QS within 12 months of the granting of provisional approval.

2. Participation in a subject-specific training course held by QS within 12 months of the granting of provisional approval.
3. Conducting a chargeable witness audit by QS or a person commissioned by QS.
   After receiving provisional approval, only up to 20 audits may be carried out independently before the witness audit is carried out.

The certification body is responsible for organizing the respective witness audits. QS can specify the type of production to be selected for the witness audit at its own discretion.

If no witness audit can take place until the maximum permissible number of audits carried out independently with provisional approval has been reached, the auditor can be blocked until a successful witness audit has been carried out.

Both the auditor and the releasing person profess their integrity by submitting a declaration of consent to the code of conduct for the QS scheme. The declaration of consent to the code of conduct for the QS scheme can be found in the partner area for certification bodies and auditors.

In addition, consent to the collection and storage of personal data is required for approval in the QS scheme.

3.2 Requirements for auditors

Certification bodies are obliged to only deploy auditors in line with their approval, qualification and knowledge.

3.2.1 Qualifications

The basis for this is an agricultural/horticultural or food-related apprenticeship. The technical qualification, supplemented by auditor training, enables the auditor to professionally and uniformly collect and evaluate the implementation of the requirements

Examples of professional qualifications:

- Graduate diploma/Bachelor's/Master's degree in agriculture (plant production)
- Graduate diploma/Bachelor's/Master's degree in horticulture
- Graduate diploma/Bachelor's/Master's degree in biology (+ specific knowledge per area)
- Agricultural engineer/agricultural foreman/farmer + specific knowledge
- Master gardener.

Professional skills are:

- Profound product and process knowledge
- Knowledge of agricultural and food laws
- Comprehensive knowledge of the QS scheme manual
- Mastery of auditing techniques

In addition to the technical qualification a proven sector-specific professional, practical experience of at least two years on a fulltime-basis (certificates etc.) in accordance with the stage production is required. If the professional experience is less than two years but at least one year, the auditor is only allowed to audit companies with a low hygienic risk (e.g. potato producers, mechanical harvesting, no handling, no seasonal workers) in the first year.

Insufficient technical qualification can be replaced by suitable training measures or sector-specific audit experience. This is to be agreed with QS in individual cases. QS reserves the right to check the success of the measures (e.g. by witness audits). Costs arising from this are to be borne by the certification body.

3.2.2 Auditor course

Initial approval as an auditor in the QS scheme can only be granted if evidence of an auditor training, which is lasting several days, is proven. Topics such as the Fundamentals of Quality Management, communication and Auditing Techniques, should have been dealt with in the course. It is the responsibility of the certification body to verify applicants' specialised skills and knowledge.

3.2.3 Internal training by the certification body

Prior to approval as a QS auditor, evidence on participation in an internal training by the certification body must be provided. Contents of internal training courses are relevant scheme manuals (incl. the bases of valuation), the QS-GAP inspection system as well as the General Regulations and the Code for Conduct. In addition to that, an introduction into the QS database and the compilation of audit reports is given. Proof of participation in an

internal training is the prerequisite for registering an auditor for the QS information event "QS for beginners".

⇒ Chapter 4. Training and Information Events

3.2.4 Audit experience

Before authorisation as an auditor or extension of authorisation is granted, industry-specific audit experience is required on the basis of proof of ten audits carried out in the last 24 months. As a proof of audit experience also accompaniments of QS regular audits or audits of other standards can be taken into account. An overview of the standards approved for this purpose is published on the QS-Website in the internal area for certification bodies and auditors.

⇒ Audit experience – approved standards

Three of these ten audits must be carried out independently and as QS-GAP regular audits, after having participated in the auditor course and the internal training but under the supervision of an auditor approved for the respective stage. Completed audits are documented in the QS database by the auditor who is already approved.

3.2.5 Trainings by QS

Before final approval, an auditor must attend the information event "QS for beginners" conducted by QS and successfully pass a basic test in order to receive provisional approval. In order to participate, all necessary documents for final approval must be submitted to QS at least six weeks before the training date.

⇒ Record sheet for auditors and releasing persons

Besides the basic test, a specific test for the respective stage must be conducted.

If the stage-specific test is also passed alongside the basic test, the auditor is issued with provisional approval entitling him or her to conduct audits. The passed stage-specific test must not be older than 12 months at the time of approval.

An auditor who fails a basic test three times in succession cannot obtain permanent QS approval. Approval for the stage production is also not possible if a stage-specific test is failed three times in succession.

An auditor loses his provisional approval if he does not take part in a stage-specific training offered by QS within twelve months of the information event "QS for beginners".

An auditor without provisional approval is also obliged to take part in a stage-specific training offered by QS within twelve months of the information events "QS for beginners" and to write the test. Otherwise, QS reserves the right to cancel the application process.

