AUDIT INFORMATION & EXPECTATION

QS WHOLESALE FRUIT VEGETABLES POTATOES

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Q-CERT

CONTENTS

1. GENERAL

The present certification regulation is about:

- QS Wholesale Fruit Vegetables Potatoes, current version.

1.1 Certification Options

- ***Wholesale Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes (fresh, prepared and processed products)***
  - ✓ Wholesale Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes (with product handling, eg. Storage, handling, marketing, transportation. It applies also to service providers with product handling) → all the requirements of the standard must be met
  - ✓ Agencies Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes → only the requirements marked as "A" in titles of Guideline Wholesale Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes must be met
- ***Logistics Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes***: For all Logistics companies that exclusively transport, and/or store fresh, prepared and processed fruit, vegetables, potatoes without becoming the owner of the products.

1.2 Registration Process

The applicant:

- Must submit to Q-CERT the respective application which includes all the relevant information.
- Upon registration, is committed to continuously comply with the certification requirements and inform Q-CERT for any changes to its data, as well as be informed of payments of the applicable fees determined by QS and by Q-CERT
- The contract with Q-CERT includes:
  - ✓ Sign the F-2002 Certification Contract QMSCERT.
  - ✓ In case of a Logistics client, the signing of the Declaration of Participation Logistics Service Provider Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes, is mandatory. This declaration defines points of the relation between the client, the C.B. and QS (e.g. data access, way of financial charging, conduct of audits, logo use, etc.).
- QS must first accept the client's registration for Q-CERT to be able to conduct the first regular audit.

1.3 Certification Scope

The scope of certification covers:

- *Wholesale F-V-P First-line merchant*: any company that purchases goods directly from producers and brings the goods to market for the first time.

- *Wholesale F-V-P Trading partner*: any company that operates within the market between first-line merchants and food retailers, which means that purchases its goods exclusively from upstream companies.
    - ✓ If the company purchases goods directly from producers in addition to other sources, it is classed as a first-line merchant.
- *Logistics F-V-P:* companies, that logistically handle – i.e. transport, ship, load and unload, store, pick, etc. – fresh and processed fruit, vegetables and potatoes. This incorporates all activities during delivery via lorry (road transport), short-term storage for the purpose of goods movement during delivery, long-term storage and picking.
    - ✓ Logistics companies that also pack, handle and/or prepare/process goods are classed as a wholesaler (first-line merchant or trading partner) or food preparation/processing company.
- *Agency:* companies that exclusively carry out trading and marketing activities without having direct (physical) contact with the goods. They are the owner of the purchased goods or buyer of the goods in order to further commercialization. They can act either as first-line merchants or as trading partner (as described above).

1.4 Audit delivery - Conduction of remote checks

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

However, for the following 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:

- agencies fruit, vegetables, potatoes (first-line merchant)
- agencies fruit, vegetables, potatoes (trading partner)

The decision not to carry out the audit on site must be documented in the audit report.

1.5 QS Certificate and Certification Cycle

The certificates issued by Q-CERT do not allow direct conclusions to be drawn on the approval of a client for QS. Only the information in the QS database indicates the status of the participant in the scheme.

The validity of the certificate begins with the date of certification decision. In case of initial audit, the end date of certificate validity is calculated by adding the time period which corresponds to the QS-Status achieved after the audit. For example, if the date of the initial audit is 1/1/2026 and the achieved QS-Status was I, then the end date of certificate validity is 31/12/2027 (after 2 years).

In case of follow-up audit the new period of certificate validity is calculated from the end date of the previous one by adding the time period corresponding to the achieved QS-Status.

1.6 Maintenance of QS Certification

For each client with one or more sites that have been accepted for certification, a full regular audit must be performed at specified intervals, with mandatory verification of all applicable requirements prior to the issuance of the certificate. The same applies if the client Changes C.B.

