Guideline

Certification

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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 scopes. 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

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 (QS-GAP only)

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 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).

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.

2.1.4 Organisation and responsibilities

The certification body must appoint an executive individual as the responsible contact person as well as a deputy for all activities connected with the QS scheme. 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.

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://qs-platform.info)**. 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

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. At least the points listed in Annex 8.4 Self-assessment checklist for certification bodies must be taken into account. 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/Scope, 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 each QS-approval stage.
- Participation in the annual information event organised by QS.

⇒ Annex 8.4 Self-assessment checklist for certification bodies

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 for the respective stage of approval by QS or a person commissioned by QS.
   After receiving provisional approval, only a limited number of audits may be carried out independently before the witness audit is carried out, namely:

   - Feed sector: 40 audits
   - Agriculture, cattle/pigs/poultry: 50 audits (per type of animal, cattle/pigs/poultry)
   - Slaughtering/deboning: 5 audits
   - Processing/convenience: 5 audits
   - Pet food: 5 audits
   - Food retail/meat wholesale/system gastronomy: 30 audits
   - Production/QS-GAP: 20 audits
   - Wholesale fruit, vegetables, potatoes: 5 audits
   - Preparation/processing fruit, vegetables, potatoes: 5 audits

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 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

Professional skills are:

- Profound product and process knowledge of the stage to be audited
- Knowledge of agricultural, animal feed and food laws
- Comprehensive knowledge of the QS scheme manual
- Mastery of auditing techniques

Examples for specialised qualification according to the different stages are listed in table 1.

In addition to the technical qualification a proven sector-specific professional, practical experience of at least one year on a fulltime-basis (certificates etc.) in accordance with the requested stage of approval is required.

A lack of technical qualification **or** sector-specific professional, practical experience 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.

Table 1: Overview of specialised qualifications		Meat and Meat Products							Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes				Crop farming	Pet food
		Compound feed production (Additive/premix production, in-spection of mobile feed milling and mixing plants, private labelling)	**Feed Material** (inspection of small scale feed material producers)	**Trade/Storage, Transshipment and Transport of feed**	**Agriculture** (cattle, pigs, poultry)	**Slaughtering/Deboning** (animal transport)	**Processing** (butchery)	**Meat Wholesale, Food Retail**	**Production / QS-GAP** (Preparation/Processing at the	**Wholesale**	**Preparation/Processing**	**Food retail** (Processing)	**Production**	**Pet Food** Manufacturing and trade
Graduate Agricultural Economist	Animal production	x	x	x	x									
	Plant production								x	x			x	
Graduate Horticulturalist									x	x			x	
Miller (Master craftsman) (+ special knowledge per area)		x	x	x										x
Agricultural Technician/Master craftsman Agriculturist/Agriculturist + special knowledge		x	x	x	x				x				x	x

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Gardener (Master craftsman)								x				x	
Veterinarian				x	x	x	x						x
Graduate Food Technician/Chemist, Food Technician		x	x		x	x	x			x	x		x
Graduate Nutritionist					x	x	x			x	x		x
Graduate Biologist (+ special knowledge per area)				x				x					
Butcher (Master craftsman)					x	x	x						x

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 the stage-specific documents of the scheme manual (incl. the bases of valuation), the QS 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 a provisional approval as an auditor or an extension of approval is granted, sector-specific audit experience must be proven. For each approval stage, evidence of at least 10 independent performed audits for the corresponding stage within the last 24 months must be produced (on the agricultural stage this evidence has to be presented per species). 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 in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors.

⇒ Audit experience – approved standards

Three of these ten audits must be carried out independently and as QS 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 stage specific test must be conducted for each stage on which approval is requested. For the stage pet food, a stage specific training conducted by QS is also required for initial approval.

If the stage-specific test is also passed alongside the basic test, the auditor is issued with provisional approval for the stage in question 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 scope in question 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 required for the relevant stage of approval. Otherwise, QS reserves the right to cancel the application process.

3.2.6 Specific approval requirements

Requirements for auditing at the feed sector stage

The following additional evidence must be provided for authorisations within the feed sector stage:

- Knowledge and skills in the assessment of quality management systems
- Knowledge and skills in the assessment of HACCP concepts

Furthermore, an approval at the stage of trade, storage, transhipment, and transport of feed is only possible in conjunction with an approval at the stage of compound feed or feed material production.

Requirements for auditing at the slaughtering stage

In addition to the basic qualification, the following proof is required for approval at the slaughtering level:

- At least one year of branch-specific, practical professional experience in the field of slaughtering (in the industry or in the craft sector) **and**
- Proof of at least one day's training for animal welfare officer in Slaughtering accordance to Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 Article 17 or proof Certificate of Competence according to Article 7 of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 and in accordance with national law.

Requirements for auditing the meat wholesale/food retail meat sector

For authorisation at the meat wholesale/food retail meat stage, at least three of the ten audit certificates to be submitted must be for one of the following types of production:

- 61 Central warehouse (meat and meat products)
- 80 Meat wholesale
- 86 Food retail warehouse meat and fruit, vegetables, potatoes
- 87 Logistics of meat and meat products
- 88 Own logistics of meat and meat products
- 880 Brokers (meat and meat products)
- 93 Butchers (sales outlets only)
- 600 System gastronomy/Communal catering coordinator (as head office)
- 601 Restaurant/Operating site
- 602 System gastronomy/Communal catering single company

of which at least one of these audits must be carried out independently (accompanied by an auditor already approved for this level).