3.2.6 Specific approval requirements

In addition, the following specific requirements must be met for approval:

- Knowledge of hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP), acquired either through education or training (at least 8 hours) (from 2026). The knowledge must be suitable for the comprehensive assessment of a HACCP system.
- Knowledge of food hygiene acquired either through training or instruction (at least 8 hours) (from 2026).

3.3 Preserving the approval of an auditor

3.3.1 Proof of minimum number of audits

In order to maintain approval, 20 audits must be conducted independently in the last 24 months (record date is the 30th June of each year).

On a limited basis the independently conducted audits of other standards can also be recognized as audit experience. An overview of the recognized standards and the possible recognition of audits conducted in these standards can be found in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors.

⇒ Sample template Evidence of minimum number of audits – form sheet

With a missing proof of the minimum number of audits the result is a loss of the approval of the auditor.

⇒ Elucidation Procedure in the event test is failed or insufficient evidence of QS audit

3.3.2 Conduct of witness audits

The proper conduct of audits by the auditors must be reviewed by the certification body at regular intervals on the basis of witness audits. The frequency of witness audits has to be risk-based. An according system must be documented in the certification body. Every auditor has to be witnessed during the performance of a regular audit at least once within three calendar years. The result of the witness audit has to be documented and forwarded to QS upon a request. The audits have to be witnessed by qualified persons (usually responsible employees of the certification body).

3.3.3 Annual stage-specific auditor training by QS

All auditors must attend a QS training course every year. Auditors who do not attend the training courses lose their approval.

3.3.4 Evidence of internal training by the certification body

Evidence of annual participation in at least one internal training course on the QS scheme organised by the certification body must be produced in order to retain approval as an auditor for the QS scheme. If an auditor gets approved for different QS approved certification bodies, the certification body shall take appropriate evidence to ensure that the auditor has attended an internal training possibly by another certification body.

During annual internal training, recent changes in the QS scheme and relevant alterations of normative documents should be addressed among others.

3.4 Cancelling the approval of an auditor

If there is an indication of insufficient audit quality, auditors can be obliged to participate for example in supplementary training measures. QS reserves the right to check the success of the measures (e.g. by witness audits). Any costs incurred in this respect shall be borne by the certification body.

Nevertheless, QS may temporarily or permanently cancel the auditor's approval due to technical reasons and, in such cases, is entitled to inform the certification bodies about the suspension of the approval for which the auditor in question was approved.

⇒ Chapter 6. Measures of the scheme integrity system

3.5 Requirements for releasing persons

Persons who are acting as QS-GAP releasing person for the first time require a qualification as an auditor for the QS-GAP Standard.

3.6 Preserving the approval of a releasing person

3.6.1 Proof of a minimum number of audit report releases

10 audit report releases during the last 24 months are required to maintain approval as a releasing person (the cut-off date is the 30th June of the year in question).

This requirement does not apply, if the releasing person is also approved as auditor.

3.6.2 Proof of audit supervision

Every two calendar years, at least one regular audit must be supervised by the releasing person. Audit supervision of audits under other standards can be recognised. You can find an overview of the recognized standards on the QS-Website in the internal area for certification bodies and auditors.

This requirement does not apply, if the releasing person is also approved as auditor.

3.6.3 Proof of an internal training course by the certification body

The releasing person must attend at least one annual internal QS training course by the certification body and must provide proof of a corresponding internal training course to QS on request.

4 Training and Information Events

Training courses and information events are organised by QS and the certification bodies.

Events organised by QS – trainings prior to approval as well as annual professional trainings - mainly concentrate on specialised technical contents of each respective stage and related harmonisation in the conducting of the audit.

In addition to auditor training courses, QS organises information meetings for the responsible persons of the certification bodies. Against the background of the dynamic development of the QS scheme, these meetings promote the mutual further development of controls and provide an opportunity to exchange experiences. Participation in these meetings is obligatory for certification bodies.

The certification body qualifies its auditors and releasing persons for their activities in the QS scheme both, prior to their QS approval and by means of annual internal training courses

5 Rules for Independent Inspection

The certification body is commissioned by scheme participant with conducting independent controls. The scheme participant and the certification body conclude a written agreement on this.

5.1 Regular audit

The certification body periodically conducts audits (so called regular audits) at scheme participants. A successfully passed regular audit is the prerequisite for the certification of the scheme participant.

Regular audits at one location may only be conducted three times in succession by the same auditor. This applies regardless of whether the auditor is approved for various certification bodies. The counting of the regular audits conducted in succession is not interrupted by the conduct of another type of QS audit (e.g. random sample audit).

During a regular audit it is verified whether a company satisfies the technical, organisational and contentual requirements necessary for participating in the QS scheme. The objective is to inspect company-specific processes and to identify opportunities for improvement. Audits are conducted using a stage-specific checklist.

Audit results are documented in an audit report and entered into the QS database by the certification body.

