



**The UK ESTA Standard**  
**European Seed Treatment Assurance (ESTA)**  
**Quality Assurance Scheme for Seed Treatment and Treated Seed**  
SCHEME RULES  
Effective from **June 2020**

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### **1: ESTA PARTICIPATION**

1.1 ESTA is open to any company and provides a quality assurance system to assure that seed treatment and the resulting treated seed meet requirements defined by legislators and industry, subject to paying the AIC registration fee and complying with the scheme rules.

1.2 A register of participants is on AIC's website at: [www.agindustries.org.uk](http://www.agindustries.org.uk)

#### 1.3 Electronic Communication

The participant must provide the certification body with an up to date electronic means of communication. This is preferably an email address. Where this is not possible a fax number or mobile number should be provided.

A list of mutually recognised assurance schemes can be found on the AIC website.

### **2: SCHEME RULES**

2.1 This ESTA code of practice is effective from.

2.2 In order to become a certified participant, applicants shall:

2.2.1 Apply for certification by completing a registration form and returning it to the scheme certification body. The applicant must confirm that they agree to comply with the scheme manual, the relevant code of practice and the certification body's scheme regulations.

2.2.2 Liaise with the scheme certification body over the quotation.

2.2.3 Pay the **AIC annual registration fee** which covers the cost of maintaining the scheme.

2.2.4 Pay the **KIWA certification fee** which covers the cost of the audit.

2.2.5 Pay the **ESA pack fee** which covers the amount of packs of seed produced over one calendar year. The invoice is raised by Kiwa and sent to the participant (after notification of fees to be paid) and will be collected by Kiwa.

2.2.6 Arrange to have an audit visit from a verifier trained and approved by the certification body.

2.3 When the applicant has been audited, and corrected any non-compliances that may have been identified, the certification body will issue a certificate of conformity and add the successful applicant to the participants list on the AIC Assurance Checker

2.4 The initial certificate of conformity will be valid from the date on which the applicant demonstrated compliance with the codes of practice and The KIWA Certification fee must be returned along with the appropriate AIC registration fee to the scheme certification body by the date shown.

2.5 Participants that wish to continue in the scheme must settle the KIWA invoice which will be sent annually. The AIC registration fee must be sent to Kiwa by the 1st July annually.

2.6 Participants will be contacted prior to the anniversary of their audit to arrange a surveillance visit which must take place at least 60 days prior to the anniversary of their initial assessment date.

2.7 Participants shall comply with the scheme requirements at all times as defined in this scheme rules and the codes of practice.

2.8 Participants shall advise the scheme certification body of any changes to the business, typically but not limited to:

2.8.1 Company ownership

2.8.2 Scope of operations

2.8.3 Key management

2.8.4 Change of contact details

2.9 Participants and applicants shall immediately advise the scheme certification body in the event that they are the subject of legal action that relates to ESTA activities.

### **3: VERIFICATION**

3.1 KIWA will produce a written report for its own assessment purposes and identify any non-compliances to the Participant if applicable. An action point list will be left at the end of the audit. Once a Participant has rectified the areas of non-compliance to the satisfaction of KIWA and within the time limits specified below, KIWA will notify the client of continued certified status or issue an ESTA certificate of compliance, whichever is appropriate. The non-compliances will be classified as per 3.1.1. and acted upon as per 3.1.2

#### **3.1.1 Classification of non-compliances**

Classification Cause

##### Critical

A gross or deliberate regulatory violation, or;  
A safety failure resulting in unsafe products, or;  
A loss of traceability such that recall of unsafe goods would be impossible, or;  
A recurrence of a Major Non-compliance raised at the preceding audit, or;  
A complete unwillingness to cooperate in the audit.

##### Major

A complete failure to implement a requirement of ESTA or;  
A recurrence of a Minor Non-compliance raised at the preceding audit.

##### Minor

A partial failure to implement a requirement of ESTA or Poor evidence to demonstrate implementation.