Requirement for auditing at the food retail stage (combined approval)

The prerequisite for the auditing of food retail outlets and food retail stores for meat and fruit, vegetables, potatoes (production types 6003 and 86) is an existing approval at the food retail meat/meat wholesale and food retail fruit, vegetables, potatoes levels.

Requirements for the auditing of coordinators

Separate approval is required to carry out coordinator audits. The prerequisite for this is an existing approval as a QS auditor at the stage agriculture or production of fruit, vegetables, potatoes/QS-Gap as well as passing a separate test.

A qualification that deviates from this can also be recognised in exceptional cases after examination by QS.

Requirements for auditing the "preparation/processing" of fruit, vegetables and potatoes

Separate approval is required to carry out audits in the area of "preparation/processing" at the production stage. The prerequisite for this is authorisation at the FVP/QS-GAP production stage and the passing of a separate test.

The performance of audits at the "preparation/processing" stage is also subject to separate approval, whereby approval at the wholesale fruit, vegetables, potatoes, processing, food retail meat and meat products or food retail fruit, vegetables, potatoes stages and the passing of a separate test are required.

Requirement for auditing the arable farming, grassland, forage stage

Authorisation for auditing at the arable farming, grassland, forage stage can be granted for an existing authorisation at the agriculture or fruit, vegetables, potatoes/QS-GAP production stage.

Requirements for auditing at the pet food stage

For approvals within the pet food stage, the following additional evidence is required:

- Knowledge in the area of animal raw materials for processing in pet food,
- Knowledge of processing and quality assurance of pet food, and
- Knowledge of the legal principles with regard to the scope of the pet food guideline.

For approval at the pet food stage, at least three of the ten audit evidence to be submitted must be for one of the following production scopes, in accordance with Chapter 3.2.4 Audit experience:

- 501 Transport service provider (pet food raw material)
- 505 Warehouse keeper (pet food raw material)
- 510 food processing company (raw material for pet food)
- 515 pet food company
- 520 Wholesale (pet food)
- 525 Private labelling (pet food)
- 530 Broker (pet food)

(accompanied by an auditor who is already approved for this stage).

If QS approval already exists for one of the following stages:

- Slaughter/deboning
- Processing/convenience
- Feed material manufacturing
- Compound feed manufacturing

the audit experience can alternatively be gained through five independently conducted audits in the pet food sector.

3.3 Preserving the approval of an auditor

3.3.1 Proof of minimum number of audits

In order to maintain approval for a particular stage – with exception of the agricultural stage – 20 audits must be conducted independently in the last 24 months (record date is the 30th June of each year). On the stage agriculture, evidence of 20 independently conducted audits for each species (cattle, pig, poultry) in the last 24 months must be provided.

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 for the corresponding stage.

⇒ 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 per level of approval 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 stage-specific training course every year for their approval stages. Auditors who do not attend the training courses lose their approval for the approval stage in question.

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

Proof of the specialist qualification of the releasing person for the applied-for stages of approval must be provided to QS in writing. The precondition for working as a releasing person is agricultural or food-related training.

Before being approved as a releasing person, applicants must attend an internal training course by the certification body as well as the information event "QS for beginners" held by QS.

⇒ Chapter 3.1.3 Internal training by the certification body

For a person to attend the information event "QS for beginners", QS must be in possession of all the necessary documents for approval at least six weeks prior to the date of the information event.

⇒ Record sheet for auditors and releasing persons

In addition to taking the basic test, applicants must also complete a stage-specific test for each stage for which approval has been applied for.

If he or she passes both the basic test and the stage-specific test, the releasing person is granted approval for the stage in question. The passed stage-specific test must not be older than 12 months at the time of approval.

A releasing person who fails a basic test three times in succession cannot obtain permanent QS approval. Approval for the scope in question is also not possible if a stage-specific test is failed three times in succession. If the approval as releasing person is applied for by an auditor already approved for the respective scopes, both the basic test and the stage-specific test are omitted.

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 for the stage in question 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). In the agriculture stage, proof must be provided of 10 audit report entries per species (cattle, pigs, poultry) in the last 24 months.

This requirement does not apply, if the releasing person is also approved as auditor for the respective stage of approval.

3.6.2 Proof of audit supervision

Every two calendar years, at least one regular audit must be supervised by the releasing person for each stage of approval. Audit supervision of audits under other standards can be recognised. You can find an overview of the recognized standards in the partner section for certification bodies and auditors.

This requirement does not apply, if the releasing person is also approved as auditor for the respective stage of approval.

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 annual 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.

Use of database interfaces
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 guidelines must be technically implemented accordingly. The content of the checklists used must fully comply with the QS checklists.