Registration of producers in the GLOBALG.A.P. database
Producers registered with QS for the QS-GAP standard must also be registered in the GLOBALG.A.P. database in accordance with the GLOBALG.A.P. requirements (Registration Data Requirements) before their first audit is carried out by the responsible certification body. In doing so, information on previous GLOBALG.A.P. numbers (GGN), GLOBALG.A.P. sanctions, if applicable, and an update of relevant master data (e.g. contact information), if applicable, must be taken into account.

Use of interfaces to the QS database
The use of database interfaces must be approved by QS prior to use.

If interfaces are used for audit organization and/or administration, all requirements of the QS-GAP guideline must be technically implemented accordingly. The content of the checklists used must fully comply with the QS-GAP checklist.

5.2 Conducting audits

The basis for the content of an audit is formed by the stage and product-specific requirements defined in the current valid version of the scheme manual (see for reference **www.q-s.de)**.

Audits should be conducted in the national language of the company to be audited. In case it is not possible to conduct the audit in the national language, the certification body and the company to be audited must reach a clear written agreement on the language in which the audit and the certification process will be conducted. The certification body must ensure that the assigned auditor has the necessary knowledge of the agreed audit language. If necessary, an independent translator must be involved. If necessary, the documents to be reviewed must be translated independently, ideally in advance of the audit. The language skills of the auditor or translator (if applicable) must be proven to QS, if requested (e.g. qualified language certificates, contract with translator, curriculum vitae). In the event that the producer or their coordinator requests the audit report in another language, the certification body must have a procedure for translating the audit report.

When entering an audit report, all comments, descriptions of deviations and corrective actions must also be written in English or German.

The certification body must also ensure that the auditor to be commissioned has adequate knowledge of the relevant local legal regulations.

5.2.1 Audit preparation

The organisational preparation of an audit includes:

- Coordination of dates and, if necessary, drawing up an audit plan. The certification body can dispense with the audit plan if it is not expedient for unannounced audits or not necessary for locations of low complexity.
- Potential request of company-specific documentation (e.g. HACCP plan, QM manual, work instructions, inspection reports). If company-specific documentation has been requested prior to the audit, the e available documentation should be checked with regard to completeness, correctness and actuality. A list of unclear or dubious documents should be prepared in advance and systematically assessed in the course of the audit.

Nevertheless in case of unannounced audits the requirements regarding the advance notification have to be respected.

⇒ Chapter 5.6 Unannounced audits

- Examination of checklists and other form sheets for completeness and check of relevant inspection equipment for proper functioning.
- Knowledge of the results of previous audits including the agreed corrective actions and their implementation.

5.2.2 On-site audit

The condition for conducting a regular audit is met, if the company-specific processes can be comprehensively evaluated at the site (e.g. cultivation period).

An on-site audit includes:

- Comparison of the planned scope of testing with the actual conditions on site
- Inspection of appropriate documentation and its control
- Recording and assessing the implementation of the requirements of the scheme manual in operational practice (among others, a complete site and field inspection, incl. corresponding measurements/testing)
- Recognition of nonconformities
- Preparation of the audit report (see 5.3), i.e. documentation of evaluations, nonconformities and, if necessary, agreement on corrective actions.

At the beginning of the audit, an introductory discussion is held, in which the audit procedure, the graduation of evaluations and, if necessary, changes to the audit schedule are explained. In the concluding discussion at the end of the audit, evaluations and preliminary audit result are discussed with the companies contact person. At the audited company a signed copy of the first page of the audit report and of the corrective actions report are to be left, if corrective actions were to be agreed in the audit. The complete audit report should be sent to the audited operation in a timely manner upon its completion.

In general, an audit has to be entirely conducted, by checking and evaluating every requirement. An audit is not to be terminated prematurely. This applies as well in case that during the audit a passing turns out to be unlikely.

The scope of the inspection includes the entire scope of application, including all registered products, product handling units and the areas of registered products.

Initial audit

The harvest and handling processes of the registered products have to be checked. The audit must be carried out close to the harvest.

- If it takes place before the harvest, a further audit to verify the outstanding requirements for the harvest must take place before the certificate can be issued.
- If the audit takes place after the harvest, the producer must be able to demonstrate that the relevant requirements have been met. Otherwise, certification may not take place until the next harvest.

Where multiple products are grown, the requirements for each product must be checked before the product is included in the certificate, with at least one product per product group being inspected on site.

During an initial audit the documentation, which resulted from the registration for the QS participation and QS-GAP certification by the coordinator or which arised up to three months before the first harvest, needs to be evaluated retrospectively, depending on which time period is less recent.

Follow-up audit

In principle, the date of the audit has to be chosen risk-orientated and the audit therefore be conducted regularly during the vegetation period of the crops (cultivation work is carried out), the harvest or the handling processes with harvest products (contains relevant processes regarding the food safety and hygiene, not only the storage).

