



Quality assurance. From farm to shop.



QS-Report Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes 02/2018



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Hygiene at harvest

QS Advisory Board discusses requirements for field toilets

Cleanliness and hygiene during harvesting have always been the focus of QS requirements in the production of fresh fruit and vegetables. They are essential to prevent pathogenic germs from entering foodstuffs during harvesting via various channels. QS still sees a need for action with regard to the specification of guidelines for toilet facilities made available to harvest workers and has taken up the topic with the Advisory Board.

“Clean, easily accessible and sufficient toilets during harvesting are indispensable to avoid possible risks of product contamination”, explains **Wilfried Kamphausen**, responsible for Fruit, Vegetables and Potatoes at QS. Compared to other standards, QS already has some of the strictest requirements in this respect. Serious deviations found as part of a QS audit are consistently assessed with a K.O. What has been lacking to date, are concrete guidelines for the number and accessibility of the toilets. Although the requirements for „appropriate distance“ and „clean condition“ are laid down in the QS Production Guidelines, there have been no minimum numbers until now. **“Experience shows that only clean and easily accessible toilets are used properly. The number of toilets provided also has a decisive influence on their state of hygiene”**, says Kamphausen. This is also confirmed by the feedback of the

auditors, who welcome precise specification regarding the distance and number of toilets.

STANDARDS IN COMPARISON: VERY DIFFERENT REQUIREMENTS

A look at other standard owners shows that there are certainly differences with regard to the requirements for field toilets: in some cases no precise regulations have been implemented, in others guide values are given for the distance between the toilets and the workplace. For example, the toilets must not be more than 500 metres from the workplace and the walk must not exceed seven minutes. For the number of toilets per harvest worker, reference is made to legal regulations. In Germany, the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin - BAuA) issues regulations for this purpose within the framework of the Workplace Ordinance, also for outdoor areas. To what extent these can be applied with regard to field toilets for harvesters and which requirements should ultimately apply to QS producers will be discussed at the next QS Advisory Board meeting. **“This is an important step towards achieving a more uniform level and avoiding disproportionate assessments. It is important to us that practicability and a certain flexibility are guaranteed”**, stresses Kamphausen.

Dear Readers,

There are few industries that are as dependent on foreign labour as fruit and vegetable production. Every year around 300,000 seasonal workers come to Germany from abroad. The prevailing working and social conditions for foreign seasonal workers occasionally generate public debate. Using the QS social module FIAS, producers can check their provisions regarding appropriate working and social conditions and have it documented for the benefit of third parties. On page 2 we present a FIAS-approved producer who talks about his view on how to deal with harvest workers. He also reports on how he has solved the issue of field toilets. The QS Advisory Board is currently working intensively on this topic and is working on concrete requirements for distance and number (p.1).

We wish you interesting reading. Your QS-team.



PRODUCERS WELL POSITIONED IN TERMS OF HARVEST HYGIENE

In order to increase awareness of the issue of occupational hygiene management, QS started carrying out random sample audits with the focus on harvest hygiene in 2015. The results of this year's hygiene audits prove that QS producers are conscientiously implementing the hygiene requirements. At 27 randomly selected farms, which mainly cultivate asparagus or strawberries, auditors checked whether the QS hygiene requirements were being implemented, the operational hygiene instructions were being followed during the harvest and that the harvest workers were receiving appropriate training. The gratifying result: all audits were passed, at 17 companies without any objections (i.e. without any C or D evaluations). **"The results show that hygiene is already a high priority",** stresses **Dr. Annette Förchler**, responsible for Production at QS. **"In the hectic harvest period, however, it is easy to lose sight of the details. So we can be sure that hygiene requirements are also being implemented during the harvest, we recommend that companies take all necessary steps ahead of the harvest".** ■



The **inspection focus of the QS hygiene audits** is on the implementation of operational hygiene management. In particular, it should be checked whether

- the general hygiene requirements are being implemented within the operation,
- the employees used for harvesting are given instructions and trained with regard to hygiene requirements,
- the harvest workers correctly implement the operational hygiene instructions,
- field toilets are available and are used and hand hygiene is observed.

Report: Böckmann Strawberries

Best harvest results thanks to satisfied employees

Around 140,000 tonnes of strawberries were harvested throughout Germany this year - although the strawberry farmers had to contend with prolonged high temperatures and exceptional dry spells this year. Nearly two thirds of the harvest is harvested in the federal states of North Rhine-Westphalia (30,000 tonnes), Lower Saxony (28,000 t) and Baden-Württemberg (21,500 t). One of Lower Saxony's largest strawberry producers, Böckmann Erdbeeren, is located in Ostercappeln near Osnabrück. Family Böckmann employs 250 staff at his company at busy times, who harvest 100 million strawberries per season. One thing is particularly important to him: appropriate working and social conditions.

