Responsible Down Standard 3.1
Certification Procedures

RDS-102-V3.1-2020.06.01
The RDS Certification Procedures 3.1 replace the RDS Certification Procedures 3.0 and ASR-105-V1.0 Textile Exchange Multiple Certification Policy, and are effective as of June 1, 2020. All audits conducted after September 30, 2020 or using RDS 3.0 shall be conducted using RDS Certification Procedures 3.1.

English is the official language of the Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures. In any case of inconsistency between versions, reference shall be made to the English version.

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The RDS will undergo a revision process at least every five years. The RDS Certification Procedures will typically be revised alongside the RDS. The next revision is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2023. You may submit feedback to the standard at any time; send to ResponsibleDown@TextileExchange.org. Points of clarification may be incorporated into RDS guidance documents prior to 2023. More substantive feedback or suggested changes will be collected and reviewed as part of the next revision of the standard.

Document Revision History

Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures 3.0, released January 2020
Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures 3.1, released June 2020
Note: V3.0 is the earliest version of this document in order to align with versions of the RDS.
Section A - General Information

A1. About the Responsible Down Standard

The Responsible Down Standard (RDS) is an international, voluntary standard that addresses animal welfare in the duck and geese supply chain and chain of custody of down and feather material from certified farms to the final product.

Individual sites are certified by independent third-party certification bodies using annual audits. Material is tracked from the farm to the final product using transaction certificates, following the requirements of Textile Exchange’s Content Claim Standard (CCS). For more information, please visit: ResponsibleDown.org.

A2. About Textile Exchange

The Responsible Down Standard is owned and managed by Textile Exchange. Textile Exchange is a global non-profit that works closely with our members to drive industry transformation in preferred fibers, integrity and standards and responsible supply networks. We identify and share best practices regarding farming, materials, processing, traceability and product end-of-life in order to reduce the textile industry’s impact on the world’s water, soil and air, and the human population.

A3. About the Certification Procedures

The RDS Certification Procedures present normative requirements for accreditation bodies and certification bodies which are specific to the Responsible Down Standard. These requirements are in addition to the requirements for all Textile Exchange standards, which can be found in ASR-101 Accreditation and Certification Procedures for Textile Exchange Standards.

Section B - References

B1. Terms and Definitions

Refer to TE-101 Terms and Definitions for Textile Exchange Standards and Related Documents for definitions of terms used in these procedures. Defined terms are shown in italics in the first usage in this document, and in some other uses for clarity.

B2. Reference Documents

The following documents are key documents for conducting RDS certification. It is essential that they are used alongside this document.

1. RDS-101 Responsible Down Standard
2. RDS-201 RDS User Manual
3. RDS-301 RDS Logo Use & Claims Guide
4. ASR-101 Accreditation and Certification Procedures for Textile Exchange Standards ("ACP")
5. CCS-101 Content Claim Standard
6. TE-101 Terms and Definitions for Textile Exchange Standards

References to "ACP" refer to requirements in ASR-101-V2.0 Accreditation and Certification Procedures for Textile Exchange Standards, and references to "AW" refer to animal welfare requirements in RDS-101-V3.0 Responsible Down Standard.

Section C - Requirements for Accreditation Bodies

C1. General Requirements

C1.1 Assessor Qualifications

C1.1.1 In addition to the assessor qualifications listed in ACP C3.1.2, assessors shall have training and/or experience with waterfowl farms and slaughter sites.

Section D - Requirements for Certification Bodies

D1. General Requirements

D1.1 Personnel Qualifications

D1.1.1 In addition to the auditor qualifications listed in ACP D3.1.5-8, auditors and certification decision makers shall have training and/or experience with waterfowl farms and slaughter sites. This may be demonstrated through shadow audits, trainings, or approved courses.

D1.2 Data and Reporting

D1.2.1 The certification body shall report all findings of live plucking to Textile Exchange immediately, including the farm name, region, scope certificate identification and a summary of findings. Textile Exchange may share the farm name and region with other certification bodies, who shall treat this information as confidential.