Auditing of coordinator´s locations
Regular audits carried out at agricultural coordinators primarily serve to examine and improve work processes. For this reason, the first audit of newly approved coordinators is conducted at the earliest six months after the signing of the contract with QS but at the latest one year thereafter.
Sub-organisational structures of the coordinator ("sub-coordinators") must be inspected accordingly. This means that during the audit, either the coordinator is in possession of all of the required documentation (declaration of participation, procedure of forwarding information etc.) or the sub-organisation(s) must also be audited.

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).

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. when animals are placed or slaughtered; in the field of plant production during the 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.

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 in the supply chain fruit, vegetables, potatoes.

⇒ Document "Cross-Checks Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes”

Auditing at the stage Production
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).

Initial audit/subsequent registration of crops
The harvest or handling processes of the registered crops have to be checked. In the case a producer applies for the certification of several crops, which are not harvested at the same time, the audit date should depend on the harvest of the main crop. Crops, which have not been checked during the harvesting period, should be checked during an unannounced audit (spot audit) and/or during the follow up audit within the next harvesting period.

In the case that the crops, which need to be certified, differ essentially regarding their harvest and handling processes, the certification body decides, whether a further on-site or document check needs to be conducted in order to certify all respective crops. This procedure applies as well, if additional crops need to become certified, which differ essentially from the crops already registered.

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.

Conduction of remote checks
In principle, the QS scheme provides for on-site audits to be carried out. However, for types of production scopes where the audit is carried out exclusively in the form of a document check, system audits can be carried out remotely as a pure document check using the complete system audit checklist. The decision not to carry out the audit on site must be documented in the audit report. For the other production scopes, the specifications for carrying out remote controls must be taken into account.

Document "Conduction of remote checks"

5.3 Audit report

The audit report contains information on the company, the audited 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.
B	The requirement is almost 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 business must propose corrective actions with implementation deadlines to the auditor for C and D evaluations. Corrective measures are to be agreed individually and appropriately in terms of both substance and time. Corrective actions implemented after or during the audit do not change the evaluation of the criterion.

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.

Moreover the approval of a location can be withdrawn by QS, if the implementation of corrective action is not made on time.

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

The audit result is calculated based on the percentage of C and D evaluations for regular audits. Only applicable requirements are taken into account for the calculation.

The audit is **passed**, if the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations presented in Table 3 is not exceeded and there are no K.O. evaluations.

The audit is **failed**, if the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations to achieve Status III according to Table 3 is exceeded, a requirement received a K.O. evaluation, a repeated D evaluation or a general K.O. were given. A K.O. evaluation occurs when a D is assigned to a requirement identified as a K.O. criterion.

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.
However, the approval of a location will be withdrawn by QS no later than six weeks after the failed audit if no successful result of a follow-up audit has been released in the QS database. In all other respects, the provisions of the Sanction Procedure Rules in Annex 5.1 to the Guideline General Rules apply.

If corrective actions that have not yet been registered as "corrected" in the QS database are available at the time of the follow-up audit, these must be discussed in detail in the comments.

The follow-up audit can take place - except at the stage food retail, system gastronomy/communal catering and in the butchery (only points of sale) – announced after a previously unannounced audit.

⇒ 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 where the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations is exceeded 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. If the audit takes place on the stage agriculture or production, additionally the number of animal places available on the farm respectively 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.

If the audit is passed, the company is categorised into a QS status based on the percentage of C and/or D evaluations.

Table 3: QS status depending on audit result, depending on the percentage of C and/or D evaluations

Percentage of C evaluations	Percentage of D evaluations	Percentage of C and D evaluations	QS status
maximum 5 %	0 %	(not relevant)	QS status I
maximum 10 %	maximum 3 %	maximum 10 %	QS status II
maximum 20 %	maximum 10 %	maximum 20 %	QS Status III

Status I
Status I can only be assigned if no D evaluation occurs.

Furthermore, the share of C-evaluations in the applicable requirements may not exceed 5%. If the 5 % limit is exceeded, status I is assigned if no more than two C valuations exist.

Status II
In status II, the proportion of C evaluations is limited to a maximum of 10% and the proportion of D evaluations to a maximum of 3%. The total share of C and D evaluations must not exceed 10%. If the percentage with regard to the proportion of D evaluations is exceeded, status II is assigned if only one D evaluation exists and no C evaluation.

Status III
In status III, the proportion of C evaluations is limited to a maximum of 20 % and the proportion of D evaluations to a maximum of 10 %. The sum of C and D valuations may not exceed 20%.

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, marking and identification of livestock, stock book) is evaluated only once in the checklist. For these requirements, the lowest result determined in the different production scopes is applicable.

Table 4: Entering the audit report into the QS database when auditing several production scopes

Requirements checklist	Evaluation production scope 1	Evaluation production scope 2	Entering the audit report into the QS database
2.1.1	A	C	C
2.1.2	A	E	A
2.1.3	E	E	E

All audited production scopes are categorised into a status together so that only one status and therefore only one date for the follow-up audit exists.

5.3.4 Audit result 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, a B to 75 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 achieved status determines the time interval to the next regular audit and the period of validity of the certificate.

