



Responsible Sourcing Scheme

Scheme Operating Protocol

Version 5 – October 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:  
<https://responsiblesourcing.org.uk/resources/>

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The growing media industry needs 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 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 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 responsible sourcing 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 comprises supply chain mapping and seven scored criteria:

- Greenhouse gas emissions
- 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 in the Version 11 Guidance Notes and associated tools.

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

<https://responsiblesourcing.org.uk/>

## 1.3 Scope of the Scheme

The scope of the scheme covers bulk ingredients 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 each finished growing media product is calculated by RSS using the confirmed substrate scores, following independent assessment by Supply Chain In-sites (SCI), the scheme's 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 Version 11 decision trees and calculator, together with the 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, such as records, reports, invoices and calculations
- 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, greenhouse gas emissions may be evidenced through supply chain maps, fuel and electricity records, transport distances and modes, current conversion factors, and supporting calculations. Where direct greenhouse gas emissions data are used, the evidence should identify the data source, calculation method, assessment boundary, units, and any allocation factors. Peat assessments require the additional evidence specified in the Version 11 Guidance Notes.

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 should complete an internal review of scores and supporting evidence before submission to ensure alignment between the claimed and verified scores.

## 2.3 Changes and Re-Assessment

Once scores are confirmed, they 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 further validation or reassessment.

In addition to reassessment following changes that affect scores, a full audit is required every three years. Following the initial audit, an annual Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) is required in each intervening year, as described in Section 5.0.

# 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 SCI, the scheme's appointed independent audit body.

SCI 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 seven days before 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 to clarify documentation already submitted, and at the auditor's discretion
- The auditor will not request documentation for entirely missing sections

- The auditor can only validate scores using evidence they have reviewed, including additional evidence submitted within the period allowed under Section 3.3.

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, including the 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 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 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 criterion.

Any discrepancies between the auditee's submitted scores and the auditor's verified scores will be recorded in 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, being 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 that it is supported by appropriate and sufficient evidence.

## 4.0 After the Audit

Following completion of the audit and receipt of the final audit report from SCI, RSS will issue the member's certificate and confirm the scores for the member's growing media products using the verified substrate scores.

Certificates are valid for one year. Continued certification is subject to the requirements set out in Section 5.0.

During the certification period, RSS must be informed of changes to products and substrates, including, but not limited to:

- Changes to input materials, such as the inclusion of green compost
- Changes to the supplier or source of an input material
- Changes to the percentage mix of input materials

Such changes may require further validation or reassessment.

## 5.0 Surveillance/ Ongoing Certification

Following the initial audit, members must submit an annual Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) to the RSS Administrator in each of the two intervening years before the next full audit.

The RSS Administrator will review the SAQ. Where no changes affecting the verified scores are identified, RSS will reissue the certificate for a further year, subject to payment of any applicable fees.

Where changes affecting the verified scores are identified, RSS will advise the member and SCI that a re-audit is required. A new certificate will not be issued until the required re-audit has been completed and the revised scores confirmed.

A full audit is required every three years. The annual SAQ does not replace an initial audit or a full audit that is due.

## 6.0 Complaints and Appeals

The auditee has the right to raise a complaint about how the audit was conducted or to appeal an audit finding.

Concerns about audit conduct or requests for review of an audit finding should first be submitted to SCI at [info@scinsites.com](mailto:info@scinsites.com).

Complaints or appeals relating to scheme decisions, certification, or membership status should be submitted in writing to the RSS Administrator at [info@responsiblesourcing.org.uk](mailto:info@responsiblesourcing.org.uk). These will be handled in accordance with the current Scheme Rules.