D1.2.2 The certification body shall report the following information to Textile Exchange quarterly. Data shall be reported in a format specified by Textile Exchange or in an alternate format which has been approved by Textile Exchange. This data is considered to be confidential and will only be made publicly available in aggregate.

a. For Individual Farm and Farm Group Certification:
   i. Name and address of each certified farm;
ii. Number of birds per year on each certified farm; and
iii. Maximum number of birds at one time (capacity) on each certified farm.
b. For Farm Area Certification:
   i. Identification of each certified area;
   ii. List of collectors;
   iii. Estimated number of birds in the area;
   iv. Estimated number of small farms in the area;
   v. Estimated volume of down produced in the area;
   vi. Justification of the base audit time for each area; and
   vii. Estimated number of contract slaughter sites in the area.
c. For slaughter sites:
   i. Number of RDS ducks slaughtered; and
   ii. Number of RDS geese slaughtered.
d. An aggregate report of non-conformities identified and exemptions granted for each AW requirement, which includes the type of certification (Individual Farm, Farm Group, Farm Area, or slaughter site).

D1.2.3 The certification body shall, on a quarterly basis, provide an anonymized report for each certified farm (Individual Farm or Farm Group) and each farm audit (Farm Area) which includes the following:

a. Type of audit (Individual Farm, Farm Group, or Farm Area);
b. Country and state/province where relevant;
c. Number of birds: total capacity and annual number, by species group (white duck, grey duck, white goose, grey goose);
d. Age of outdoor access (days);
e. Mortality rate (% per flock, prior to slaughter);
f. Number of birds euthanized per year;
g. Age of birds at slaughter (days); and
h. Distance between farm and slaughter site (kilometers).

D2. General Auditing Requirements

D2.1 Farm Auditing Requirements

D2.1.1 The certification body shall request information needed to follow biosecurity measures prior to the audit. All biosecurity measures shall be followed to ensure the auditor is allowed to enter the farm without risk of spreading disease.

D2.1.2 In relation to AW 5.7.3,

1 State or province shall always be included for farms in Canada, China, Russia, and the United States.
a. the certification body shall conduct confirmation visits for a minimum of 10% of goose parent farms annually, calculated at the level of the scope certificate.

b. in cases where the certification body believes parent farms are live plucking or where there is known live plucking in the region, the sampling rate for confirmation visits shall increase to at least 50% of parent farms annually.

D2.1.3 In relation to AW 3.13, the certification body may limit the evaluation to worker training and tools on the farm to enable euthanasia (see also AW 5.3.6 & 5.4) until June 30, 2021. Effective July 1, 2021, the certification body shall require records to show that euthanasia is practiced as required by the standard.

D2.1.4 In relation to AW 6.8, the certification body may limit the evaluation to worker training and a timeline for stunning at the slaughter site (see also AW 6.1) until June 30, 2021. Effective July 1, 2021, the certification body shall require stunning to be practiced as required by the standard.

D2.2 Slaughter Site Auditing Requirements

D2.2.1 All sites where slaughtering of waterfowl occurs shall be considered to be slaughter sites, except for small farms included in a Farm Area Certification.

D2.2.2 Slaughter site requirements shall be evaluated for the entire facility and not limited to birds from RDS certified farms.

D2.2.3 For Farm Area Certification,

a. Slaughter sites which sell to collectors shall be identified and included in the audit;

b. Auditors shall ask farms about local contract slaughter sites (both which do and do not provide service to the farm) during audits and confirmation visits; and

c. Contract slaughter sites are exempt from auditing, provided that they do not also sell down to collectors.