Depending on the auditing program the client has chosen, then:

- For program "Unannounced regular audits" only one unannounced full audit must be carried out before the expiration date of the certificate
- For program "additional unannounced spot audits", one announced full audit and one unannounced spot audit must be carried out before the expiration date of the certificate. The spot audit is done 2 months before or after the full audit as well as from the regular expiration of the certification period. With a certificate term of six months, the time interval is at least 1 month. The results of unannounced spot audit affect the client's QS-Status only in case of K.O. evaluations.

QS reserves the right to conduct unannounced audits (random, special or parallel) to the clients of Q-CERT, in order to verify the correct and uninterrupted implementation of QS-Scheme by the Scheme Participants.

1.7 Subsequent Audits

The coordination of the dates and timetable of the audit is done with the cooperation of the client and Q-CERT.

The achieved status determines the time interval to the next regular audit and the period of validity of the certificate.

If:

- QS-Status I→ next regular audit in 2 years.
- QS-Status II→ next regular audit in 1 year.
- QS-Status III→ next regular audit in 6 months.

Also:

- In case the audit is failed, a full regular audit must be conducted within 6 weeks.
- In case that K.O. evaluations are given during a random sample, special, parallel or spot audit, a regular audit must be carried out within a period of 6 weeks.

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

When the audit frequency is ≥1 year then the follow-up audit can be conducted up to 6 months before the expiration of the certificate. If the audit is conducted within those six (6) months, the validity of the new certificate shall be counted from the expiry of the previous one. If the audit is conducted earlier than those six (6) months, the validity of the new certificate shall be counted from the date of the audit plus the time period corresponding to the achieved QS-Status.

When the audit frequency is <1 year then the follow-up audit can be conducted up to 1 month before the expiration of the certificate. If the audit is conducted within that one (1) month, the validity of the new certificate shall be counted from the expiry of the previous one. If the audit is conducted earlier than that one (1) month, the validity of the new certificate shall be counted from the date of the audit plus the time period corresponding to the achieved QS-Status.

Important Notes:

1. Different audit frequencies may be set to consider international agreements between QS and other standard holders.

2. Q-CERT decides on the extent of the follow-up audit and has to justify this decision.

3. If the requirement evaluated with a K.O. only refers to documentation needs, Q-CERT can decide to only examine the implementation of corrective measures by means of documentary evidence.

1.8 Certification Process

Prerequisite for client's certification is the successful evaluation of a regular audit.

There are 5 types of evaluations of the scheme's requirements:

- A: The requirement is completely fulfilled.
- B: The requirement is almost completely fulfilled.
- C: The requirement is partially fulfilled
    - Corrective actions are required to a limited extent.
- D/K.O.: The requirement is not fulfilled
    - Corrective actions are required to a significant extent.
- E: The requirement is not applicable

It is not possible to assign B evaluations at individual stages of the QS scheme.

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 general K.O. is appointed:

- In the event of a break-off or a refusal of the audit by the client (regular, follow-up, spot)
- If, in the case of K.O. evaluations, the scheme participant refuses to provide suitable evidence (e.g. photographs)
- 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 client must be informed by Q-CERT 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.

The client must do the following in case of C and D evaluations:

- Propose corrective actions with implementation deadlines to the auditor.
  - For requirements marked with a hash symbol (#), a maximum correction period of 28 days applies. In the event of significant nonconformities – such as a threat to the safety of consumers, employees or the environment – the deadline must be shortened.
- Determine and rectify the causes.
- Take suitable preventive measures.
- Document the implemented measures.

Corrective actions implemented after or during the audit do not change the audit's result.

If the agreed corrective actions are not properly implemented so that the non-conformance is identified within the same requirement at the next audit, the corresponding requirement may be assessed at a lower rate.

The audit is passed, if the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations presented in the following table 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 the following table is exceeded, a requirement received a K.O. evaluation, a repeated D evaluation or a general K.O. were given. In this case, 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.

