**SQC**

**LEAF Marque**

**Press release**

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**SQC streamlines LEAF audits for Scotland’s oat growers**

Scottish Quality Crops (SQC) is delighted to announce that LEAF Marque certification will be offered to its members alongside the annual audit from April 2023. Delivered through its sole certification body, Food Integrity Assurance (FIA), this can, if required, be carried out jointly with other farm assurance schemes to avoid duplication.

This will be significant for farmers in Scotland growing for Quaker Oats, who are working towards becoming LEAF-Marque certified, the global assurance scheme that recognises more sustainably farmed products, as part of a partnership between PepsiCo and LEAF.

Managing Director of SQC, Teresa Dougall, said:

*“There are over 100 farmers in Scotland growing for Quaker Oats, who are all working towards LEAF Marque certification. One of the key asks of our members is to minimise the time and pressure of audits, and as part of this commitment to growers we are delighted to now be able to offer this service through FIA to streamline LEAF Marque audits into one assessment where possible.”*

LEAF Marque is widely used and, in some cases, required by large retailers. It demonstrates the robust envi­ron­men­tal and busi­ness commitment of individual business through Integrated Farm Management, a whole farm approach that includes soil and water management, pollution control, energy efficiency, landscape conservation and community engagement.

LEAF and PepsiCo are working together to provide Quaker Oats farmers with the tools, data and support needed to enhance sustainable growing practices.

Phil Skentelbery, Certification Body Manager for LEAF Marque, said:

*“LEAF and Quaker share a commitment to helping farmers reduce their environmental impact through championing more sustainable, regenerative farming practices in the UK. Since the end of 2021, we have been working together with their oat growers to help them achieve LEAF Marque certification, accelerating their farming approaches to the next level of sustainable excellence in areas such as soil and water management, energy efficiency, waste management, and biodiversity.*

*“We are delighted to be partnering with Scottish Quality Crops to deliver a more streamlined and joined up auditing process. By working together, we have a significant opportunity to deliver more sustainably grown oats to consumers, which will feed into the wider Scottish farming industries commitments towards reaching net zero and enhancing biodiversity.”*

Stephen Sanderson, General Manager of FIA, which was established in 2022 by the agricultural cooperative SAOS to offer an engaged, more efficient auditing service, said:

*“We are pleased to now be approved to certify for LEAF Marque which fits perfectly with our mission to support, develop and build on Scotland’s key credentials of truly sustainable food production that is climate-friendly and enhances our unique rural environment. Our priority is to provide a service that focuses on true collaboration with Scottish farmers and producers, adding value to the auditing process.”*

75% of Quaker Oats are grown within a 100-mile radius of the Cupar Mill in Fife, Scotland. Fife grower, John Hutcheson, one of the founding members of producer organisation Oat Co, says a ‘one hit audit’ is very welcome:

“*I am also pleased to see it delivered by FIA, as part of the trusted, producer orientated SAOS*.”

He adds that the metrics that LEAF Marque provides, which holds international standing, should ensure growers secure value as they help customers meet their sustainability goals:

*“Customers are increasingly seeking to illustrate their environmental commitments, but as we take measures as growers to meet their goals - which can incur a cost at farm level, whether it’s taking land out of production or completing more audits - we need to ensure that value is delivered back to us to recognise and reward sustainable practices. The certification is currently for oats, but with whisky distillers also looking at this, it could in time extend across all cereals.”*

Any producer wishing to join the LEAF Scheme should contact the FIA office on 0131 609 0558 or via email: info@foodassurance.co.uk

**Editors’ notes:**

* **Scottish Quality Crops (SQC)**

SQC is the assurance body for cereal growing in Scotland to provide industry and consumers with confidence that cereals produced for the food chain are not only fully traceable and managed to safeguard food safety but also focus on the increasingly important sustainability requirements of the sector. Food Integrity Assurance was appointed in 2022 to carry out the audits, from the assessments through to the provision of certificates for the schemes that SQC currently operates. **For more on FIA see** [**https://saos.coop/what-we-do/food-integrity-assurance-scheme/**](https://saos.coop/what-we-do/food-integrity-assurance-scheme/)

* **LEAF Marque:** The principles of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) underpin the requirements of LEAF Marque certification, as set out in the LEAF Marque Standard. IFM is a whole farm business approach that delivers more sustainable farming. Modern technology and traditional methods are used with the goal of delivering a prosperous farming that enriches the environment and engages local communities.

A farm business managed to IFM principles will demonstrate site-specific and continuous improvement across the whole farm including: Organisation and Planning, Soil Management and Fertility, Crop Health and Protection, Pollution Control and By-Product Management, Animal Husbandry, Energy Efficiency, Water Management, Landscape and Nature Conservation and Community Engagement.