D2.3 Critical Practices and Non-Conformities

D2.3.1 When a critical non-conformity is issued to a farm for an animal welfare requirement, the certification body shall:

a. Immediately remove the farm from the scope certificate or suspend the scope certificate;

b. Notify Textile Exchange with the farm name, region, scope certificate identification, the requirement, and the date the non-conformity was identified;

c. Notify the scope certificate holder, if held by a different company; and

d. Not permit the farm to be recertified (including lifting the suspension or rejoining the group) until the later of
i. 180 days from the date the critical non-conformity was identified, and

ii. After a complete turnover of the birds present on the farm (i.e. the farm has a new flock).

NOTE: D2.3.1.d still applies to a farm if the scope certificate is suspended and the suspension is lifted or the scope certificate re-issued during the specified time.

D2.3.2 When a critical non-conformity is identified during a Farm Group or Farm Area audit, the certification body shall identify the scope certificate as high risk and shall increase sampling for the current audit accordingly if a low or medium risk designation was in place.

D2.3.3 When two or more critical non-conformities are identified during a Farm Group or Farm Area audit, a critical non-conformity shall be issued to the organization/ICS and the scope certificate shall be suspended. A full audit at high risk level sampling which results in no critical non-conformities being issued shall be conducted before the organization may become certified again.

NOTE: Two critical NCs may be issued to two farms for the same animal welfare requirement, to two farms for different animal welfare requirements, or to the same farm for different animal welfare requirements.

D2.3.4 If live-plucking is observed during a confirmation visit to a parent farm for F1.5, the certification body shall report its findings to Textile Exchange and issue a major non-conformity to the organization. The organization’s corrective action plan shall include either a confirmation that live-plucking on the parent farm has ceased or that the parent farm is no longer a supplier of eggs or hatchlings to the RDS certified farm before the non-conformity may be closed. The certification body should conduct a follow-up confirmation visit to confirm the corrective action plan is in place.

D2.3.5 If live-plucking is observed during a parent farm audit for the Parent Farm Certification module the certification body shall report its findings to Textile Exchange and issue a major non-conformity to the organization, as well as a critical non-conformity to the parent farm. The organization’s corrective action plan shall include either a confirmation that live-plucking on the parent farm has ceased or that the parent farm is no longer a supplier of eggs or hatchlings to the RDS certified farm before the non-conformity may be closed.

D2.3.6 The certification body shall not issue an Individual Farm Certification to a farm where a critical non-conformity has been issued, and where the required waiting time defined in D2.3.1.d has not been completed, and shall not allow such a farm to be included in a Farm Group or Farm Area Certification.
D2.4 Multiple Certification

D2.4.1 A farm may be part of more than one scope certificate, including one Individual Farm Certification or one or more Farm Group Certifications. A slaughter site may be part of multiple Farm Group Certifications.

D2.4.2 The same certification body shall issue all scope certificates which cover a specific farm or slaughter site, and the certification body shall conduct a separate audit per scope certificate.

D2.4.3 Auditing of volume reconciliation shall take into account all of the down sales from the farm or slaughter site, including down sold as non-RDS and down sold under another RDS scope certificate.

D2.5 Risk Assessment Process

D2.5.1 Prior to each audit, the certification body shall conduct a risk assessment and assign a risk level for each scope certificate following the process in ACP Appendix C. The following risk table shall be used. For Farm Group Certification, the certification body may divide the farms into multiple subgroups for the purposes of risk assessment and sampling. For Farm Area Certification, the risk assessment shall be conducted for each area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope Certificate History (N/A for initial audits)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous audits found live-plucking or force-feeding</td>
<td>Critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous audits found major non-conformities, but no live-plucking or force-feeding</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous audits found no major non-conformities</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Legislation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No animal welfare legislation</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal welfare legislation in place, but not strongly enforced</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong local legal enforcement of animal welfare legislation</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Force-feeding</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known force-feeding in the region</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known force-feeding in the region, but force-feeding is legal</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known force-feeding in the region and force-feeding is illegal</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Live-plucking</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known live-plucking in the region</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known live-plucking in the region, but live-plucking is legal</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No known live-plucking in the region and live-plucking is illegal | Low
---|---
Goose supply chain | Medium
Recent drop in meat prices | Medium
Birds slaughtered at an older age (more than 6 months) | Medium
Parent Farm is combined with raising farm | High
High degree of variation of farming practices between sites | High
Medium degree of variation of farming practices between sites | Medium
High degree of homogenous farming practices among sites | Low
CB auditor identified critical or major AW non-conformities not identified by the ICS during the previous audit | High
CB auditor identified minor AW non-conformities not identified by the ICS during the previous audit | Medium
CB auditor did not identify AW non-conformities not identified by the ICS during the previous audit | Low
High volume of down | Medium
No availability of third-party information or standard | Medium
Collectors purchase down from outside the region (Collector Area only) | Medium

