



Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.3



**Textile
Exchange**

—
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Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures, V3.3



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The *Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.3* replaces the *Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.2* and is effective as of **March 1, 2024**. **All audits and assessments conducted after April 1, 2024 shall be conducted using the *Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.3*.**

English is the official language of the *Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.3*. In any case of inconsistency between versions, reference shall be made to the English version.

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The *Responsible Down Standard (RDS)* will undergo a revision process at least every five years. The *Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures* will typically be revised alongside the RDS. You may submit feedback to the certification procedures at any time; send to Assurance@TextileExchange.org. Points of clarification may be incorporated into supplementary and guidance documents prior to 2025. More substantive feedback or suggested changes will be collected and reviewed as part of the next revision of the document.

Document Revision History

Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.0, released January 2020
Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.1, released June 2020
Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.2, released July 2021
Responsible Down Standard Certification Procedures V3.3, released March 2024
Note: V3.0 is the earliest version of this document to align with versions of the RDS.



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Section A - General Information

A1. About the Responsible Down Standard

The Responsible Down Standard (RDS) is an international, voluntary standard that addresses animal welfare in the duck and geese supply chain and chain of custody of down and feather material from certified farms to the final product.

Individual sites are certified by independent third-party certification bodies using annual audits. Material is tracked from the farm to the final product using transaction certificates, following the criteria of Textile Exchange's Content Claim Standard (CCS). For more information, please visit: ResponsibleDown.org.

A2. About Textile Exchange

Textile Exchange is a global nonprofit that creates leaders in the sustainable fiber and materials industry. The organization develops, manages, and promotes a suite of leading industry standards as well as collects and publishes vital industry data and insights that enable brands and retailers to measure, manage, and track their use of preferred fiber and materials.

With a membership that represents leading brands, retailers, and suppliers, Textile Exchange has, for years, been positively impacting climate through accelerating the use of preferred fibers across the global textile industry and is now making it an imperative goal through its 2030 Strategy: Climate+. Under the Climate+ strategic direction, Textile Exchange will be the driving force for urgent climate action with a goal of 45% reduced CO2 emissions from textile fiber and material production by 2030.

A3. About the Certification Procedures

The RDS Certification Procedures present normative criteria for *accreditation bodies* and *certification bodies* which are specific to the Responsible Down Standard. These criteria are in addition to the criteria for all Textile Exchange standards, which can be found in *ASR-101 Accreditation and Certification Procedures for Textile Exchange Standards*.

Section B - References

B1. Terms and Definitions

Refer to *TE-101 Terms and Definitions for Textile Exchange Standards and Related Documents* for definitions of terms used in these procedures. Defined terms are shown in italics in the first usage in this document, and in some other uses for clarity.



B2. Reference Documents

The following documents are key documents for conducting RDS certification. It is essential that they are used alongside this document.

1. *RDS-101 Responsible Down Standard*
2. *RDS-201 RDS User Manual*
3. *ASR-101 Accreditation and Certification Procedures for Textile Exchange Standards (“ACP”)*
4. *CCS-101 Content Claim Standard*
5. *TE-101 Terms and Definitions for Textile Exchange Standards*
6. *TE-301 Standards Claims Policy*
7. *TE-302 Standards Logo Use Specifications*

References to “ACP” refer to criteria in *ASR-101-V2.1 Accreditation and Certification Procedures for Textile Exchange Standards*, references to “AW” refer to animal welfare criteria in *RDS-101-V3.0 Responsible Down Standard*, and references to “RDS” refer to the Responsible Down Standard 3.0.

Section C - Criteria for Accreditation Bodies

C1. General Criteria

C1.1 Assessor Qualifications

- C1.1.1** In addition to the assessor qualifications listed in ACP C3.1.2, assessors shall have training and/or experience with *waterfowl farms* and *slaughter sites*.

Section D - Criteria for Certification Bodies

D1. General Criteria

D1.1 Personnel Qualifications

- D1.1.1** In addition to the auditor qualifications listed in ACP D3.1.5-8, auditors and certification decision makers shall have training and/or experience with *waterfowl farms* and *slaughter sites*. This may be demonstrated through shadow audits, trainings, or approved courses.



D1.2 Data and Reporting

D1.2.1 The certification body shall report all findings of *live plucking* to Textile Exchange immediately, including the farm name, region, *scope certificate* identification and a summary of findings. Textile Exchange may share the farm name and region with other certification bodies, who shall treat this information as confidential.

D1.2.2 The certification body shall report the following information to Textile Exchange quarterly. Data shall be reported in a format specified by Textile Exchange or in an alternate format which has been approved by Textile Exchange. This data is considered to be confidential and will only be made publicly available in aggregate.

- a. For Individual Farm and Farm Group Certification:
 - i. Name and address of each certified farm;
 - ii. Number of *birds* per year on each certified farm; and
 - iii. Maximum number of birds at one time (capacity) on each certified farm.
- b. For Farm Area Certification:
 - i. Identification of each certified *area*;
 - ii. List of *collectors*;
 - iii. Estimated number of birds in the area;
 - iv. Estimated number of *small farms* in the area;
 - v. Estimated volume of *down* produced in the area;
 - vi. Justification of the base audit time for each area; and
 - vii. Estimated number of *contract slaughter sites* in the area.
- c. For *slaughter sites*:
 - i. Number of RDS ducks slaughtered; and
 - ii. Number of RDS geese slaughtered.
- d. An aggregate report of non-conformities identified and exemptions granted for each AW criterion, which includes the type of certification (Individual Farm, Farm Group, Farm Area, or slaughter site).