Table 5: Duration of approval in the individual stages, depending on the status

Stage \ QS-Status	I	II	III
Agriculture cattle farming, Agriculture pig farming, Production, Livestock Transport	3 years	2 years	1 year
Feed sector (except matrix certification), Agriculture poultry production, Hatcheries, Agricultural coordinators, Slaughtering/Deboning (including Livestock transport), Processing, Convenience, Meat Wholesale (including broker, logistics of meat and meat products), Butchery, Food Retail (non-coordinated), System gastronomy and communal catering (non-	2 years	1 year	6 months

Stage \ QS-Status	I	II	III
coordinated), Wholesale, Logistics and Preparation/Processing Fruit, Vegetables and Potatoes Pet Food			

Stage \ QS-Status	Passed
QS-GAP	1 year
Feed sector (only matrix certification)	3 years

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.

Different audit frequencies can be determined in order to take advantage of international agreements between QS and other standard owners.

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.. 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.

If audits are failed on the stage food retail, butchery (direct point of sale) and restaurant/operation site of system gastronomy/communal catering, the follow-up audit has to be performed as a complete regular audit, at latest six weeks afterwards.

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 and confirmations

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

When issuing certificates or confirmations 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 or confirmation shall only be issued by the certification body when an eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme consists. Locations that are included on the basis of a scheme agreement in the QS scheme obtain only after the signature of the contract the eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme. 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 in accordance with the respective QS status. 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 in accordance with the respective QS status.

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 in accordance with the respective QS status. 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 audit

With an audit frequency of at least one year, the follow-up audit can be conducted up to 6 months prior to the original end of the certificate's validity. If the audit is conducted within 6 months of the end of the certificate's validity, the validity of the follow-up certificate begins with the expiry of the previous certificate. If the audit is conducted earlier than 6 months before the certificate expires, the period of validity of the new certificate is calculated on the basis of the audit date plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status.

With an audit frequency of less than 1 year, the follow-up audit can be conducted up to 1 month prior to the original expiry of the certificate. If the follow-up audit is conducted within 1 month of the expiry of the certificate, the validity of the follow-up certificate begins with the expiry of the previous certificate. If the audit is conducted earlier than 1 month before the certificate expires, the period of validity of the new certificate is calculated on the basis of the audit date plus the time interval in accordance with the respective QS status.

In deviation from this, the audit in companies in the Fruit Vegetable Potato Production stage with an audit frequency of at least one year can be brought forward by up to nine months without affecting the duration of the certificate.

⇒ Chapter 5.4: Audit Frequency

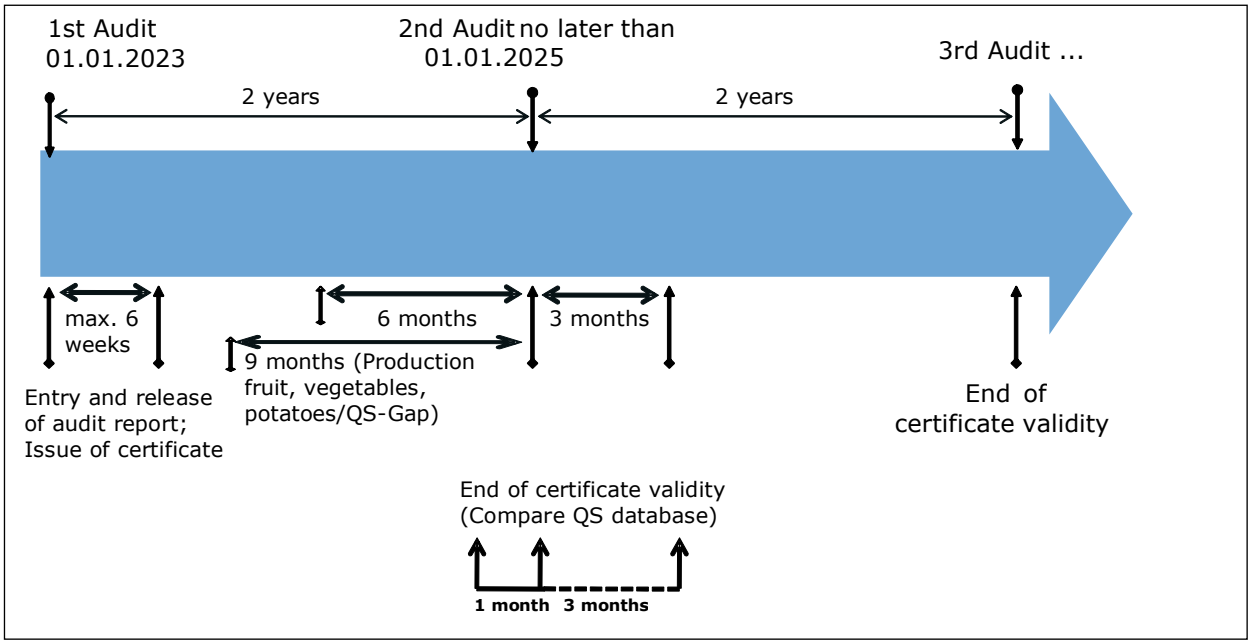

Figure 1: Illustration of the validity and, if applicable, extension of a certification (example)

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 scheme agreement by the scheme participant or by QS
- 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
- Deregistration of a location from an approved matrix (feed sector)
- Change of the certification body by scheme participant
- 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.