D2.5.2 The certification body should also consider whether or not farms keep goose and duck breeds that can be force-fed (ducks: mulard and barbarie/Muscovy; geese: grey geese) in its risk assessment.

D2.6 Audit Types

D2.6.1 The following audit types shall be used:

a. Announced audits;
b. Semi-announced audits, where one of the following options for notice are used, at the discretion of the certification body:
   i. The site receives up to 72 hours’ notice of the audit, to ensure that the site is open and the correct people are available; or
   ii. The site receives notice of a 2-month window during which the audit will be conducted, but does not receive any additional notice prior to the auditor’s arrival.
c. *Confirmation visits*, where the site receives less than one hour’s notice of the visit and the auditor limits the evaluation to a visual check for animal welfare only. (Note that a confirmation visit is not considered to be a full audit.)

**D2.6.2** Where confirmation visits are required, the certification body shall make efforts to avoid the site predicting when the confirmation visit will occur, aside from what may be inferred from D2.6.3.

**D2.6.3** Where there is a substantial variation in weather conditions or farming practices seasonally, the certification body shall conduct at least 75% of all confirmation visits during a different season than when the audit was conducted and should occur when riskier practices (e.g. transport) may take place.

**D2.6.4** On-site audits shall be conducted during a time when birds are present at the site.

**D2.7** Audit Duration

**D2.7.1** The following minimum time shall be spent on-site to conduct each audit. This does not include auditor travel or reporting time.

   a. Individual farms: 2 hours
   b. Farm group ICS evaluation: 4 hours
   c. Farm group member farm: 2 hours
   d. Slaughter site: 4 hours
   e. Confirmation visit to a farm: 0.5 hours
   f. Farm area: Total time is determined based on the base days calculation and risk assessment. See D3.3. A minimum of 1 hour shall be spent at each farm visited.

**NOTE:** The audit times listed in D2.7.1 are presented as a minimum. Individual farm and farm group audits should typically have a longer duration than the minimum, and certification bodies should allow for more time in planning.

**D3. Certification Types**

**D3.1** Auditing Individual Farms

The following requirements apply to Individual Farm Certification only.

**D3.1.1** All farms included in an Individual Farm Certification shall be audited annually.

**D3.1.2** All audits shall be announced for the first year of certification. After the first year of certification, audits shall be conducted as follows:

   a. At high risk farms, all audits shall be semi-announced, and a minimum of 30% of farms shall receive an additional confirmation visit each year.
b. At medium risk farms, at least 50% of audits shall be semi-announced. The remaining audits may be announced. A minimum of 10% of farms shall receive an additional confirmation visit each year.

c. At low risk farms, audits may be announced. A minimum of 5% of farms shall receive an additional confirmation visit each year.

NOTE: Percentages of farms in 4.2 apply per certification body, per year. They should apply per country/region per year and for each scope certificate over time, though sampling may focus more on farms where more risk factors have been identified within each risk category.

D3.2 Auditing Farm Groups

The following requirements apply for Farm Group Certification, and are in addition to ACP Appendix E.