If post-harvest handling of produce takes place on the location, the audit must take place annually during this time. Based on a documented risk assessment by the certification body, the frequency can be extended to up to every two years. If the handling process consists solely of storage, the audit must take place every two years if other relevant processes can be checked (e.g. harvesting, plant protection).

If no product handling takes place, the audit must be carried out at least every two years during the harvest, unless only mechanical harvesting takes place.

If several crops are grown, at least one crop in each crop group must be checked on site.

If crops from a crop group that has already been certified are reported subsequently, the certification body decides whether a further on-site inspection or documentary check is required before the crop can be included in the certificate.

Cross-audit delivery note checks (cross-checks)

In order to check the identity and traceability of the products in the QS scheme, cross-audit delivery note checks are carried out.

⇒ Document "Cross-Checks Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes

Conduction of remote checks

In principle, the QS scheme provides for on-site audits to be carried out.

If deviations are made in exceptional circumstances, the requirements for conducting remote inspections must be taken into account.

⇒ Document "Conduction of remote checks"

5.3 Audit report

The audit report contains information on the location, the audited production scope and the evaluations, including comprehensible comments on the inspected requirements, the preliminary audit result and the corrective actions report, if corrective actions were to be agreed in the relevant audit. It must be prepared by the auditor or an employee of the certification body. If any changes occur after the review of the audit report by the certification body, the certification body has to notify the company concerned in writing and without delay.

As a final step before entering the audit report, the auditor checks in the QS database whether the master data required for the audit report have been entered correctly. If the master data is correct, the auditor enters the audit report into the QS database.

The audit result is generated automatically in the database.

5.3.1 Evaluations

Individual requirements are evaluated on the basis of degrees to which they have been fulfilled.

Table 2: Evaluation based on degrees of fulfilment

Evaluation	Degree of fulfilment
A	The requirement is completely fulfilled.
C	The requirement is partially fulfilled.
D (K.O.)[1]	The requirement is not fulfilled.
E	The requirement is not applicable.

[1] Requirements that could have a critical influence on food safety in case of non-compliance or that are very important for the scheme for other reasons, are defined as K.O. criteria. Non-compliance

with one of these criteria could lead to the opening of a sanction procedure and could result in a loss of the eligibility of delivery. D-evaluation of a K.O. criterion is called K.O.-evaluation.

A repetitive D-evaluation during a follow-up audit may be evaluated as K.O. (see 5.3.2 Corrective actions).

A general K.O. is applied in the event of a break-off or a refusal of the audit by the enterprise.

A general K.O. must also be applied if, during the audit, the auditor establishes that there is an acute threat to the safety of humans, animals, the environment, feed or food, that this threat emanates from a part of the location that is not included in the inspected scope, and the urgent threat in the QS scheme cannot be averted by other means (ultima ratio).

The company must be informed by the certification body in writing without delay of the consequences of the general K.O. Proof must be provided to QS on request that information has been provided to this effect.

If a criterion is not rated A, this must be justified in the audit report in a comprehensible and meaningful way. Corrective actions, including appropriate deadlines for their implementation are documented for all C and D evaluations that are identified. Especially K.O. assessments are, if possible, documented by means of suitable evidence (e.g. photos, copies) and proved to QS upon request.

For criteria which are marked with an asterisk (*), all evidences and/or test objects which were used to prove the compliance must be given regardless of the evaluation (e.g. measured values, calculation results, random samples). For certain stages, the requirements for comments set out in the annex to the guidelines must be observed.

⇒ Annex 8.3 Evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk

5.3.2 Corrective actions

The audited location must propose corrective actions to the auditor in case of C and D evaluations.

The auditor/certification body sets the deadlines for implementing the corrective actions. For all K.O. and # requirements, the correction period is a maximum of 28 days and can be shortened depending on the deviation (endangering the safety of consumers, employees and the environment).

Corrective actions are to be agreed upon individually and in a manner that is appropriate in both factual and temporal terms. Corrective actions implemented after or during the audit do not change the assessment of the requirement.

Corrective actions report

The evaluations, related remarks and proposed corrective actions, including deadlines for their implementation and responsibilities, must be documented in the corrective actions report. If the corrective actions report is not prepared during the audit, it must be submitted to the certification body by the audited company and finally agreed with the auditor no later than 14 days after the audit.

The determination of corrective actions comprises the following steps:

- Determination of causes
- Rectification of causes
- Suitable measures to prevent a recurrence of the problems (preventive measures)
- Documentation of the implemented measures

Implementation of corrective actions must be checked by the certification body. If the verification is not performed on-site, the evidence of implementation of the corrective action must demonstrate when and how the implementation was performed. The correct and timely verification of corrective actions must be entered into the QS Database by the certification body at least four weeks after the deadline for the implementation. In case the implementation of a corrective action has an effect on the eligibility of delivery of a location, it has to be confirmed by a releasing person. Certification bodies must be able to provide proof of the verification to QS upon request.

