



Responsible Sourcing Scheme

Scheme Operating Protocol

Version 3 – June 2026

Purpose of Document

This document sets out the scope of the Responsible Sourcing Scheme, its operating protocol, and the process by which audits are conducted and substrate scores are obtained and maintained.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this document; however, it is subject to change. The latest version is available at: www.responsiblesourcing.org.uk

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

The growing media industry is required to identify, assess, and manage its environmental impacts. In the context of the Paris Agreement and the UK Government's legally binding carbon reduction targets, the measurement and management of greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint are of increasing importance.

Growing media materials present a range of environmental and social impacts across the supply chain. Some impacts are direct and readily quantifiable, whilst others are less apparent and require a structured assessment approach. Peat has been subject to significant scrutiny; however, alternative materials must also be assessed to ensure that substitution results in an overall reduction in environmental impact.

The scheme does not seek to mandate the immediate removal of any specific material. Instead, it provides a framework to support a managed transition towards more responsibly sourced growing media, ensuring continued functionality and performance for agricultural and horticultural applications.

The objective of the scheme is to provide a consistent and evidence-based methodology for the assessment of input (substrate) materials against defined criteria, resulting in a verifiable score for each substrate.

These individual substrate scores are used to calculate an overall score for finished products. This enables manufacturers to benchmark product performance, identify opportunities for improvement, and support informed decision-making within the supply chain.

1.2 The Scheme

The Responsible Sourcing Scheme (RSS) is an industry-led certification scheme that provides a structured framework for the assessment of growing media materials.

The scheme is owned and operated by Responsible Sourcing Scheme Ltd and is supported by input from across the horticultural supply chain, including manufacturers, retailers, growers, and other relevant stakeholders.

The assessment methodology is based on defined criteria, including:

- Supply chain mapping
- Energy use
- Water use
- Social compliance
- Habitat and biodiversity
- Pollution
- Renewability
- Resource use efficiency

These criteria are maintained and periodically reviewed through the RSS governance structure to ensure continued relevance and alignment with industry requirements.

Detailed requirements for assessment, scoring, and evidence are set out within the Scheme Guidance Notes and associated working documents.

Organisations producing growing media for commercial sale may apply to join the scheme. Details of the application process are available at:

www.responsiblesourcing.org.uk

1.3 Scope of the Scheme

The scope of the scheme covers substrates used at greater than 5% by volume within a growing media mix used to produce commercial growing media.

Each manufacturing site is assessed individually, with the substrates in use evaluated based on site-specific materials, processes, and supply chains.

The auditee is required to complete a self-assessment in accordance with the scheme methodology. This includes identifying all relevant substrates and applying the defined criteria to determine an initial score for each material.

The independent audit body will assess, verify, and validate the information provided by the auditee, including supporting evidence, to confirm the final score for each substrate.

The overall score for the finished growing media product is calculated by RSS using the confirmed substrate scores, following independent assessment by Supply Chain In-sites (SCI), the appointed third-party audit body.

1.4 Audit Objective

The objective of the audit is to verify that the auditee's self-assessment accurately reflects the environmental and social performance of substrates in accordance with the scheme methodology.

The audit will assess the accuracy, completeness, and validity of the data submitted, based on the review of objective evidence.

2.0 Preparing for the Audit

The scheme decision trees and calculator, as provided within the RSS Guidance Notes and associated tools, guide the auditee through the self-assessment process.

These tools consist of structured questions, typically requiring yes/no or quantitative responses, which generate a score for each input material.

For each response, the auditee shall provide appropriate supporting evidence. This evidence will be reviewed by the auditor to verify the submitted scores.

Objective evidence may include:

- Documents (e.g. records, reports, invoices)
- Interviews with relevant personnel
- Observations of processes or activities

All evidence shall be submitted in advance of the audit to enable remote assessment.

2.1 Evidence Requirements

Evidence must be sufficient to demonstrate how each score has been determined.

For example, energy use may be evidenced through energy bills, supported where necessary by additional data (e.g. sub-metering or equipment specifications) to isolate relevant processes.

Where a condition does not exist, this may be verified through documentation, observation, or interview.

Evidence must be appropriate, verifiable, and directly relevant to the criteria being assessed.

