



Responsible sourcing scheme for growing media

Scheme Management V1.1

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1 Background and Introduction

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) is a groundbreaking initiative designed to instigate a fundamental shift in the horticulture industry. This scheme provides a robust framework that enables manufacturers to evaluate the environmental and social impacts of both traditional and innovative raw materials.

The evaluation process is anchored in seven key criteria that provide a comprehensive assessment of the environmental and social responsibility of the materials used. These criteria include:

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The greenhouse gas emissions associated with the extraction, transport and production of materials, including additional peat-specific emissions where applicable, expressed as kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per cubic metre (kg CO₂e/m³).
- **Water Use:** The quantity of water required in the production process and the impact on local water resources.
- **Social Compliance:** The adherence to fair labour practices and contribution to local communities.
- **Habitat and Biodiversity:** The impact on local ecosystems and biodiversity during the extraction or production of the materials.
- **Pollution:** The level of pollutants released during the production and transport of the materials.
- **Renewability:** The rate at which the resource can be naturally replenished.
- **Resource Use Efficiency:** The efficiency of using the resource in terms of waste and by-products.

The RSS is a collaborative effort, designed with valuable input from a wide array of industry stakeholders and external organisations. These include the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and various environmental NGOs. Additionally, retailers, growers, and manufacturers have also contributed their expertise and insights to the scheme.

This diverse group of stakeholders not only strengthens the scheme's credibility but also ensures that it is reflective of the various perspectives and interests within the horticulture industry. This broad-based support and participation make the scheme more robust and effective in achieving its goal of promoting environmental responsibility in the horticulture industry.

Sourcing materials responsibly is about making deliberate, educated choices to minimise environmental impacts, but there is also a need to constantly revisit and challenge thresholds to

maintain “best practice.” The criteria have been defined as being able to differentiate more responsibly sourced from less responsibly sourced material. These criteria enable users of the scheme to source materials more responsibly, which we hope will help contribute to the sustainability of the horticultural industry.

The decision criteria have been chosen to account for complicated and variable situations, including global supply chains. The criteria have been developed through careful deliberation and have evolved through numerous iterations into their current form. The intention has been to make the scheme globally relevant, with reference to documents, standards etc. applicable to all countries.

The scheme is independently audited, and users need to provide evidence to support the scores they claim. Evidence must be gathered from across the supply chain, as described under each criterion.

The horticultural industry recognises two over-arching objectives:

1. To respect the environment
2. To prevent the UK horticultural industry from being disadvantaged.

2 RSS Sourcing Policy

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) for Growing Media is committed to transforming the way growing media is sourced and used, prioritising environmental responsibility and sustainability. This policy outlines the guiding principles that underpin the scheme's approach to sourcing.

Mission Statement

At RSS, our mission is to enable growers, retailers, and consumers to access ethically and responsibly sourced growing media that supports healthy plant growth while minimising environmental impact.

Core Principles

The scheme is built on three foundational principles:

1. Responsibility

- Encourage members to evaluate and select suppliers that respect biodiversity, ecosystems and local communities.
- Prioritise sustainable practices, such as using renewable resources and minimising waste.

2. Quality

- Support the development of consistent quality standards for growing media through the Growing Media Association (GMA).
- Encourage members to refer to the GMA quality standards and associated guidance.

3. Innovation

- Promote continuous improvement and sustainability through research and development.
- Explore new materials, technologies, and cultivation techniques to enhance eco-friendliness, reduce resource consumption, and minimise carbon emissions.

Objectives

The scheme is designed to inspire positive change throughout the horticulture industry by:

- Encouraging responsible sourcing practices.
- Providing a clear framework to evaluate the environmental impact of materials.
- Supporting the development of sustainable growing media solutions.

By adhering to this policy, RSS aims to cultivate a more sustainable and resilient future for horticulture while enabling stakeholders to make informed, environmentally responsible decisions.

3 Scheme Management

3.1 Management Structure

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) is managed by the **Board of Directors**, with support from the **RSS Steering Group**. This structure ensures balanced oversight and allows for strategic input from the wider membership.

3.2 Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible for the strategic direction and overall governance of the RSS.

- 2.2.1 The Board will ideally consist of **two growers, two manufacturers, and two retailers**, although this composition may be adjusted based on the availability of suitable candidates and the needs of the RSS.
- 2.2.2 Members of the Board are nominated by the RSS membership, and their election is ratified through a vote of the membership. Individuals may nominate themselves or others for board positions.
- 2.2.3 Each year, **two members of the Board must step down** and either retire or stand for re-election, ensuring a rotation of perspectives and maintaining fresh leadership.

3.3 Member Involvement in Decision-Making

To ensure a sense of ownership and engagement, members of the RSS have a say in decision-making through participation in the Annual General Meeting (AGM), where they vote on key decisions and strategic directions for the scheme.

3.4 Chair of the Board

The Chair of the Board is elected by the members during the AGM.

- 2.4.1 The Chair will serve a **two-year term** and may stand for re-election for one additional consecutive term. After two consecutive terms, a two-year gap is required before the Chair is eligible for re-election.
- 2.4.2 The Chair is responsible for leading board meetings and casting a vote in case of a tie.

3.5 RSS Steering Group

The **RSS Steering Group** is open to any individual who wishes to contribute to the success of the RSS.

- 2.5.1 The group plays a supportive role, providing input and feedback on various aspects of the scheme.
- 2.5.2 The Steering Group aims to foster collaboration among stakeholders and ensure the scheme's ongoing relevance to industry needs.

3.6 Sub-Committees

The Board may establish **Sub-Committees** to focus on specific areas of the scheme as needed. The current sub-committees include:

- 2.6.1 Marketing Committee:** Responsible for all marketing activities, promotion, and external communication of the RSS.
- 2.6.2 Technical Committee:** Manages the technical aspects of the scheme, including the continuous review, updating of the scheme rules, and liaising with the scheme auditors.
- 2.6.3** Additional sub-committees may be formed based on emerging needs or specific projects, ensuring a flexible and responsive management structure.

3.7 Quorum for Board Meetings

A quorum of at least **three members** of the Board of Directors is required for board meetings to proceed and for decisions to be made.

3.8 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The **Board of Directors** will organise an Annual General Meeting (AGM) to discuss the progress, strategies, and future of the scheme. Notice of the AGM, including the meeting's agenda and relevant documents, will be served to all members no less than **14 days prior** to the meeting.

- 2.8.1 This notice period provides sufficient time for members to review materials, prepare questions or points for discussion, and arrange their attendance.
- 2.8.2 Each member of the scheme is entitled to **one** vote.

3.9 Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)

An **Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)** can be called either by the Board of Directors or by no less than **two-thirds of the membership** to address urgent matters or discuss issues outside the scope of the AGM.

Notice for an EGM, including the agenda and related documentation, must be given with a minimum of **21 days' notice** to all members to ensure adequate preparation time.

3.10 *Scheme Auditors*

4.6.1 The Board appoints independent third-party auditors as necessary.