If the implementation of corrective actions is not conducted appropriately and on time, the certification body has to decide whether the granted certification needs to be withdrawn. The certification body informs QS about this matter.

If the corrective action is not implemented within the deadline, the location will be blocked for delivery into the QS scheme (automatically by QS no later than 4 weeks after the expiry of the correction period).

If agreed corrective actions have not been sustainably implemented and this leads to a new non-compliance with the corresponding requirement during a subsequent audit, a lower evaluation can be given for this requirement.

5.3.3 Audit result for the scope QS-GAP

In regular audits carried out according to the QS-GAP standard, the audited company receives a score, which depends on the evaluations received. This score results from the degree of fulfilment of the requirements. An A evaluation corresponds to 100 points and a C to 50 points. No points are scored for D and E evaluations. The audit result is calculated by dividing the achieved points by the maximum total number of points that can be achieved. Only the applicable requirements are taken into account for the calculation.

The recommendations provided in the Guideline QS-GAP Production Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes must be controlled by the certification body, but they do not have any influence on the audit result.

The audit **is passed** if the result is at least 70% and does not contain any K.O. evaluation.

The audit **is not passed** if the audit result is less than 70%, a K.O. evaluation, a repeated D evaluation or a general K.O. was given.

If the audit is failed, a regular audit has to be conducted as a follow-up audit. The follow-up audit should be carried out within a period of at the latest six weeks. If it is not possible to implement the corrective actions within this period, the post-audit may also take place at a later date.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if there is no successful follow-up audit present in the database. Furthermore, the regulations of annex 5.1 Rules of Sanction Procedure of the guideline General Regulations apply.

⇒ Chapter 5.4 Audit frequency

⇒ Annex 5.1 to the Guideline General Regulations (Rules of sanction procedure)

K.O. evaluations, general K.O.s, repeated D evaluations and audits with an audit result below 70 % must be notified to QS by the certification body through the immediate entry and release of the audit report in the QS database within two working days. The farm size in hectare (for each crop) is to register in the audit report and to deposit in the database. QS then decides whether a sanction procedure is to be initiated.

Joint auditing of several production scopes

For individual stages several production scopes of a company can be audited together. In such cases, only one checklist is used during the audit. A requirement which is relevant for several production scopes (e.g. fertilisation, plant protection) is evaluated only once in the checklist. For these requirements, the lowest result determined in the different production scopes is applicable (see table 4).

All audited production scopes receive the same audit result.

5.4 Audit frequency

The time interval until the next regular audit or the certificate validity period for the standard QS-GAP is one year.

The follow-up has to be scheduled in such way, that the subsequent certification takes place on time and thus the QS approval can be preserved.

Follow-up audit after K.O. evaluations during a regular audit

If an audit is not passed, a follow-up audit in the form of a complete regular audit must be conducted on site (see 5.3.3 Audit result). The decision on the extent of the follow-up audit is in the responsibility of the certification body and has to be justified upon request.

In case of regular audits with a K.O. assessment, the certification body can decide on its own responsibility not to conduct the follow-up audit on site as a complete regular audit, but only to review the requirements assessed with a K.O. (not possible with an audit result of less than 70 %, a repeated D rating or a general K.O.). In individual cases, if the requirement evaluated with a K.O. only refers to documentation needs, it is permissible to only examine the implementation of corrective measures by means of documentary evidence.

Follow-up audit after K.O. evaluations during a random sample, special, parallel or spot audits

In the event of K.O. evaluations during random sample, special, parallel or spot audits, the follow-up audit must always be conducted in form of a complete regular audit within a time period of six weeks (see 5.3.3 Audit result).

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

⇒ Chapter 6. Measures under the scheme integrity system

5.5 Granting, preserving and withdrawal of certification

5.5.1 Certification process

The responsibility for granting, preserving and withdrawal of certification lies with the certification body.

The decision on certification must be made no later than 6 weeks after the audit was conducted. Within this period, the audit must be entered and released in the QS database by the certification body. Otherwise, the QS head office shall decide on the further procedure.

When changes that may affect certification become known, it is the responsibility of the certification body to take appropriate action. This explicitly includes changes made after certification has been granted. This applies accordingly to an extension or limitation of the scope as well as the suspension of a certification.

5.5.2 Issue of certificates

Certificates can be issued by the certification body, but they do not allow direct inference to the approval of a QS-GAP location for the QS scheme. Only the information in the database is relevant.

When issuing certificates the following points should be noted:

On each certificate, audit date, date of decision on certification and expiry date of certification validity must be indicated. When issuing certificates, it must generally be ensured that the data indicated on the certificate match up with the data on the approval of the scheme participant recorded in the QS database. Form and content of the certificate must comply with sample certificates and confirmations. Logos of the scheme participant might also be inserted upon request. It is important to ensure that a misleading use of the logos is avoided.