2.2 Pre-Audit Review

The auditee is recommended to complete an internal review of scores and supporting evidence prior to audit to ensure alignment between submitted and verified scores.

2.3 Changes and Re-Assessment

Once scores are confirmed, product scores remain valid unless a material change occurs. This includes:

- Changes to input materials
- Changes to supplier or source
- Changes to material proportions

Such changes may require re-assessment.

In addition to change-driven re-assessment, sites will be subject to a full reassessment every three years to confirm continued compliance. An annual declaration/self-assessment is also required to maintain certification between full audits.

3.0 The Audit Process and Reporting

3.1 Audit Arrangements

Audits will, where possible, be conducted remotely and will involve the review and validation of documentation submitted by the auditee in support of their self-assessment. Each substrate will be evaluated by Supply Chain In-sites (SCI), the appointed independent audit body.

SCI (the auditor) will contact the auditee to agree and confirm the audit date, being the date on which the remote review will take place. Details for the submission of documentation will be provided in advance.

The auditee shall ensure that appropriate personnel are available on the agreed audit date to provide clarification and respond to any queries raised by the auditor.

All documentation must be submitted to SCI no less than 7 days in advance of the agreed audit date. Where documentation is not submitted within this timeframe, the audit fee may still be charged.

The following conditions apply:

- Evidence provided during the audit will only be accepted for clarification of documentation already submitted, and at the discretion of the auditor
- The auditor will not request documentation for entirely missing sections
- The auditor can only report on evidence that has been reviewed during the audit

The auditor shall act independently and impartially and shall base all findings solely on objective evidence.

3.2 The Audit

The audit will consist of three stages:

Opening Meeting

The opening meeting will:

- Confirm attendees and contact details
- Confirm the scope of the audit (substrates being evaluated)
- Confirm that all required documentation has been submitted and is available for review
- Confirm confidentiality requirements
- Provide the auditee with the opportunity to ask questions
- Confirm the audit plan

Evaluation

The evaluation stage will include:

- Review of submitted documentation
- Requests for clarification where required
- Recording of findings to support validation of the submitted decision tree scores

Closing Meeting

The closing meeting will:

- Confirm the scope of the evaluation
- Provide feedback on the audit findings
- Confirm completion of the audit and agreement of the exit report
- Reconfirm confidentiality
- Provide guidance on next steps and timelines
- Provide the auditee with the opportunity to ask questions

3.3 Audit Reporting

The audit outcome will be documented in a report detailing the evidence reviewed to validate the decision tree scores for each substrate.

Where the auditee is unable to provide sufficient evidence during the audit to support the submitted scores, a period of 28 days will be allowed for the submission of additional information.

Where no or insufficient evidence is provided within this period, a score of zero will be applied to the relevant criteria.

Any discrepancies between the auditee's submitted scores and the auditor's verified scores will be recorded within the audit report.

The audit report will be issued by SCI to both the auditee and RSS. The target timeframe for issuing the report is 21 days from the date of the last audit activity (either the audit date or the receipt of additional evidence).

RSS will use the confirmed substrate scores to calculate the overall score for each manufactured product.

As part of the audit process, scores may be reviewed in the context of comparable substrates and previous assessments. Where a score is significantly higher or lower than expected, the auditor may undertake additional scrutiny to ensure the score is supported by appropriate and sufficient evidence.

4.0 After the Audit

The certification body, Supply Chain In-sites will issue a certificate indicating the substrates which have been assessed.

This certificate will be valid for 1 year from assessment.

RSS will confirm the product scores for your growing media products based on the outcome of your assessment.

During the certification period, RSS must be informed of changes to products and substrates, which may include, but are not limited to

- Change of input material (e.g. inclusion of green compost)
- Change of supplier or source of input material
- Change in the percentage mix of input materials

Changes to substrates may require validation assessment.

5.0 Surveillance/ Ongoing Certification

Continuation of certification will be dependent upon the completion and submission of an annual declaration/self-assessment questionnaire and payment.

An assessment will be required for certification every 3 years

6.0 Complaints and Appeals

The auditee has the right to complain regarding how the audit was conducted and appeal against the audit outcome. Complaints and appeals should be made via email to info@scinsites.com