**3.1.2 Response to Non-compliances**

| <b>Classification</b> | <b>Initial audit</b>  | <b>Surveillance audit</b>   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Critical              | Certification refused. Full audit required. KIWA Scheme Manager to be contacted immediately.  | Certification suspended with immediate effect. Re-audit required prior to reinstatement of certification.   |
| Major                 | Certificate not granted until non-conformances rectified. Plan corrective actions to be submitted within 15 days of audit and timescales to be agreed with Certification Body.        | Certification continues. Plan of corrective actions to be submitted within 15 days of audit and timescales to be agreed with the certification body, typically no more than 60 days from audit. Failure to implement corrective actions within agreed timescales will lead to suspension. |
| Minor                 | Certificate not granted until non-conformances rectified. Plan of corrective actions to be submitted within 30 days of audit and timescales to be agreed with the certification body. | Certification continues. Plan of corrective actions to be submitted within 30 days of audit and timescales to be agreed with the certification body, typically no more than 60 days from audit. Failure to implement corrective actions within agreed timescales will lead to suspension. |

3.2 Verifiers shall avoid carrying out audits during the busy periods, except with the agreement of the company concerned.

3.3 AIC shall reveal the identity and ESTA status behind a ESTA reference accompanying a load at a purchaser’s request.

3.4 Complaints and appeals shall be directed to the certification body and will be handled in the manner covered by sections 5 and 6

3.5 The Certifying Body must ensure that the same auditor will not audit the same company beyond a consecutive 3 year period. An auditor should have a break of at least 1 scheme year.

**4: CERTIFICATE SUSPENSION AND WITHDRAWAL**

4.1 The scheme certification body, in conjunction with AIC, may suspend or withdraw a participant’s certificate of conformity when the participant has:

4.1.1 Non-conformances that are not resolved within the required time limits.

4.1.2 Critical non-compliances that have, or are likely to have, an adverse effect on product safety or legality. Non-conformances against requirements printed in bold italics in each code will result in suspension.

4.1.3 Failed to pay the AIC annual registration or KIWA certification fees.

4.2 Suspended participants must demonstrate to the Certification body that the non-conformances have been resolved in order to have certification re-instated. A follow up assessment by the scheme verifier to confirm this shall take place.

4.3 Participants that do not demonstrate to the scheme certification body that non-conformances have been resolved within 1 month of suspension will have their certificates of conformity withdrawn.

4.4 Participants that have their certification withdrawn would need to apply as new participants if they wish to regain certification. Withdrawn participants will remain on the register for 18 months.

4.5 The scheme certification body will automatically update the register on the AIC web site with details of a participant's changed certification status.

4.6 Suspended or withdrawn participants may not claim to be ESTA-approved, nor undertake contracts that specify ESTA registration without advising the client.

4.7 Where an ESTA participant has their certification suspended or withdrawn, the scheme certification body will be entitled to provide an explanation of the reasons for suspension or withdrawal, on request, to other persons or organisations who own or have a contract with the suspended or withdrawn participant at the time of the suspension or withdrawal.

## **5: COMPLAINTS**

5.1 Complaints about either a ESTA participant or the scheme certification body should be directed to the scheme certification body where they will be acknowledged, reviewed and actions taken to resolve the cause of any problems.

5.2 The scheme certification body is accredited by the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) and works to strict codes of conduct. If participants are not satisfied with the way in which the scheme certification body handles the complaint, they should refer the matter to AIC.

## **6: APPEALS**

6.1 A participant has the right of appeal against decisions made by the scheme certification body.

6.2 Appeals shall be made in writing to the scheme certification body within 14 days of being advised of a decision that is the subject of appeal.

6.3 The scheme certification body acknowledges appeals and an initial investigation is made by the certification body's scheme manager.

6.4 If the scheme manager does not support the decision against which the appeal is based then the scheme certification body will correct the erroneous decision.

6.5 If the scheme manager supports the decision on which the appeal is based then an independent panel, which will include an AIC representative, is convened to handle the appeal. The scheme certification body, AIC and the participant are entitled to attend the appeals panel and present information to the panel.

6.6 The independent appeals panel makes a ruling based on information supplied during the hearing.

6.7 The ruling of the appeals panel is binding and final on the scheme certification body and participant.

6.8 The appeals panel will be convened within 30 days of receipt of the appeal.