D3.2.1 The certification body shall carry out annual on site of farm group members based on the group risk level, determined based on D2.5.1, with separate sampling for farms and small slaughter sites. The number of sites audited shall be determined as follows, where \( n \) is the number of farms in the farm group:

a. High risk level: audits of at least \( 3 \sqrt{n} \),

b. Medium risk level: audits of at least \( 2 \sqrt{n} \), and

c. Low risk level: audits of at least \( \sqrt{n} \).

D3.2.2 In addition to D3.2.1, on-site audits shall be conducted for all parent farms which are group members.

D3.2.3 The certification body shall conduct confirmation visits to at least 10% of farms in high-risk groups each year. The certification body may conduct additional confirmation visits to farms in Farm Groups of any risk level.

D3.3 Auditing Farm Areas

The following requirements apply for Farm Area Certification.

D3.3.1 Audits of farm areas shall consist of

a. an audit of the organization which manages the Farm Area;

b. an audit of a sample of small farms within the farm area;

c. an audit of a sample of small slaughter sites within the farm area, if any; and

d. an audit of each site included in the scope certificate which is not covered by b or c, if any (e.g. farms which are not small farms, slaughter sites which are not small slaughter sites).

D3.3.2 The audit of the organization shall include
a. an evaluation of the ability of the organization to manage the farm area certification;
b. an evaluation of the documentation of purchases from the area; and
c. interviews with local stakeholders including veterinarians, farmer organizations and animal welfare groups, where possible.

D3.3.3 The certification body shall conduct a risk assessment on the farm area to determine the sampling rate to be used, based on the risk criteria in D2.5.1. For the first year, a risk level of medium or high shall be assigned.

D3.3.4 The certification body shall calculate a base level of audit days based on the following criteria:

a. The certification body shall compile an estimate of the number of birds in the farm area, and identify any small slaughter sites to be included, based on data provided by the ICS.
b. The time to audit a sample of farms which represent 10% of the birds in the farm area shall be calculated, taking into account the minimum audit duration listed in D2.7.1.
c. The time to audit the square root of the number of small slaughter sites included in the farm area shall be determined.
d. The typical local travel time sufficient to audit the sites identified in b. shall be determined.
e. The base audit time shall be calculated as the sum of the times identified in b. and c.

D3.3.5 The certification body shall spend a minimum amount of time auditing the farm area during each audit. This time includes local travel between sites but excludes all other travel and reporting time, as well as auditing required by D3.3.1.a and d.

a. High risk level: 3x the base audit time,
b. Medium risk level: 2x the base audit time; and
c. Low risk level: 1x the base audit time.

D3.3.6 Farms and slaughter sites shall be selected for audit as follows:

a. Based on identified areas of risk;
b. To represent the geographic and operational range of sites included in the area; and
c. Randomly, as much as possible while also meeting a. and b.

D3.3.7 During audits of slaughter sites, the certification body shall conduct or evaluate a volume reconciliation.

D3.3.8 Non-conformities shall be issued to the organization rather than to a farm or slaughter site in the area.
D3.3.9 Confirmation visits may be conducted but are not required for Farm Area Certification.

D3.4 Parent Farm Certification

The following requirements apply if the organization is choosing to implement the Parent Farm Certification requirements (see RDS B1.1.1).

D3.4.1 If an organization chooses to include Parent Farm Certification in its certificate scope, the certification body shall conduct on-site audits of all parent farms supplying farms included in the scope certificate annually.

D3.4.2 Parent Farm Certification shall not be applied to Farm Area Certifications. Parent farms included in an area shall be subject to audits on the same basis as all other farms in the area.

D3.4.3 Following a positive audit result from Parent Farm Certification, the certification body shall include

a. the standard as “Responsible Down Standard (RDS) including Parent Farm Certification” on the scope certificate; and

b. a notation that the material meets Parent Farm Certification requirements by checking the appropriate box in box 15 on the transaction certificate, when this is requested by the seller and either

   i. the seller on the transaction certificate holds Parent Farm Certification, or

   ii. the seller is a supply chain organization and demonstrates that the down meets Parent Farm Certification requirements based on incoming transaction certificates.