Policy for Development of Red Tractor Standards

1.   Background

Red Tractor is a standards organisation and the setting of standards for farmers, growers and the supply chain is at the heart of the business. Standards must be set within the context of science, legislation, international norms, experience and with the aim of balancing different stakeholder requirements. This policy document defines a framework – clarifying aims and objectives and with explanation of different roles and accountabilities within the standard setting process and with reference to the '*UK Farm Assurance Review', Llewelyn et al (2025)*.

This policy should be understood with reference to Red Tractor's Vision and Purpose:

Vision – Red Tractor's ambition is to be the pride of British food and farming, trusted by consumers, supply chain and governments

Purpose – Red Tractor exists to set standards for British food that everyone can trust

These overarching aims are relevant to all Red Tractor standards and the reputation of scheme and scheme participants are interdependent. Standard development must be informed by the need to protect reputation in-the-round. This approach must however be applied in a manner that is proportionate and appropriate to context. A different approach may be needed to achieve this ambition successfully in different sectors and within different parts of the supply chain, providing proportionality of action versus risk.

2.   Accountability

Red Tractor Technical Managers are conduits for standard development within their sector. They are the focal point for identifying opportunities to add, improve and remove standards through stakeholder engagement, horizon scanning and the monitoring of scientific research and legislation. They work with colleagues, directors, identified experts and stakeholders from all relevant parts of the supply chain to ensure standard development is informed by a representative and diverse selection of viewpoints.

Personnel within the Red Tractor governance structure (including the Sector Board and Technical Advisory Committee) ensure standards are well informed, fit-for-purpose, subjected to an appropriate level of scrutiny and coherent with the Red Tractor Vision and Purpose. The Red Tractor governance structure also ensures that standards command sufficiently broad support, can be practically implemented and are appropriate and proportionate to context of application.

The process of standard setting is one of co-design. The Sector Technical Manager is the technical writer; responsible for converting collective decisions into coherent, functional standards that may be readily understood and effectively assessed

3.   Principles for Standard Setting

a. Standards must have a reason for being
Standards exist for a definable purpose that can be clearly articulated. Should a standard not meet this expectation (or cease to do so), it should be removed at the next available opportunity. Examples of a 'definable purpose' are covered in **Annex 1** of this document. Please note that this is a list of potential reasons for a standard to exist. Personnel within the Red Tractor governance will determine where the threshold for inclusion has been met.

b. Standards are clear and comprehensible
Standards contain sufficient information to convey meaning concisely. Plain language should be used wherever possible but not at the expense of meaning and precision.

c. Standards can be practically implemented
Standards can be understood, effectively implemented and deliver clear and observable outcomes. Standards are practically achievable for businesses of all sizes.

d. Standards can be objectively assessed
Standards deliver outcomes that may be objectively verified for compliance.

e. Standards protect consumer trust in Red Tractor
Traceability is a core expectation in food chain quality standards and is identified as a pre-requisite within the FAO & WHO, *General principles of food hygiene* (Codex Alimentarius Code of Practice, No. CXC 1-1969). Red Tractor's logo and British imagery gives this topic additional resonance as verification of British provenance. Standard development is also influenced by an appreciation of the Farmed with Care foundation that underpins consumer trust in British farming standards on topics such as animal welfare. Red Tractor standards shall seek wherever practical and proportionate to reinforce and enhance consumer confidence that Red Tractor products can be traced back to Red Tractor assured farms and safeguard consumer trust in the standards those farms meet.

f. Food safety is of paramount importance
The origins of Red Tractor may be connected to food safety scares of the 1980s and 1990s. While Red Tractor research (e.g. *Trust in Food Index*) indicates UK consumers now have a high degree of confidence in the safety of British produce, we only need to look back a few decades or towards other parts of the globe to see this is not an inevitable state of affairs. Red Tractor standards should seek to protect, reinforce and – where practical and proportionate – enhance assurance of food safety.