If the certificate of a matrix coordinator is withdrawn, the certificate of the entire matrix is withdrawn.

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 company, a new audit must be conducted when and if the company re-registers.

If a company 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 ownership, 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.

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 by the scheme participant, 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 body decides not to accept certification for matrix certification in the feed sector, the matrix coordinator and 33 per cent of the sites must be successfully audited and the audit reports submitted and released within four weeks of the certification being rejected.

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

Unannounced audits are conducted on all stages of the QS scheme. The unannounced audits can be conducted as

- unannounced regular audits or as
- unannounced spot audits between two announced regular audits or as
- unannounced spot audits between two unannounced regular audits.

A list of production scopes for which unannounced audits must be conducted is annexed to this guideline.

⇒ Annex 8.2 Unannounced Audits – Production Scopes

Initial audits can - except at the stage food retail, restaurant/operating site of system gastronomy/communal catering and in the butchery (only points of sale) - be performed announced. This applies analogue to follow-up audits in case of K.O. assessments from unannounced regular audits.

For certain types of production, it is possible to choose the way in which unannounced audits are conducted.

If there is a choice, the scheme participant determines in the database for each location how the unannounced audits are to be conducted. This determination includes all production scopes of a production branch. In the area of agriculture poultry, the respective coordinator is responsible for entering the data in the database. For companies that are integrated by QS inspection (e.g. small-scale feed material producers, mobile feed milling and mixing plants) the data are entered by the certification body.

A change from the option "unannounced spot audit with announced regular audit" to "unannounced regular audit" must be made at least 3 months prior to the expiry of the regular certification period. A change to the option "unannounced spot audit with announced regular audit" must be made at least 6 months prior to the expiry of the regular certification period, so that it is possible to conduct an unannounced spot audit before the next announced regular audit.

For the stages agriculture cattle, agriculture pig and for the standard QS production it is not possible to choose the way in which unannounced audits are conducted. Here, the audit option "unannounced spot audit and unannounced regular audit" applies for all locations.

Only the audit option "unannounced spot audit and announced regular audit" applies to the QS-GAP standard and to locations at the stages of slaughtering/ deboning, processing, convenience, preparation and processing of fruit, vegetables, potatoes as well as the pet food process chain (with the exception of PA 525 Private Labelling (pet food) and PA 530 Broker (pet food).

Procedure in the case of prompt performance of other, announced audits.
The certification body shall avoid that announced audits of other standards or scopes 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, the option "unannounced spot audit" has to be chosen. If there is no option (see above), no combined audits can be carried out in case of doubt.

5.6.1 Unannounced regular audits

Unannounced regular audits must be conducted prior to the expiry of certification. All criteria of the stage-specific checklist must be fully checked.

It is possible to notify the company in advance on individual stages in order to ensure that a person capable of providing information is present during the audit according to the following table:

- Feed sector: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Agriculture
  - Cattle and pigs: maximum 48 hours (2 working days)
  - Poultry: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
    for breeders maximum 48 hours (2 working days)
- Hatcheries: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Butchery: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Meat wholesale: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Production QS: maximum 48 hours and minimum 24 hours
- Wholesale
  - fruit, vegetables, potatoes: maximum 24 hours (1 working day)
- Food retail no advance notification
- System gastronomy/ no advance notification
  - communal catering

At the stages agriculture and production the relevant coordinators are to be informed about the upcoming, unannounced regular audit in the same time at the earliest.

In branches of the food retail, in restaurants/operating sites of system gastronomy/communal catering and in butchery (only points of sale) and the stages of agriculture cattle and agriculture pig, regular audits must be conducted exclusively unannounced. Regular audits, which are conducted according to the standard QS production, are also carried out unannounced. An overview of the relevant audit options by stage or production scope can be found in Annex 8.2 Unannounced audits - production Scopes.

5.6.2 Unannounced spot audits

Unannounced spot audits are conducted additionally between scheduled regular audits. Even if a continuation of the certification is not intended, an unannounced spot audit is carried out in the current certification cycle, if this type of auditing is selected. 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 or the status of a company. However, if a K.O. evaluation or a general K.O. 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.

This information option does not exist for spot audits at locations of the stages

- slaughtering/deboning (production scopes 30 to 35)
- processing (production scopes 41 to 43)
- convenience (production scope 83)
- preparation/Processing Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes (production scopes 85) as well as
- process chain pet food (productions scopes 505 to 520)

The spot audits in locations in these scopes take place completely unannounced, i.e. no prior contact may be made.

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. With a certificate term of six months, the time interval is at least one month.

Spot audits on the Agriculture/Production stage

Spot audits are conducted on the basis of random samples on the Agriculture/Production stage. The random sample is determined by the cut-off date of 1. July every year under consideration of the following percentages:

- Poultry: 50% of all the locations registered for spot audits by a coordinator
- Pigs: 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator
- Cattle: 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator
- Production: 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator
- QS-GAP 10% of all the locations registered by a coordinator

The number of spot audits, which have to be conducted by the certification body the respective year, can be adjusted during the year 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 except for spot audits with a focus on Animal health (see below).