A certificate shall only be issued by the certification body when an eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme consists. The certification body is notified of this per e-mail from QS.

⇒ Annex 8.1 Sample Certificates and Confirmations

5.5.3 Validity of certificates

The certificate validity begins with the date of the decision on certification. In the case of an initial audit, the end of the certificate's validity is calculated from the audit date plus the time interval of one year. In the case of a follow-up audit, the new period of validity of the certificate is calculated on the basis of the end of the previous certificate plus the time interval of one year.

Extension of certificate validity

In justified individual cases, the certification body as an exception has the option to extend the validity of a certificate by up to 3 months. An extension may only be granted if a certification body approved by QS has already been commissioned to conduct a follow-up audit. The extension can be granted at the earliest 1 month prior to the expiry of the validity of the certificate. It must be executed and justified in writing in the QS database.

The follow-up audit and certification decision must then take place within the period of certificate extension, which can be no more than three months. If the certification decision is positive, the period of validity of the certificate begins with the day of the certification decision and ends with the final date of the previous certificate (without extension) plus the time interval of one year. The previous extension of the certification is not included in the calculation of the new end date. If the follow up audit was not passed, the extension of the eligibility to deliver ends.

Bringing forward the QS-GAP audit

The audit can be brought forward by up to nine months without affecting the duration of the certificate. At least 6 months must elapse between two system audits of a QS-GAP certified site.

⇒ Chapter 5.4: Audit Frequency

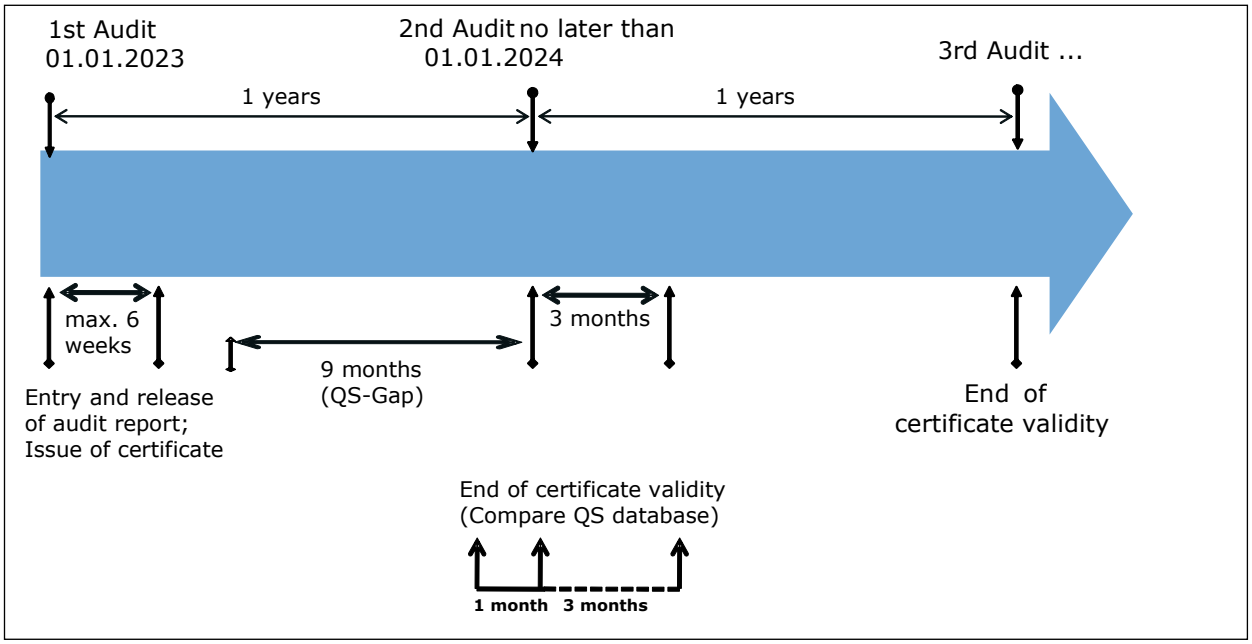

Figure 1: Illustration of the validity and, if applicable, extension of a certification (example)

5.5.4 Withdrawal of certificates

Certificates must be withdrawn in the following circumstances:

- Severe violations against the scheme manual
- Exclusion of the scheme participant
- Cancellation of the declaration of participation by the coordinated company or by the coordinator.
- Notice of termination of the scheme participant to QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH
- Change of the certification body by scheme participant/coordinator
- Change of standards or premature recertification

The certification body and QS inform each other about exclusion of the scheme, cancellation or withdrawal of a certificate.

The certification body is notified by QS in the event of the exclusion or termination of a scheme participant. The certification body must notify QS whenever a certificate is withdrawn.