g. Standards provide value to scheme participants through market access, protection of industry reputation, earned recognition and – where practical – competitive advantage
Red Tractor seeks to be well-informed of relevant customer and consumer expectations and have a proportionate understanding of the approaches adopted by peers and competitors. While Red Tractor cannot guarantee the most stringent standard on every topic, taken in-the-round, Red Tractor standards should provide the best overall match for meeting consumer expectation and protecting industry reputation within the domestic market (when compared to other, broad-focus, farm assurance schemes). Standard development should be mindful of Earned Recognition opportunities with government, customers and other relevant stakeholders to maximise value to scheme participants and reduce duplication. Red Tractor standards can also be a vehicle for addressing bespoke requests that exceed foundational expectations but are meaningful to specific customers and markets. In addressing such requirements,

individuals within the governance process shall be mindful of the value in facilitating segmentation where this allows early adopters to be rewarded for good practice but also aware of the potential for point-of-difference requirements to become foundational ones over time.

h. Standards deliver a due diligence foundation in an efficient manner

Documentary evidence is a core element of evidencing compliance in many professional settings and supports the credibility of Red Tractor certification as part of a due diligence defence. This delivers value for all within the supply chain and ensures Red Tractor certification is a valuable component of customer buying specifications. This documentary evidence base must be lean and efficient to avoid adding burden without value. Any documentary requirement should have a clear justification. Red Tractor will facilitate paper-free approaches wherever practical, accept alternative documentary evidence that delivers an equivalent outcome and remain open to streamlining opportunities. In principle, we should not require two bits of paper where one will suffice.

i. Standards meet the needs of the sector but are consistent across sectors where not detrimental to sector autonomy

Different sectors have differing risks and different operational realities and customer and consumer expectations. This may necessitate different standards. If there is not a clear rationale for difference, standards should be aligned across sectors to ensure the delivery of assurance is as efficient as possible for scheme participants.

j. Legislation should be covered where the topic is relevant, coherent with Red Tractor's Vision and Purpose and in the absence of valid justification for an alternative approach

Compliance with the law is a foundational expectation rather than a primary objective of assurance. An assurance scheme cannot cover all legislation and should not seek to replace the role of government and regulators. There are however often good reasons to base standards around legislation. Where a topic is relevant to the Vision and Purpose of Red Tractor and legislation provides an appropriate benchmark for 'what good looks like', this will often be a relevant reference point for standard content. This can also support Earned Recognition agreements with government agencies. We should also be mindful that effective, industry self-regulation can be a means of limiting the need for government intervention and regulation.

While legislative compliance may offer a sufficient basis for standard content, this will not always be the case. In some cases, builds upon legislation will be entirely appropriate and a demonstration that Good Agricultural Practice is an established, industry norm and not simply a consequence of regulation. We must also recognise increasing divergence between the legal frameworks of devolved nations of the UK. While it is within the gift of the Red Tractor governance process to adopt standards with different implementation by nation, this must be balanced against the benefits in clarity and consistency of having one standard for all.

k. Impact assessments are considered and used where valuable

Standard development is informed by an understanding and appreciation of the impact on scheme members of introducing new or modified standards. The need for impact assessment and approach adopted should be efficient and proportionate, protect scheme reputation and ensure that any additional costs for scheme participants are justified, practical to implement and that any associated complexity or cost is proportionate to the benefits of introduction. The correct approach will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Impact assessment may include a consideration of the depth and breadth of change required to enable compliance and – where appropriate – a consideration of the opportunity cost of not introducing a change.

l. Phased introduction of new standards is considered where practical

Options will be considered to phase in new requirements, to support businesses in achieving compliance. This may be informed by an impact assessment (see principle 11) and may be achieved through a variety of mechanisms – including where practical – introduction as a recommendation. This must be balanced against other objectives and will not be practical in all cases.