Spot audits with a focus on Animal health

The certification body is obliged to carry out a spot audit with a focus on Animal health within three months of identifying the need for counselling and to enter and release it in the QS database in companies with livestock farming operations for which mandatory counselling is planned based on the results of the monitoring of slaughter diagnostic data (see Guideline Agriculture Pig Farming). In justified exceptional cases, the deadline for carrying out the audit can be extended by one month. If no audit has been released in the database by the end of the deadline, this leads to the blocking of the agricultural company for deliveries in the QS scheme.

In a spot audit focussing on Animal health, the condition of the animals in the stock in particular is evaluated using a special checklist. No single animal scoring is carried out, but conspicuous animals are collected during a sty inspection. Other abnormalities (e.g. in management, structural defects, etc.) are also collected. Finally, an evaluation is made as to whether the livestock owner has already fully remedied the abnormalities identified in the Diagnostic Data Monitoring. If this is the case, the need for counselling is cancelled. If the problems have not been completely resolved, there is still a Need for counselling. If fundamental management problems with regard to Animal health are recognisable, the Counselling obligation also remains in place.

Compared to the spot audits at the agricultural level described above, the following exceptions apply to spot audits focussing on Animal health:

- The performance of a spot audit with a focus on Animal health is also mandatory if a spot audit has already been performed for the company in the certification cycle.
- A time interval between regular audits already carried out or planned and the regular expiry of the certification period is not prescribed.
- Spot audits focussing on Animal health can be carried out at the same time as another QS audit (e.g. regular audit).
- The audit result is 'Need for counselling cancelled' or 'Need for counselling remains passed'. If the Need for counselling remains passed, the audit must be released in the QS database within two working days.
- In the spot audit focussing on Animal health, only individual requirements that are relevant in a regular audit are checked.

However, if such serious nonconformities with the requirements of the Guideline Agriculture Pig Farming are found that they would lead to a K.O. evaluation, this must be evaluated and documented in the audit report for the spot audit. Only in this case does the audit result have an impact on the status or audit frequency of a company.

⇒ Guideline Agriculture Pig farming

Spot audits on mobile milling and mixing plants

Spot audits on mobile milling and mixing plants may be conducted on a random sample basis. Here, 10% of company plants with a minimum of one plant unit is to be inspected. In the sequence of audits conducted, different plant items are to be inspected.

⇒ Annex 8.2 Unannounced Audits – Production Scopes.

Procedure in the event that a scheme participant chapses 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.

5.7 Combined QS/IFS Audit

On some stages within the QS scheme combined audits for IFS and QS can be conducted. This means that the requirements of the IFS standard and those of QS are checked in one audit. The auditor must have QS and IFS approval for the corresponding stage at the time of the audit.

On the stages slaughter/deboning, processing and convenience combined audits together with the scheme IFS Food are possible. On the stage wholesale fruit, vegetables, potatoes combined audits are possible with the schemes IFS Food, IFS Cash & Carry/wholesale. A QS audit for agencies can be combined with the audit of IFS Broker.

After the combined audit the complete QS checklist is to be stored in the QS database. On this basis a status is calculated for this location and accordingly issued an eligibility of delivery.

The combination of an IFS and a QS audit is only possible, when the audit is conducted under the same circumstances (announced or unannounced). Concerning the announcement, the stricter regulations need to be applied.

5.8 Auditing of bundles in food retail, system gastronomy/communal catering and butchery (direct point of sale)

The knowledge of a company's' self-assessment system is indispensable for the conducting of audits at centrally managed branches on the Food Retail and butchery (direct point of sale) or centrally managed restaurants/operating sites at the system gastronomy/communal catering stage. For retail or system gastronomy/communal catering companies with centralised structures, the audit of the relevant QS requirements can be divided into an audit of the head office and an audit of the branches. If a branch / restaurant/operating site / point of sale does not fulfil the criteria for approval (at least Status III) in the initial audit, a re-audit is carried out within six weeks. If QS conformity is again not found, the sample size for the entire bundle is increased to 20%. Approval of the new bundle is granted if the QS auditing of the bundled branches / restaurants / operating sites / direct points of sale is successful. Approval of the new bundle will be granted upon successful auditing of the bundled branches / restaurants/operating sites / direct points of sale by QS.

The central audits are carried out announced annually (approx. every 12 months), whereby it is at the discretion of the certification body to carry out the audit remotely. The audits are concluded with a pass/fail and there is no categorisation in status I to III.

The certification bodies must ensure that they are kept up to date with the latest requirements of self-assessment system.

Categorisation to a QS status

With multiple locations in the food retail, restaurants/operating sitesor butchery (direct point of sale) sector, categorisation to QS Status I to III is made for the entire producer group. Based on the audit results of the inspected branches / restaurants/operating sites / direct points of sale, the QS database determines the categorisation of each producer group and the resulting scope of random sampling for the following audit interval (12 months). If one branch/point of sale does not satisfy the approval criteria in the audit (minimum QS Status III), a follow-up audit is conducted within six weeks. If QS conformity cannot be determined yet again, the scope of random sampling is increased to 20% for the entire producer group during the current audit interval. Failed audits are not taken into account concerning the fulfilment of the scope of random sampling.