If a certificate is withdrawn due to the termination of the scheme participant or deregistration of coordinated location, a new audit must be conducted when and if the location re-registers.

If a location re-registers within 6 months, a follow-up audit must be conducted. Otherwise an initial audit has to be conducted once again.

If a company re-registers within 2 months of deregistering (e.g. after a change of coordinators), the same or a new certification body can examine and continue the certification decision of the preceding audit provided that the reasons for registration/deregistration do not speak against continuation and/or the transfer of the certificate.

In case of the contrary behaviour to contract, the certification body decides about the conduction of follow-up measures or even withdrawal of certificate and termination of contract with the scheme participant. At the same time the certification body contacts QS to define the further actions.

5.5.5 Decision on preserving certification

If there is a change in the structure or personnel of the responsible management of a company, in case of a scope extension, or if any other information exists which allows the conclusion that the company may no longer satisfy requirements, the certification body has to decide whether or not the conduct of a new follow up audit is necessary for the purpose of preserving certification. A new regular audit must always be carried out in the event of a change of ownership and/or change of legal entity (see definition of "producer").

Scheme participants are obligated to inform the certification body responsible for the operation immediately as well as the responsible coordinator with regard to any significant operational changes that may jeopardise the maintenance of certification. If requisite information is not passed on by the scheme participant, the QS approval may be forfeited.

5.5.6 Change of certification body

In the event of a change of the certification body, certification can be transferred. To this end, the outgoing certification body is obliged to pass on all existing documents required for a transfer of certification directly to the new certification body. The new certification body is obligated to review the transferred certification within four weeks after the scheme participant has chosen the new certification body in the database. The decision of the review must be documented in the database. If the certification body decides not to accept the certification, a new regular audit needs to be conducted as well as entered and released in the data base within four weeks after the change.

If the certification is accepted, it must still be ensured that the newly responsible certification body – if necessary - continues to monitor the implementation of all corrective actions not remedied yet or that the change of the certification body only takes place after the complete implementation of all corrective actions. The regulations regarding unannounced audits have to be taken into account by the certification body, the location is transferred to.

If there are K.O. evaluations which have not been corrected at the time of the change of certification body, a new regular audit needs to be conducted at any rate.

The change of the certification body is not allowed if the extension on certificate validity has been conducted.

5.6 Unannounced audits

Procedure in the case of prompt performance of other, announced audits.
The certification body shall avoid that announced audits of other standards are carried out in direct temporal proximity to the unannounced QS audit.

Combined audits (e.g. combination with other standards) are still possible if the control of all parts of the combined audit is conducted without advance notification. If conducting an unannounced audit is not possible within the other standard, no combined audits can be carried out.

5.6.1 Unannounced spot audits

Unannounced spot audits are conducted additionally between scheduled regular audits. The main focus of spot audits lies in the control of the production process. As a rule, only selected criteria are audited. A comprehensive check of documents or other criteria is only made if there are indications that nonconformities exist. With the exception of K.O. evaluations, spot audits have no effect on the audit frequency of a company. However, if a K.O. evaluation or a general K.O. (including repeated D-evaluations) is awarded during a spot audit, a regular audit must be carried out within a period of six weeks (see chapter 5.3.3 Audit result).

In order to ensure the presence of a person capable of providing the necessary information, it is possible to inform the company about the spot audit at the earliest 24 hours (1 working day) before the planned audit date.

The spot audit is performed within a certification cycle before the next regular audit. The time period must be at least two months from the regular audit (before and after) as well as from the regular expiration of the certification period.

Spot audits are conducted on the basis of random samples. The random sample comprises 10% of the locations bundled by a coordinator and is determined on the cut-off date of 1 July of each year.

The number of spot audits, which have to be conducted by the certification body the respective year, can be adjusted during the year by QS in case of major changes in the number of locations coordinated by one coordinator.

The locations to be audited are selected by the certification body on a risk-oriented basis (e.g., size of location, area of production, geographical location or previous audit results). The selection is to be distributed proportionately across the countries in which the certification body holds QS-GAP certificates.

Procedure in the event that a scheme participant refuses an audit
If a scheme participant refuses to have an audit conducted, the certification body has to decide whether the refusal is justified. The decision should be documented and presented to QS on request.

In the event of an unjustified refusal, the certification body must enter the audit in the QS database with a general K.O. The scheme participant must be notified of the possible consequences of a

refusal in advance and in writing (possible loss of eligibility of delivery, sanctions procedure, conducting of a complete regular audit). On request, evidence must be presented to QS that the necessary information has been provided.

