**Action Note 2023/11/01: Chapter 3: Exports – Veterinary Attestation**

**Purpose:**

This action note is to inform field staff of changes to the certification of ‘regular veterinary visits’ for EU exports. Action is required for all slaughterhouses exporting to the EU directly or indirectly. OVs are encouraged to read the full Q&A document drafted by DEFRA which can be found on AHDB’s Exports webpage, under ‘Veterinary Attestation Numbers’ , ‘FAQs for industry and vets’. (links included at the end of this document).

**Background:**

In January 2022, the EU’s Animal Health Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/429) introduced a new requirement for farms producing animals, products of animal origin or germinal products for exporting to the EU (or movements to Northern Ireland under the conditions of the Northern Ireland Protocol/Windsor Framework) to be subject to “regular veterinary visits”. This is implemented by Article 8(e) of Delegated Regulation 2020/692:

*“must receive regular animal health visits from a veterinarian for the purpose of the detection of, and information on, signs indicative of the occurrence of diseases, including those listed diseases referred to in Annex I relevant for the particular species and category of animal, germinal product or product of animal origin and emerging diseases.”*

The frequency of veterinary visits should be at least annual, and it is the last holding of residence that needs to meet the requirement. This has been agreed by all four UK Chief Veterinary Officers.

A temporary measure - farmer’s attestation - had to be put in place to maintain trade to the EU. Therefore, in 2022 it was agreed that farmer attestations could only be used as evidence of compliance until 13 December 2023. From this date, evidence of the veterinary visits should be passed from the veterinarian on farm to the certifying OV at the end of the food chain.

**Procedure:**

From **13th of December 2023**, this requirement can be fulfilled as follows:

1. The regular vet visit requirement is met if the farm is a member of a DEFRA [qualified assurance scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-assurance-schemes-evidence-of-vet-visits/qualifying-farm-assurance-schemes). The schemes currently recognised in this context are:
* Quality Meat Scotland (QMS)
* Red Tractor
* Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Beef and Lamb Scheme (FAWL) / (Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers Ltd (WLBP)
* Lion Quality
* Poultry Health Scheme

If farmers are part of the assurance schemes above, there is no need for further evidence to be provided while they remain a member of the assurance scheme. The slaughterhouse Food Business Operator (FBO) will verify membership details. The assurance schemes operate their own audit and compliance processes, which provide the level of confidence that assurance scheme members are meeting the requirement.

1. In England, if a farm has had an annual visit as part of the Defra Animal Health and Welfare Review Pathway scheme, then this visit will fulfil the requirement. The visiting vet will record the Vet Attestation Number (VAN) of the veterinary visit. More information can be found [here](https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2023/08/23/annual-health-and-welfare-review-making-it-easier-to-apply-comply-and-export/).
2. If the farm is not part of a recognised farm assurance scheme or receiving a Pathway vet visit (for England only), then a visit must be organised with a private veterinarian and an attestation is required from the veterinarian stating the visit has taken place. The responsibility for organising this visit lies with the farm business owner. The vet will leave a signed attestation form with the farmer which will include the VAN.

Abattoir FBOs should verify this information and assure the abattoir OV, via an agreed system that the information is correct. OVs issuing Support Health Attestations (SHAs) and/or certificates in abattoirs and along the food chain, including the export certifying OVs at the end of the chain, will be able to rely on this information. They would only carry out their own verification checks if there are specific concerns.

**VAN:**

This will be created by the visiting vet for their visits and those under the Defra Animal Health and Welfare Review Pathway scheme (England only). It will comprise of:

* The visiting vet’s RCVS number,
* County Parish Holding (CPH) number of the establishment visited,
* date of validity of the declaration.

For example: 1234567 [MRCVS number] 12/345/6789 [CPH number] 0624 [Valid to the end of June 2024].

The farmer should record the VAN on FCI documentation when an animal or animals move to market or to an abattoir. In England, the LIS sheep system will have functionality for the visiting vet to record their visit against the CPH. In Scotland, ScotEID will have similar functionality added. Both are aiming to update their system in December 2023. Abattoirs FBOs and OVs will be able to view this information, where the visiting vet has recorded the information.

However, between the 13th of December 2023 and 12th of April 2024, there will be an implementation period, to allow time for any issues to be identified and addressed in the first few months as the new approach is fully introduced. This aims to increase compliance over the implementation period. It also allows time for vets to start using the new functionality in the digital systems. During this period, farmer self-declaration can still be accepted at the abattoir, but OVs should encourage FBOs to communicate back to their suppliers and stress the point that the “implementation period” will end on the 12th of April 2024.