For decades the Böckmanns have been producing first-class strawberries for well-known trading houses – Europe-wide. The company is a family business. Farm manager **Heinz Böckmann** remembers: **"Until 1975 my parents grew vegetables in Melle-Neuenkirchen. A year later they decided to switch to strawberries. In 1977, I set up my own business in the Osnabrück area and the first strawberry fields were created"**. Since then the business has grown rapidly. **"In the beginning we grew strawberries on 5 hectares. Today it is 62 hectares"**, says Böckmann proudly. His secret to success? Quality **"We do not compromise on quality - we live from our customers remaining loyal to our strawberries and buying them again and again"**, explains Böckmann. QS certification needs to be in place here. **"With QS we have been using a recognized standard since 2005, which not only works in our favour from a marketing point of view, but also serves as the basis for good professional practice"**, says Böckmann.

EMPLOYEES ARE OUR GREATEST ASSET

Böckmann's fields are harvested from May to September. First in the poly-tunnel, later in the open fields. Numerous employees and seasonal workers are involved in the harvest. All year round, a regular team makes sure the harvest is guaranteed for the following year. Practical protective mechanisms such as the use of fleece and polythene covers as well as good theoretical knowledge of plant biology and meteorology are indispensable tools. In the summer months, the team is supplemented by around 400 seasonal employees

who help with harvesting and logistics. The numerous harvest helpers are housed in a residential complex built by Böckmann in 2010. They have everything they need for their well-being - even TV channels in their mother tongues and Skype facilities to keep in touch with their families who have stayed at home. Heinz Böckmann is convinced: **"No machine can harvest and sort the fruits as carefully as the employees. They are our greatest asset! When you work with good, satisfied employees who feel comfortable and who are properly rewarded, you achieve the best output"**. Providing this care



really pays off. Many employees have been loyal to the Böckmanns for over 20 years. Böckmann confirms its exemplary corporate social management by voluntarily participating in the QS Inspection of Working and Social Conditions (FIAS). **“With the QS social module, I have the opportunity to have my provisions for appropriate working and social conditions checked in an independent inspection and documented for the benefit of third parties”**, says Böckmann. And how did he solve the much discussed problem of field toilets?

“At the beginning of the season I set up mobile toilet blocks”, says Böckmann. For the farmer it is a matter of course that there are sufficient and regularly cleaned toilets in reachable distance: **“Hygiene is very important to us. This includes that a hygiene training in the national language is carried out with the employees before starting work. Hand washing facilities, soap and towels are provided at the toilets and it is taken care of by the foremen that they are also used - a must for every food processing company”**. ■

With the **QS social module FIAS**, scheme participants have the opportunity to have their provisions for appropriate working and social conditions checked in an independent audit and documented for the benefit of third parties.



QS strengthens international presence

Extended range of events and services for foreign scheme participants

More and more foreign companies are deciding to participate in the QS scheme. In particular from Italy, Spain and the Netherlands, QS is currently receiving numerous requests to participate in the scheme. QS is expanding its range of services and events to provide foreign producers, coordinators, auditors and certification bodies with even better information about the services within the QS scheme and the possibilities of participating in the scheme.

INFORMATION EVENTS FOR COORDINATORS, WHOLESALERS, LOGISTICS COMPANIES AND CERTIFICATION BODIES

will focus on general information on the QS scheme and in particular recognition of the GLOBALG.A.P. Option 2 certificates. An information event is planned for the end of 2018 in Italy.

WEBSITE AND DATABASE IN SPANISH

As an additional service for Spanish scheme participants, a Spanish version of the QS company website will be launched shortly. The QS database will also be available in Spanish from next year

TRAINING SERIES ON CORRECT SAMPLING

In order to support QS coordinators and wholesalers in carrying out the correct sampling, QS will conduct training courses on sampling for QS residue monitoring in winter 2018 and spring 2019 in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Germany. In a theoretical and practical part, the participants will learn clearly and practically what is important when sampling fruit and vegetables. In addition, typical errors and potential sources of contamination during sampling will be identified. Representative and expert sampling is a basic prerequisite for obtaining correct analytical results in residue monitoring.

COOPERATION WITH FOOD EXPERTS S.L.

DQS residue monitoring and the topic of sampling training are also the focus of a cooperation between QS and Food Experts S.L. Against the background of further optimisation of QS residue monitoring, the Spanish sampling institute is evaluating the current requirements. In addition, Food Experts S.L. will in future support QS in the implementation of sampling training abroad.