Table 6: Annual scope of random sampling for food retail producer groups, depending on the QS status of the average of audited branches / restaurants/operating sites / direct points of sale.

QS-Status	Annual extent of random sampling
I	10 %
II	15 %
III	20 %

Approval of a producer group
For initial approval or subsequent registration, a random sample of min. 10% of the registered locations of the entire producer group (but at least 3 branches / restaurants/operating sites / direct points of sale) is inspected. The branches / restaurants/operating sites / direct points of sale to be inspected are determined by the certification body. If this random sample confirms conformity with QS requirements, the entire producer group (e.g. group of companies, market chain) is approved. If one branch / restaurant/operating site / direct point of sale does not satisfy the approval criteria in the initial audit (minimum QS Status III), a follow-up audit is conducted within six weeks. If QS conformity cannot be determined yet again, the scope of random sampling is increased to 20% for the entire producer group. Approval of the new producer group will be granted once the branches / restaurants/operating sites / direct points of sale have been successfully audited by QS.

The audit interval starts with the date of initial approval of the producer group in the QS scheme and lasts 12 months. Subsequently registered producer groups receive the same cut-off date as existing producer groups, irrespective of the subsequent registration date. If the requested scope of audits is realised during the audit interval, approval is extended for another 12 months. The date of initial approval remains unchanged.

From the date of which the requested scope of random sampling for the current audit interval is fulfilled, a certificate for a producer group may be issued.

5.9 Matrix certification in the feed sector

For companies or groups of companies with several trading locations or with several external storage premises, as well as for companies/groups of companies that operate purely as service providers for storage and transshipment and/or transport, it is possible to carry out matrix certification under the following conditions. Several sites are certified together without each individual site having to be inspected. Compliance with the requirements is checked using a random sampling procedure (except for the matrix coordinator). Matrix certification at production sites or private labellers is not possible (see also Feed Sector Guideline).

Approval of a matrix
For initial approval, the matrix coordinator (head office) and at least 33 per cent of the matrix locations must first be successfully audited. The matrix locations to be audited are selected by the certification body on a risk-oriented basis.

The audit interval of a matrix begins on the date of the first authorization of the matrix in the QS scheme and is three years (36 months).

The matrix coordinator must be audited at least once a year (approx. every 12 months) and thus three times in an audit interval. Each matrix location assigned to a matrix must be audited at least once during the certification period. The certification body ensures the risk-orientated distribution of audits over the term of the certificate. The matrix locations audited prior to initial authorisation do not have to be audited again in the first audit interval. The matrix coordinator must be audited at least twice more in the first audit interval after initial authorisation.

If the matrix coordinator has not been audited three times within an audit interval, the approval of the entire matrix will not be extended until the required audit scope has been fulfilled. The audit counts for the audit interval for which it was repeated. The matrix location must be audited again in the following audit interval.

In addition to the provisions under 5.3.3, the following applies: If a matrix coordinator has failed an audit, the approval of the matrix coordinator and all matrix locations that are authorised to deliver via the matrix will be withdrawn by QS no later than six weeks after the failed audit if no successful result of a follow-up audit has been released for the matrix coordinator in the QS database.

If a matrix location is deregistered from an approved matrix, a successful scheme audit must be available in the QS database within eight weeks. Otherwise, the location loses its approval in the QS scheme.

Issue of certificate
Companies that have been inspected within the framework of matrix certification only receive one certificate. This certificate contains all approved locations of the matrix. The validity and term of the certificate is three years. An extension of the certificate term is not possible.

In addition, the provisions of (sub)section 5.5, in particular 5.5.4, apply.

Subsequent registration of a location for a matrix

If a location is to be included in an already approved matrix, a scheme audit must be carried out and passed at this location in order for the location to be authorised to deliver in the QS scheme. Locations that are integrated into the QS scheme on the basis of a scheme contract only receive eligibility of delivery for the QS scheme after the contract has been signed.

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, re-approval and for an extension of the QS 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 Witness 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 witness 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 a witness 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 Annexes

Annexes 8.1 to 8.2 are published as an extract.

8.1 Sample certificates and confirmations
8.2 Conduction of unannounced audits – production scopes
8.3 Evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk
8.4 Self-assessment checklist for certification bodies

Revision information version 01.01.2025

Criterion	Changes
2 Requirements for certification bodies	Renaming of chapter 2.1 Approval of certification bodies and expansion of the subchapters to include approval requirements and procedures
2.1 Approval of certification bodies	Restructuring of the chapter: previously 2.1.8 Overview of the approval procedure for a certification body; Extension: Explanation of the application procedure
2.1.1 Approval requirements and procedures	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 2.1.1 Accreditation; new: Explanation of the application procedure and the requirements for the necessary documents
2.1.2 Accreditation (QS-GAP only)	Renumbering and restructuring of the chapter: previously 2.1.2 Independence and objectivity; clarification of accreditation in relation to QS-GAP
2.1.3 Impartiality and objectivity	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 2.1.3 Organization and responsibilities
2.1.4 Organization and responsibilities	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 2.1.4 Handling of documents
2.1.5 Handling documents	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 2.1.5 Customer satisfaction analysis and complaints management
2.1.6 Customer satisfaction analysis and complaints management	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 2.1.6 Access authorization and inspection of documents
2.2 Maintaining the approval of a certification body	Deletion: Proof of accreditation or surveillance audits with the exception of the QS-GAP standard/scope.New: Annual documentation of self-assessment by the certification body (Annex 8.4 Self-assessment checklist for certification bodies)
2.3 Violations of the certification body against QS requirements	Renaming of the chapter: previously 2.3 Revocation of the approval of a certification body; restructuring of the content and consolidation of the chapter content
3 Requirements for auditors and releasing persons	Restructuring of the subchapters 3.2 Requirements for auditors to 3.6 Maintaining approval as a releasing person, and an extension of the chapter to include 3.1 Approval procedure.

