

SPECC HELPS FARMERS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

In business, a key measure of successful trading is knowing where your product comes from and the potential end market.



Farmers, auction markets and processors are seeing the value of an online tool recently launched by QMS, which allows them to check if cattle are potentially eligible for the Scotch Beef PGI brand.

The Scotch Potential Eligibility Cattle Checker (SPECC) is providing the Scottish red meat supply chain with a simple way to check cattle have been quality assured from birth.

Lanarkshire beef finisher John Brown from Gaintykehead, Airdrie, who farms in partnership with his father Jim and mother Jesme, has been using the web-based checker since the beginning of the year. SPECC has helped him with decision making in his business to promote Scotch Beef PGI.

One of the biggest finishers of beef cattle in Scotland and a QMS Cattle & Sheep quality assurance scheme member, John puts around 2,000 head through the farm each year, selling to ABP Perth and Scotbeef.

The Browns buy steers and heifers all year round at 480 to 500kg from markets in Stirling, Ayr and Lanark. They are finished at 680 to 700kg liveweight on a diet of potatoes (from the neighbouring Albert Bartlett processing plant), barley, dark grains and grass silage.

The average deadweight of animals is 360kg and John also sells five or six each week to local butchers and buys continental cross or Aberdeen Angus cattle at grass time to help supply what his customers want.

In John's view, one of the most important aspects to consider when he is buying cattle at the markets is whether an animal will qualify for the Scotch Beef PGI brand.

"Fully Scotch assured cattle are worth up to 15p/kg more to us at the abattoir, so it is very important to have clarity on this information before buying," he said.

He finds SPECC a helpful tool not only when buying cattle, but also for managing them once they are on his holding.

"A quick scan of the animal's passport will highlight if there has been a break in the assurance chain. I can then decide how long to keep it for," he said.



"Obviously I would rather every animal I buy is Scotch Potential Eligible but in reality that does not always happen, so by using SPECC I can easily identify animals and then determine the best end market for them."

John believes that this new, easy way of checking cattle eligibility should be an incentive for any farmers who are not QMS members to join up and become quality assured, including suckled calf producers who will increasingly be financially penalised for selling non-assured cattle.

Jill Hunter, Assurance Advisor with QMS, who has been working on SPECC since its launch, agreed.

Gaintykehead - Farm Facts

- Originally the 320 acre grass farm supported 150 dairy cows but, in 2006, the decision was made to go out of dairy farming and gradually the cows were replaced with finishing cattle.
- The basic infrastructure was there to change enterprises but for the first five years, the SFP was re-invested to renovate buildings and build a slurry pit and slurry store.
- Numbers have increased for the past three years. The Browns now finish 2,000 cattle every year.
- The next steps for the business are to consider opportunities to further improve efficiency in their cattle feeding regime to optimise daily live weight gains.
- The Browns are also looking at better grass management, which is a challenge in Lanarkshire.
- The Browns also plan to develop their own Gaintykehead Beef brand.



"SPECC is about to go-live in Scottish auction markets, where its results will be displayed on sale ring boards, allowing potential buyers to make better informed decisions on which cattle they buy."

"By using SPECC, I can easily identify animals and then determine the best end market for them."

She explained that SPECC is quicker than the current checking system which is used by auction markets. Instead of the user having to scan each CPH number on a passport, it instantly provides the animal's status by simply scanning the top barcode on the passport," she added.

When SPECC goes live in auction markets, farmers will notice different animal statuses on sale ring boards. The status will be:

- SPE - Scotch Potential Eligible
- FA + number of days - Farm Assured
- NA - Not Assured

The number of days after FA denotes the number of cumulative and successive days the animal has spent on QMS assured holdings.

Scottish abattoirs are also using SPECC to determine which cattle are eligible for the Scotch Beef PGI brand.

Murray Hardy of Scotbeef, Bridge of Allan said it has speeded up intake and made it easier to identify Scotch versus Farm Assured cattle.

"Everything we put through Scotbeef is Farm Assured but some customers want Scotch Assured and SPECC simplifies the identification process. We thoroughly recommend it and would like to see it being used throughout the purchasing chain," said Murray.

Frank Ross, General Manager at ABP, Perth said, "As an abattoir looking to source primarily Scotch Potential Eligible cattle, SPECC assists in speeding up animal status checking."

Farmers are being encouraged to use SPECC to check their cattle before presenting them for sale or slaughter, or when bringing new stock onto their farm.+

SPECC - At a glance

The Scotch Potential Eligibility Cattle Checker (SPECC) is a free tool from QMS which allows farmers, auction markets and abattoirs to check whether individual animals are potentially eligible for the Scotch Beef PGI brand.



SPECC is very easy to use and returns quick search results. It allows farmers to view the status of all cattle which are currently registered on their holding(s) and check the status of any individual animal by manually entering the ear tag number or by scanning the short barcode at the top of the passport. An unregistered user can also perform ear tag number searches.

SPECC is hosted on the ScotEID website and for anyone not already registered with ScotEID, a simple two-step registration process is all that is needed to start using SPECC.

A free SPECC app is also available for users who are the move, which can be downloaded on Google play or Apple App Store. It allows the ear tag number to be scanned from the passport, using the mobile phone's camera or, alternatively, the ear tag number can be manually entered.

For more information and to start using SPECC please visit: www.scoteid.com/qms/specc