Even when meat from animals is not intended for export to the EU, there is a high likelihood that some of the animal products or by-products derived from them may be included in exports to the EU further down the chain. Therefore, DEFRA are strongly recommending that all farm businesses ensure a veterinary visit has taken place at their farm.

**Transfer of information from the farm vet to abattoir:**

It is the abattoir FBO’s responsibility to have a system in place to ensure all accepted animals come from premises that receive a veterinary visit. That could be a system to verify:

* farm assurance membership
* the presence of the VAN on the FCI or checking the VAN is recorded on the LIS (England) or ScotEID (Scotland) digital systems.

If the OVs suspect fraudulent use of the VAN for example, they can request the FBO to ask for a copy of the vet declaration.

**Simplified step-by-step process:**

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| 1. **Farms that are part of a qualifying assurance scheme**
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| * 1. **Farm** receives vet visits as part of the assurance scheme requirement and doesn’t need to do anything else.
	2. **Slaughterhouse (SH)** **FBOs** will verify membership of assurance schemes (usually confirmed via the FCI) as per current verification process and follow the agreed procedure to satisfy the slaughterhouse OV.
	3. **The OV at the SH** issues the SHA for the relevant products destined for export.
	4. The SHA will enable **the export Certifying OV**, to sign the EHC as required.
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| 1. **Farms that receive a Pathway visit (England only) or a separate regular vet visit.**
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| * 1. Following a visit, **the visiting vet** issues a vet declaration with a 'vet attestation number’ – VAN (or provides it on the Pathway document) *OR* records their visit on the LIS (which generates a VAN) or ScotEID platforms, as applicable.
	2. **Where the visiting vet isn’t using the digital systems, the farmer** records the VAN on all FCIs accompanying animals for slaughter. When animals go through a market, the VAN/s is/are transferred by the market on the new mart FCI to accompany the animals to SH.
	3. **SH FBOs** will verify the VAN on the FCI or on the above platforms and follow the agreed procedure to satisfy the slaughterhouse OV.
	4. **The OV at the SH** issues the SHA for the relevant products destined for export.
	5. The SHA will enable **the export Certifying OV**, to sign the EHC as required.
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**Required actions:**

* **Plant attending OVs to discuss the above with their FBOs and, by the 1st of December 2023, agree to a documented system which will ensure all animals/products intended for export to the EU come from premises that receive a veterinary visit (either by the qualified assurance scheme, via the English Pathway programme or a separate regular vet visit meeting the Art 8(e) requirements).** **The agreed procedures should be uploaded on each plant’s folder on SharePoint, in the Export subfolder.**
* All field staff to note the contents of the action note, plant attending OV to ensure that the Action note is read by all FSS staff and this is noted in the Action/Information Log.
* Print a copy for the plant file together with an Action/Information Log.

**This Action Note will be**:

* Uploaded to the Action Note Live Folder and Operations tracker log on SharePoint.
* Forwarded to Website mailbox (websiteteam@fss.scot) for publication on our website.

The Action Note will remain live until formally incorporated in the SMOC.

Copies of the live and revoked Action Notes can be found on [SharePoint](http://sgsharepoint16/sites/FSS/ops/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Home.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fsites%2FFSS%2Fops%2FShared%20Documents%2FSMOC%2FSMOC%20%2D%20Action%20Notes&FolderCTID=0x012000BE19D936AC67B044AE90EEDEB6E4B48F&View=%7B4874B561%2DB608%2D40C4%2DBE22%2DC4C905F4C7BD%7D).

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| **Action Note drafted by** | **Action Note agreed by** | **Published** |
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| **4/10/23** |  |  |

**Useful links:**

[Export or move food, drink and agricultural products - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/export-food-and-agricultural-products-special-rules)

[Farm assurance schemes: evidence of vet visits - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-assurance-schemes-evidence-of-vet-visits)

[Veterinary attestation for animal health visits (previously veterinary declaration) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/veterinary-declaration-for-animal-health-visits)

[Exports | AHDB](https://ahdb.org.uk/exports#h23)

[08/11/2023: New Vet Attestation, if not Farm Assured, from 13 December 2023 | ScotEID](https://www.scoteid.com/node/136)