Criterion	Changes
3.1 Approval procedure	Renaming of the chapter: previously 3.1 Requirements for auditors; Implementation of chapter 3.1.7 Overview of the approval procedure for an auditor; New: Differentiation between provisional and final approvals. Granting of provisional approvals to auditors and releasing persons by the responsible certification body. Definition of the maximum number of audits permitted for auditors in the initial approval for each approval stage before a chargeable witness audit by QS is required. Editorial optimization: Requirements for auditing the "preparation/processing" of fruit, vegetables and potatoes
3.2 Requirements for auditors	Restructuring and renaming of the chapter: previously 3.2 Maintaining approval as an auditor
3.2.1 Qualification	Restructuring and renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.2.1 Verification of minimum audits
3.2.2 Auditor course	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.1.2 Auditor course; Deletion: based on standards such as DIN EN ISO 9001, DIN EN ISO 19011, DIN EN ISO/IEC 17065.
3.2.3 Internal training by the certification bodies	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.1.3 Internal training by the certification bodies
3.2.4 Audit experience	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.1.4 Audit experience
3.2.5 Training by QS	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.1.5 Training by QS; new: the information event "QS for beginners" replaces the initial training by QS. For the pet food stage, subject-specific training by QS is required for new approval.
3.2.6 Specific admission requirements	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.1.6 Specific requirements for approval; new: Requirements for auditing at the stage of approval of slaughter/deboning (At least one year of experience in slaughter (industrial or artisanal) and proof of one day of training as an animal welfare officer in accordance with Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 or proof of competence in accordance with §4 of the Animal Welfare Slaughter Regulation); Requirements for auditing at the stage of pet food.
3.3 Maintaining approval as an auditor	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.2 Maintaining approval as an auditor
3.3.1 Proof of minimum audits	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.2.1 Proof of minimum audits

Criterion	Changes
3.3.2 Conducting witness audits	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.2.2 Conducting witness audits; editorial optimization
3.3.3 Annual specialized auditor training by QS	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.2.3 Annual specialist auditor training by QS
3.3.4 Proof of internal training by the certification body	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.2.4 Proof of internal training by the certification body
3.4 Revocation of an auditor's approval	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.3 Revocation of approval of an auditor
3.5 Requirements for releasing persons	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.4 Requirements for releasing persons
3.6 Maintaining approval as a releasing person	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.5 Maintenance of approval as releasing person
3.6.1 Proof of a minimum number of audit releases	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.5.1 Proof of a minimum number of audit releases
3.6.2 Evidence of audit monitoring	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.5.2 Proof of audit monitoring
3.6.3 Proof of internal training by the certification body	Renumbering of the chapter: previously 3.5.3 Proof of internal training by the certification body
4 Training and information events	Restructuring of the chapter: Integration of Table 1 in Chapter 2 Requirements for certification bodies and 3 Requirements for auditors and releasing persons
5 Rules for independent inspection	Editorial restructuring of the chapter regarding regular audits: implemented in Chapter 5.1 Regular audits
5.1 Regular audits	Restructuring of the chapter content regarding regular audits; new: requirement to use database interfaces
5.2 Conducting audits	Editorial optimization of the audit report in German and English

Criterion	Changes
5.2.1 Audit preparation	Editorial optimization of the audit plan
5.3.2 Corrective actions	Editorial optimization of the action plan
6.2 Audits of special purpose	Editorial optimization of the chapter
6.4 Office audits	New: An office audit is required for the initial approval, re-approval and extension of the QS approval of a certification body.
6.5 Witness audits	Renaming of the chapter: previously Accompaniment of audits; expansion of content and clarification regarding witness audits subject to a fee and the issuing of a written report on the results of the witness audit carried out.
7 Explanation of symbols	Renaming of the chapter: previously 7 Definitions with subchapters: 7.1 Explanation of Symbols and 7.2 Terms and Definitions; Deletion: subchapter 7.2 Terms and Definitions
8.1 Sample certificates and confirmations	Editorial optimization of the annex
8.3 Evidence/test items for criteria marked with an asterisk	Editorial optimization of the annex: Tables 1-4; new: Table 5: Specifications for requirements of the guideline for the wholesale of fruit, vegetables, potatoes.
8.4 Self-assessment checklist for certification bodies	New: Annex 8.4 Self-assessment checklist for certification bodies

Guideline
Certification

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