QS AT THE ICOP IN ROTTERDAM

The ICOP (Rotterdam, 21-23 November 2018) is one of the most important international meetings for the fruit and vegetable industry. This year QS is

represented for the first time with an information stand at the congress in the Netherlands.

COOPERATION WITH EUROFRUIT

From September 2018 QS will present the QS scheme along the entire fruit and vegetable production chain in cooperation with the international magazine Eurofruit. A five-part series explains which requirements apply to the individual stages of the scheme chain. Eurofruit is the leading marketing magazine for fresh fruit and vegetables in Europe. With a print readership of 8,500 subscribers and an online reach of more than 63,000 readers, the magazine reaches industry decision-makers across Europe. ■





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New technologies in plant research

QS Advisory Board visiting research centre in Jülich

What is modern plant research working on to contribute to solving global mega-trends such as food security, climate change and bio-economics? Which technical innovations of today's research, for more yield with greater efficiency in the use of water and nutrients, less impact on the environment and better adaptation to future climate conditions, will be found in actual practice in the medium term? These are just a few of the questions that were intensively discussed during the visit of the advisory board at the Institute of Plant Sciences of the Jülich Research Centre.

Prof. Ulrich Schurr, Chairman of the QS Science Fund Fruit, Vegetables, Potatoes, explained in detail what consequences the increasing population on our planet will have for plant production: in the period from 2010 to 2050 the same amount of biomass will have to be produced as in the entire history of mankind beforehand. At the same time, the area for plant or crop production cannot be increased. New sensors, automation and robotics as well as digitization offer innovative options for finding solutions to these urgent questions. Completely new possibilities will be available for both cultivation and plant management in years to come. Genetics and physiology are becoming increasingly intertwined: with state-of-the-art genome sequencing techniques and innovative approaches to plant physiology. Today in Jülich, for example, tomographic methods are now used in research that were previously only seen in medicine: magnetic resonance tomography and positron emission tomography (PET) are now common instruments in hospitals. At the Jülich Research Centre, they are used to examine root systems. Without having to dig out the roots, it is possible to study their development, the emergence of diseases and the dynamics of water and nutrient uptake. Such results are then processed further by growers and plant producers to select more efficient plants with higher yields and develop effective plant management.

„Industry 4.0“ is not usually associated with plant research, but networking and digitization of production does not even stop here. For example, researchers in Jülich are

using autonomous robots to survey natural diversity as well as breeder-relevant populations. For the advisory board and Prof. Schurr, one thing is important: not only grain is processed here, but data on fruit, vegetables and potatoes can also be collected using these modern methods. In addition to high-tech in the greenhouse, drones, robots and various digitization methods are increasingly being used out in the field. For example, researchers are measuring the development of stock structures over time. The researchers are not content with today's level of high-tech: new projects are combining robotics, digital analysis methods (e.g. machine learning and modelling) with the excellent knowledge of plants, soils and environmental monitoring. The economic research being conducted in parallel has the goal of showing the ways, which advantages these new methods offer the practitioner, how

they can be put into practice more quickly, and which consequences they will have in the working world.

One thing is clear following the visit to the Research Centre in Jülich: there are many innovations in the researchers' pipeline; if Germany wants to remain fit for the future, science and practice must work together to implement these options in products and applications. The QS Science Fund will also make a small but important contribution in this regard: because practice and science must be able to speak with one voice. ■



News in brief

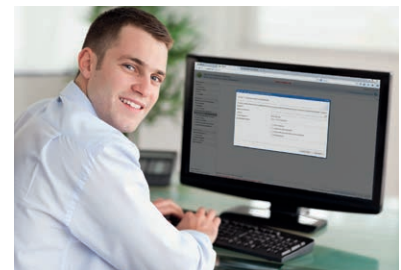
SUSTAINABILITY: QS-GAP ACHIEVES GOLD STATUS AT SAI

In the first half of 2018, the Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) of the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform (SAI) for QS-GAP was carried out. The SAI platform is a global initiative on the part of food companies. It develops tools and guidance to support global and local sustainable procurement and agricultural practices and conducts benchmarking with standards organisations in the sector. The result for QS-GAP: in combination with German legislation, gold status is achieved. In combination with European legislation, QS-GAP achieves silver status. The detailed benchmarking has been published on the FSA website. ■



QS DATABASE - NEW LOGIN OPTION FOR SCHEME PARTICIPANTS

Information and data protection are very important to QS. In order to enable QS-certified farmers and producers to have a picture of what kind of monitoring and audit data about their farms are stored in the QS database, they will in future be able to have their own access to the QS database. Up to now, this was only possible via the coordinators. From September, the login details will be sent by e-mail via the respective coordinators. ■



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