4.   Horizon scanning and drivers of change

Sector Technical Managers will liaise on an ongoing basis with stakeholders and other relevant parties, included but not limited to academics, regulators, NGOs and other schemes. Sector Boards and Technical Advisory Committees will also be provided with opportunities to participate in this ongoing process. The Sector Technical Manager is not the driver of change but is the primary conduit for identifying where change could be appropriate and beneficial. New standards proposed should have an advocate or sponsor, identifiable to stakeholders within the standard setting process. The sponsor may be a supply chain participant, the Sector Technical Manager and – in certain circumstances – an external party (e.g. a regulator). Consultation through the Red Tractor governance process provides scrutiny to ensure changes are justified, proportionate and practical.

While horizon scanning should be a live and ongoing process, maintenance of Sector Strategy provides a vehicle for ensuring this occurs in a regular and comprehensive fashion. Sector Boards should review Sector Strategy on a minimum annual basis. Within a full standard review, this horizon scanning process will feature a more direct invitation for other parties to offer views on where introducing, amending or removing standards would represent an improvement or offer increased value for stakeholders – including opportunities to prevent or limit audit proliferation.

The following graphic provides an indication of the typical process path a successful change (e.g. a new standard) would pass through before adoption.
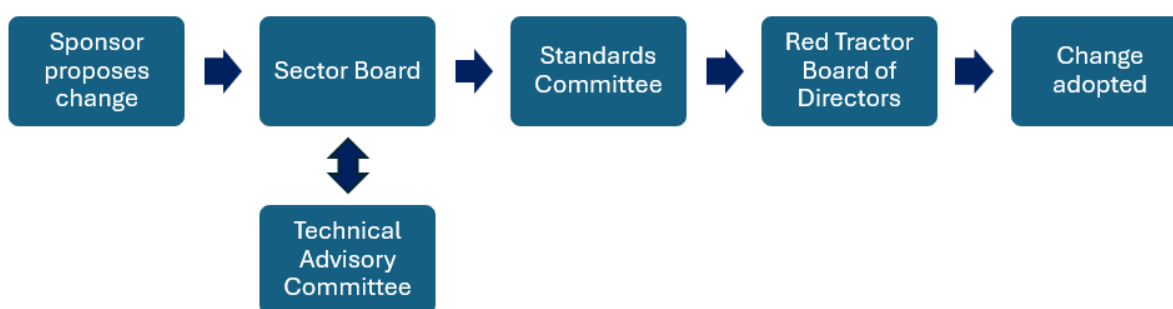
Further explanation of Red Tractor governance is provided within **Annex 2**.

5.   Timescales and Windows for Change

Standard changes require considerable time and expense to implement. Standard changes can be made – by default – just once each calendar year. This is an upper limit rather than a target. If no change is required, no changes need be made. Any decision to make more than one annual change adds unbudgeted cost to the Red Tractor accounts. In exceptional circumstances, this

may be permitted at the discretion of the Red Tractor Leadership Team and the Red Tractor Board of Directors.

6.   Interim Changes

Isolated change events that add, amend or subtract individual standards or introduce a small suite of changes constitute an interim standard change. They are most commonly applied to individual sectors but may also cover multiple sectors. Such changes will typically require scrutiny and approval only within Red Tractor's internal governance process and will be marked by a decimal point change in version number (e.g. version 2 → version 2.1). Interim changes will be informed by stakeholder engagement and horizon scanning but suggestions for change will not be proactively sought – they are made reactively, in response to an identified need. Non-essential changes may sometimes be consolidated with an interim change where this is deemed to be to the overall benefit of the scheme (e.g. removal of a redundant standard).

7.   Full Review and Version Change

A full standard review should include an appraisal of all existing standard content for continued suitability and relevance and be informed by a balanced and comprehensive appraisal of where standard development could improve the robustness, coherence and efficiency of the text – informed by broad stakeholder feedback. The final text will be approved through Red Tractor's governance process and informed by a proportionate level of wider consultation, commensurate to the amount of change proposed and as deemed appropriate by the Red Tractor Board of Directors. Completion of a full standard review is marked by a sequential change in version number (e.g. version 2 → version 3).