Percentage of C evaluations	Percentage of D evaluations	Percentage of C & D evaluations	QS Status
Maximum 5%	0%	-	I
Maximum 10%	Maximum 3%	Maximum 10%	II
Maximum 20%	Maximum 10%	Maximum 20%	III

Additional for each Status:

- Status I
  - ✓ No D evaluation occurs.
  - ✓ 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
  - ✓ 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.

The approval of a location will be withdrawn by QS no later than six weeks after the failed audit, if there is no successful follow-up audit present in the QS database.

In case of doubt about compliance with the requirements of the QS standard, the QS management board may give direct order for a new audit to clarify and verify any inconsistencies. Any costs that will result from such an audit shall be borne by the client if one or more serious breaches of the QS agreement or the requirements of the standard are found.

This also applies to additional customers, companies and locations if the discrepancies affect other companies in the same or another stage of the supply chain under control.

1.8.1 Combined QS audit with IFS

It is possible to combine a QS audit with an IFS audit.

In this case:

- Stage Wholesale Fruit Vegetables Potatoes is combined with IFS Food, IFS Cash and Carry / Wholesale.
- Stage Agencies is combined with IFS Broker.
- The requirements of both standards are simultaneously audited in one audit.
- The audit is carried out under the same conditions for both standards (announced or unannounced).
- Regarding the announced or unannounced nature of the audit, the strictest rules apply.

- After the combined audit, the complete QS Checklist is stored in the QS database, the status of the customer is calculated and the eligibility of delivery is issued accordingly.

1.9 Transfer of certification

The client has the right to request a change of C.B. during the period of validity of its certificate.

Q-CERT is obliged to provide all the necessary documents for the transfer of certification directly to the new C.B.

In case a company wants to transfer its QS certification to Q-CERT:

- Q-CERT is obligated to review the transferred certification within four weeks after the client has chosen it on the QS software platform
- The decision of the review must be documented in the QS software platform.
- If Q-CERT decides not to accept the certification, a new regular audit needs to be conducted as well as entered and released in the QS database within eight weeks after the change.
- If the certification is accepted, it must still be ensured that Q-CERT continues to monitor the implementation of the corrective actions or that the change of the C.B. only takes place after the complete implementation of all corrective actions.
- The regulations regarding unannounced audits have to be taken into account by Q-CERT

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

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

1.10 Evaluation Process

Before the certification audit is conducted, the following must be completed:

- The client should have available the written documentation such as the HACCP study, the Quality Management Manual, work instructions and internal audit reports.
- Q-CERT may ask for and check before the audit specific written documentation of the client.
    - ✓ Q-CERT will prepare in advance, a list of unclear or doubtful documents in order to be evaluated during the audit.
- The client's specific processes need to be thoroughly assessed at its location (during operation).

1.11 Certification Decision

Q-CERT is required to make a certification decision within 6 weeks from the date of the audit. After that deadline, the audit becomes invalid and a new audit must be carried out.

2. APPLICANT'S OBLIGATIONS

The client is responsible for:

- Registration in the QS-database, including the selection of Q-CERT as its C.B.
- Complying with all QS-Scheme's requirements.
- The complete and correct documentation of the system.
- The conduction of internal assessments.
- The correct and on-time implementation of corrective actions.
    - ✓ If the report for corrective actions is not prepared during the audit, the client must submit it to Q-CERT and its context agreed upon with the auditor within 14 days from the audit date.
- The correct use of the QS Certification and the Mark and the labelling of the products.
- Compliance with the legal provisions applicable in the country of production of the products and the country of destination.

The client must immediately inform QS, and if necessary, the authorities, in case of critical incidences regarding the QS-Scheme and product recalls from the market. Those include:

- Non-conformities that occur in the procurement of goods or during production or marketing that might pose a risk to food safety.
- Preliminary procedures that are initiated due to violation of regulations to secure food safety.
- Media research, critical media reports and public protests which are carried out and are performed directly or indirectly due to questions of food safety.

The client is responsible for entering and updating the relevant Master Data in the QS-database.