6 Measures under the scheme integrity system

In order to check the functionality of quality assurance measures, QS organises systematic and interlocked control measures that focus on the quality of inspections conducted by certification bodies, auditors and laboratories, the cross-stage functioning of the QS scheme as well as on scheme participants' compliance with requirements. These control measures are designed to review the status quo and, at the same time, continuously develop and improve processes in the QS scheme. Amongst others, the following measures (integrity checks) are included:

6.1 Random sample audits

In addition to the periodic regular audits, compliance with QS requirements is checked by means of random sample audits. Random sample audits shall be unannounced. In order to ensure the presence of a person being able and authorised to provide necessary information, notice may be given no longer than 24 (1 working day) hours before the scheduled audit date. Random sample audits are restricted to several selected requirements, which are the focus of the audit. Unless they contain K.O. evaluations, random sample audits do not have an effect on the frequency of regular audits or the QS status.

A random sample audit must not be carried out by the same auditor who carried out the last regular audit at the company.

If K.O. evaluations occur, a complete regular audit has to be conducted within a time period of six weeks.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

6.2 Audits of special purpose

QS also commissions audits of special purpose, for example in suspicious cases or in case of imminent danger. Audits of special purpose are usually performed completely unannounced. Unless they contain K.O. evaluations, audits of special purpose do not have an effect on the frequency of regular audits or the QS status. If K.O. evaluations occur, a complete regular audit has to be conducted within a time period of six weeks.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

6.3 Parallel audits

Parallel audits serve to verify the result of a previous regular audit. They are performed by QS within a maximum of six weeks after the regular audit.

Parallel audits shall be unannounced. In order to ensure the presence of a person being able and authorised to provide necessary information, notice may be given no longer than 24 hours before the scheduled audit date. Parallel audits are restricted to several selected requirements, which are the focus of the audit. Unless they contain K.O. evaluations, parallel audits do not have an effect on the frequency of regular audits or the QS status.

If K.O. evaluations occur, a complete regular audit is to be conducted within a time period of six weeks.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn at least six weeks after the failed audit, if no successful follow-up audit is present in the database.

6.4 Office audits

Certification bodies are audited by means of office audits that are subject to a fee in order to ensure the correct and uniform implementation of the QS inspection system. Office audits can be conducted on-site at the certification body's premises, remotely, or a combination of both.

QS conducts office audits at certification bodies using its own personnel and/or externally commissioned auditors. An office audit is required for the initial approval or re-approval of a certification body.

The certification body is obliged to provide QS or a person/organization commissioned by QS with comprehensive information and to allow inspection of all documents related to its activities for the QS scheme.

6.5 Accompanying audits

QS or a person/organization commissioned by QS can check the activities of the certification body for the QS scheme at any time, including as part of chargeable accompanying audits. Audits conducted in the QS scheme may be accompanied by QS or a person commissioned by QS. The certification body as well as the accompanied auditor will receive a written report on the results of the accompanying audit afterwards.

The certification body must ensure that an accompanying audit can be carried out at each company to be audited.

6.6 Audit report inspection

Audit reports entered into the QS database by certification bodies are verified with regard to completeness and correctness. The objective is to avoid incorrect and implausible data entries and to harmonise the implementation of requirements by certification bodies and auditors.

The certification body is obliged to contribute to the rapid elimination of possible ambiguities (correction of audit report if necessary).

7 Explanation of Symbols

Reference to related documents are highlighted by the use of **bold text**.

This symbol precedes every list of documents you are obliged to show/submit.

Notes are identified by ***Note*** *in italics*.

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

8 Definitions

- Certification (DIN EN ISO/IEC 17000:2005)

  Confirmation of conformity by a third party in relation to products, processes, systems or persons.

- Location

  A location can consist of one or more fields/greenhouses. It is managed by the same (legal) person and the same infrastructure is used. This means that all requirements of the QS Guideline Production can be tested altogether, and no field/greenhouse-specific distinctions have to be made (e.g., regarding plant protection product storage, machinery, hygiene training of employees). Each location is given a location number. Several locations with the same product must be certified by the same certification body.

- Producer

  In terms of QS, a producer is an individual or a company (legal entity), that owns or leases land. The grower is responsible for the production of the certified products and for the products sold by this agricultural/horticultural business. A grower must have at least one location and can also register several locations. Each producer receives a QS ID and may only register once. If a producer has several sites with the same product, these must be certified by the same certification body.

- Product group

  A product group is a group of products that have similarities in how they are grown, harvested and their food safety hazards (e.g. microbiological contamination).

- Product handling

  Product handling includes all post-harvest processes involving product contact (e.g. washing, sorting, processing, packaging, storing, chemical treatment).

- Storage of products

Storage is the term used to describe the whereabouts of products in the company that are not marketed immediately after harvesting/receiving. Storage does not include handling, transhipment and picking, as well as the short-term provision of goods for picking.

9 Annexes

Annexes 9.1 to 9.2 are published as an extract.

9.1 Sample certificates QS-GAP

9.2 Evidence/Objects of inspection for criteria marked with an asterisk

Inspection system
QS-GAP

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