A full standard review may be completed individually by sector but will more commonly be completed across all sectors to facilitate cross-sector consistency. A full version change will be completed every 5-years or more frequently if a need is identified. The AFS Board or Red Tractor Leadership Team may deem it appropriate to extend the interval between version changes by a defined interval but this should be for a specified purpose. It is anticipated that a full standard review will take at least one year to complete and may require additional time (up to two years) where the level of complexity is sufficient. Any extension agreed should take these timelines into account. While change should not be pursued for its own sake, a full-scale review is an important element of ensuring the standards remain fit-for-purpose.

Annex 1 – Standards must have a reason for being

Standards may exist for multiple reasons and underpinning detail will be more bespoke. Where rationale rests upon subjective assessment, the Red Tractor governance structure is the safety valve for continued suitability.

LEGISLATION – possible examples:
- Coherence with legislation or Code of Practice where a benchmark of good practice
- Coherence with legislation or Code of Practice to support Earned Recognition
- Adherence to established legal limits (e.g. residues of medicines and PPPs)

BENCHMARKING – possible examples:
- Equivalence with another scheme or initiative to support market access
- Equivalence with another scheme or initiative to limit audit proliferation

FOOD SAFETY – possible examples:
- Preventing / reducing risk of physical contamination
- Preventing / reducing risk of chemical contamination (including residues)
- Preventing / reducing risk of microbiological contamination and viruses
- Preventing / reducing risk of allergenic contamination
- Controlling vectors of disease that are transmissible to humans (e.g. vermin)

TRACEABILITY – possible examples:
- Traceability of process inputs to support one-up/one down traceability
- Traceability of internal process to support a due diligence defence
- Traceability of process outputs to support one-up/one-down traceability
- Traceability through supply chain to enable food safety / legal issues to be effectively isolated
- Traceability of associated parts of the supply chain (e.g., transport, catchers, markets)

ANIMAL HEALTH – possible examples:
- Protecting biosecurity
- Responsible use of medicines (protecting animal welfare, limiting resistance risk)

ANIMAL WELFARE – possible examples:
- One Health Agenda (reference: https://onehealthdev.org)
- Five Freedoms / Five Domains; '*Understanding the Five Domains model of Animal Welfare', The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Science*

WORKER PROTECTION – possible examples:
- Health & Safety of people
- Fair and ethical treatment of people

TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE – possible examples:
- Professional qualifications to demonstrate competence
- CPD to maintain and update knowledge of key topics
- Specific internal or external training for tasks with significant influence on standards and compliance

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION – possible examples:
- Protecting soil health
- Minimising risk for pollution into water courses

OTHER – Alternative reason, defined on case-by-case basis and deemed as valid through the Red Tractor governance process

Annex 2 – Red Tractor governance

The schematic below offers an overview of the bodies within the Red Tractor governance process. More detailed information is available within the Red Tractor Governance Handbook: Governance - Red Tractor

RED TRACTOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair, Sector Chairs, Industry (NFU, AHDB, BRC, BMPA, BPC)Independents (Vice Chair & Consumer Interests, Vet, Finance), CEO

Brings supply chain insights and experience. Develops Vision, Purpose, Business Plan, Strategies and Objectives

Delegates the development of standards

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Vice Chair & Consumer Interests, 6 Sector Chairs, additional Independent Director (Vet), CEO, selected permanent staff

- ▶ Oversees technical strategy & operations including policies on standards development, compliance, supply chain traceability
- ▶ Agrees common positions to ensure appropriate benchmarks and to reduce audit burden & complexity e.g. for mixed farms
- ▶ Delegates sector specific strategy and standard development to Sector Boards
- ▶ Incorporates Sector Board feedback to spread knowledge transfer and promote best practice

6 SECTOR BOARDS
Representatives drawn from the entire food chain
Determines Sector Strategy and standards

6 TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES (TACS)
Representatives drawn from the entire food chain
Recommend technical standards