- In case of Wholesale, regarding the crisis management, the client must appoint a contact person responsible for communication of critical incidences.

Except of the Master Data for Wholesale, the client must provide information on its existing quality management and self-assessment systems as well as details of the external laboratories which it uses for product analysis.

The Client must inform Q-CERT when:

- There are changes in ownership, structure or management personnel.

- There is scope expansion.
- There is evidence which lead to the conclusion that the client doesn't fulfill the requirements of the scheme.

In case of crisis the client must grand to Q-CERT access to its premises and the necessary written documentation.

Documents and records relevant to the internal self-assessments of the client must be kept within the QS-system and stored for at least 2 years.

In case of unannounced audits:

- The client must determine in the QS-database the type of the audit for every location (regular or spot audit).
- 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.

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

The scheme applicant is approved for participation in the QS scheme with the signing of the agreement. He/she is then eligible to deliver and can be looked up in the QS database under "Scheme participant search".

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

3. Q-CERT'S OBLIGATIONS

Q-CERT must send the audit plan to the client's management before the audit day.

Q-CERT will inform the client about the visit to him in case of unannounced audit and maximum 1 working day before.

- If the client refuses to have an unannounced audit conducted, Q-CERT will decide whether the refusal is justified. The decision should be documented and presented to QS.
- In case the refusal is unjustified, Q-CERT must enter the audit in the QS database with a general K.O. The client must be notified of the possible consequences of a refusal in advance and in writing.

Q-CERT ensures that regular audits of other standards are not carried out over short distances with unannounced audits of the QS standard.

Q-CERT must enter the verification of corrective actions into the QS-database at least 4 weeks after the deadline of the implementation.

If the implementation of corrective actions is not conducted appropriately and on time, Q-CERT:

- Has to decide whether the granted certification needs to be withdrawn.
- Will inform QS about this matter.
  - ✓ the approval of the client can be withdrawn by QS, if the implementation of corrective action is not made on time.

Q-CERT will send to the client the complete audit report immediately after completion.

Q-CERT informs the client timely and in writing, if there are changes during the review of the audit report.

Q-CERT must immediately register and release the audit report in the QS-database within 2 working days when there are:

- K.O. evaluations
- General K.O.s
- Repeated D-evaluations
- Audits where the maximum permitted percentage of C and/or D evaluations is exceeded

  QS will then decide whether to initiate a sanctioning process.

Q-CERT is responsible for informing the client about the costs of the whole process, as they are determined by QS and Q-CERT. If a further visit to its premises is needed to prove the closure of a non-conformance, there may be a new charge.

Q-CERT can issue a certificate only when QS has given the “eligibility of delivery” for a client in the QS-database and has received the corresponding e-mail confirmation.

In case Q-CERT wants to end its Accreditation, or in the case it looses its QS approval, must inform its clients in writing that they have to undergo the certification process again or to transfer their certification to another C.B. Q-CERT must also inform its Accreditation Body.

Only authorized members of the system have access to the data such as the client, Q-CERT and the auditor.

4. SANCTIONS

Sanctions are imposed and communicated in writing to the client by the QS Sanction Board, an independent and neutral committee whose members are appointed by QS and who are not employees, shareholders or have other active commercial relationship with QS. The sanction process is described in detail in QS's document "Annex 5.1 Rules of sanction procedure".

In the case of severe violations, QS may immediately block scheme participants. The block lasts until the QS sanction board has reached a decision, but for no longer than a maximum of six weeks.

QS is authorized to inform the parties involved in the QS scheme about these immediate measures.

The sanctions that may be imposed are:

- Increased control frequency.
- Warning.
- Contractual penalty.
- Temporary blocking (withdrawal of "eligibility of delivery").
- Permanent exclusion (recommendation to QS regarding the termination of scheme agreement).

Temporary blocking or recommendation for permanent exclusion, are communicated to the QS database and imposed when there is:

- Willfully or grossly negligent violation or endangering of human, animal or environment or respectively of property values of other QS scheme participants or of the reputation of the QS scheme as a whole.
- Commercialization of QS products although the eligibility of delivery has been withdrawn.
- Wilfully misinformation during the registration of the relevant data for the calculation of the QS fees
- Enduring violation against the QS scheme agreement/scheme manual in spite of warning.

Any compensation claims which QS may have against the scheme participant (client) are not affected by the sanction measures.

The client can raise an objection to a decision of the QS sanction board, which has to be given towards the QS head office within 30 days after receiving the written decision of the QS sanction board. It has to be forwarded to QS in writing and must be justified.

- The objection:

- ✓ Once it has been lodged, the QS sanction board reviews its decision and notifies the client in writing of the result of this review.
- ✓ Has postponing effect.
- ✓ The decision of the sanction board becomes effective, as soon as the decision has been confirmed within the objection procedure. This does not apply, if the sanction board has decided for immediate implementation in exceptional cases. In these cases, the client has to comply with the decision of the sanction board regardless of any objection.

- Any further objection to a decision of the sanction board regarding an objection lodged by the client is not permitted.
- The option of raising an objection does not preclude the option of taking recourse to judicial review before a court of law.

5. EXTENSION OF CERTIFICATE VALIDITY – CERTIFICATE WITHDRAWAL & DECISION ON PRESERVING THE CERTIFICATE

In justified individual cases, Q-CERT 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 Q-CERT 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.

- 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.
- If the follow up audit was not passed, the extension of the eligibility to deliver ends.

Certificates must be withdrawn in the following circumstances:

- Severe violations against the scheme manual
- Exclusion of the client
- Cancellation of the scheme agreement by the client or by QS
- Notice of termination of the client to QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH
- Change C.B. by the client
- Change of standards or premature recertification

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.

Q-CERT has to decide whether or not the conduct of a new follow up audit is necessary for the purpose of preserving certification in case there are/is:

- Changes in the ownership, structure or personnel of the responsible management of the client
- A scope extension
- Any other information which allows the conclusion that the company may no longer satisfy requirements

6. USE OF CERTIFICATION MARK

The client can use the QS certification mark when is permitted to him through the QS contract system both on the product itself and in accompanying documents and in information and promotional material, as determined in "Style guide for the QS certification mark".

The client may sell his products to resellers as products from QS certified companies or describe their products as such in the accompanying documents only if the reseller is a QS Scheme Participant. In justified cases there may be deviations from this rule if the reseller is expected to stop advertising or actively marketing these products as QS within his own business transactions and communications with his clients. Then the accompanying product documents should not be described as QS.

The use of the QS certification mark is included in the QS participation fee.

The model of the material on which the QS certification mark will be used must be approved by QS prior to printing.

The necessary print data (samples of shapes, colors, etc.) are available in the protected area of the QS website for the Scheme Participants.

For justifiable reasons, QS may, upon request, approve different ways of presenting the certification mark (color, size, language). The client must be able to demonstrate this approval during the audit.

The use of the QS certification mark must not be misleading for the consumer:

- The QS certification must be maintained across all stages of the production of the product (inside and outside the processes of the client)

- In multiple product labelling/presentation it must be made clear to which product the QS certification marks refers.

Revision No:	Revision Date	Nature of Change	Approval
0	3/11/2017	Original Issue	RG/VN
1	28/03/2018	Changes in wording	VN/KP
2	5/12/2018	Update due to new scheme version	VN/KP
3	18/12/2019	Update due to new scheme version 01.01.2020	KP/VN
4	22/12/2021	Update due to new scheme version 01.01.2022	KP/VN
5	23/12/2022	Update due to new scheme version 01.01.2023	KP/VN
6	21/12/2023	Update due to new scheme version 01.01.2024	KP/VN
7	23/12/2024	Update due to new scheme version 01.01.2025	KP/VN
8	22/12/2025	Update due to new scheme version 01.01.2026	KP/VN