- D1.2.3** The certification body shall, on a quarterly basis, provide an anonymized report for each certified farm (Individual Farm or Farm Group) and each farm audit (Farm Area) which includes the following:
- a. Type of audit (Individual Farm, Farm Group, or Farm Area);
 - b. Country and state/province where relevant¹;
 - c. Number of birds: total capacity and annual number, by species group (white duck, grey duck, white goose, grey goose);
 - d. Age of outdoor access (days);
 - e. Mortality rate (% per flock, prior to slaughter);
 - f. Number of birds euthanized per year;
 - g. Age of birds at slaughter (days); and
 - h. Distance between farm and slaughter site (kilometers).

D2. General Auditing Criteria

D2.1 Farm Auditing Criteria

- D2.1.1** The certification body shall request information needed to follow biosecurity measures prior to the audit. All biosecurity measures shall be followed to ensure the auditor is allowed to enter the farm without risk of spreading disease.
- D2.1.2** In relation to AW 5.7.3,
- a. the certification body shall conduct *confirmation visits* for a minimum of 10% of goose parent farms annually, calculated at the level of the scope certificate.
 - b. in cases where the certification body believes parent farms are live plucking or where there is known live plucking in the region, the sampling rate for confirmation visits shall increase to at least 50% of parent farms annually.

¹ State or province shall always be included for farms in Canada, China, Russia, and the United States.



D2.2 Slaughter Site Auditing Criteria

- D2.2.1** All sites where slaughtering of waterfowl occurs shall be considered to be slaughter sites, except for *small farms* included in a Farm Area Certification.
- D2.2.2** Slaughter site criteria shall be evaluated for the entire facility and not limited to birds from RDS certified farms.
- D2.2.3** For Farm Area Certification,
- Slaughter sites which sell to *collectors* shall be identified and included in the audit;
 - Auditors shall ask farms about local *contract slaughter sites* (both which do and do not provide service to the farm) during audits and confirmation visits; and
 - Contract slaughter sites are exempt from auditing, provided that they do not also sell down to collectors.

D2.3 Critical Practices and Non-Conformities

- D2.3.1** When a critical non-conformity is issued to a farm for an animal welfare criterion, the certification body shall:
- Immediately remove the farm from the scope certificate or suspend the scope certificate;
 - Notify Textile Exchange with the farm name, region, scope certificate identification, the criterion, and the date the non-conformity was identified;
 - Notify the scope certificate holder, if held by a different company; and
 - Not permit the farm to be recertified (including lifting the suspension or rejoining the group) until the later of
 - 180 days from the date the critical non-conformity was identified, and
 - After a complete turnover of the birds present on the farm (i.e. the farm has a new flock).

Note: D2.3.1.d still applies to a farm if the scope certificate is suspended and the suspension is lifted or the scope certificate re-issued during the specific time.



D2.3.2 When a critical non-conformity is identified during a Farm Group or Farm Area audit, the certification body shall identify the scope certificate as high risk and shall increase sampling for the current audit accordingly if a low or medium risk designation was in place.

D2.3.3 When two or more critical non-conformities are identified during a Farm Group or Farm Area audit, a critical non-conformity shall be issued to the organization/ICS and the scope certificate shall be suspended. A full audit at high risk level sampling which results in no critical non-conformities being issued shall be conducted before the organization may become certified again.

Note: Two critical NCs may be issued to two farms for the same animal welfare criterion, to two farms for different animal welfare criteria, or to the same farm for different animal welfare criteria.

D2.3.4 If live-plucking is observed during a confirmation visit to a parent farm for F1.5, the certification body shall report its findings to Textile Exchange and issue a major non-conformity to the *organization*. The organization's corrective action plan shall include either a confirmation that live-plucking on the parent farm has ceased or that the parent farm is no longer a supplier of eggs or hatchlings to the RDS certified farm before the non-conformity may be closed. The certification body should conduct a follow-up confirmation visit to confirm the corrective action plan is in place.

D2.3.5 If live-plucking is observed during a parent farm audit for the Parent Farm Certification module the certification body shall report its findings to Textile Exchange and issue a major non-conformity to the *organization*, as well as a critical non-conformity to the parent farm. The organization's corrective action plan shall include either a confirmation that live-plucking on the parent farm has ceased or that the parent farm is no longer a supplier of eggs or hatchlings to the RDS certified farm before the non-conformity may be closed.

D2.3.6 The certification body shall not issue an Individual Farm Certification to a farm where a critical non-conformity has been issued, and where the required waiting time defined in D2.3.1.d has not been completed, and shall not allow such a farm to be included in a Farm Group or Farm Area Certification.

D2.4 Multiple Certification

D2.4.1 A farm may be part of more than one scope certificate, including one Individual Farm Certification or one or more Farm Group Certifications. A slaughter site may be part of multiple Farm Group Certifications.

D2.4.2 The same certification body shall issue all scope certificates which cover a specific farm or slaughter site, and the certification body shall conduct a separate audit per scope certificate.



D2.4.3 Auditing of volume reconciliation shall take into account all of the down sales from the farm or slaughter site, including down sold as non-RDS and down sold under another RDS scope certificate.

D2.5 Risk Assessment Process

D2.5.1 Prior to each audit, the certification body shall conduct a risk assessment and assign a risk level for each scope certificate following the process in ACP Appendix C. The following risk table shall be used. For Farm Group Certification, the certification body may divide the farms into multiple subgroups for the purposes of risk assessment and sampling. For Farm Area Certification, the risk assessment shall be conducted for each area.

Risk Factor		Level
Scope Certificate History <i>(N/A for initial audits)</i>	Previous audits found live-plucking or force-feeding	Critical
	Previous audits found major non-conformities, but no live-plucking or force-feeding	Medium
	Previous audits found no major non-conformities	Low
Local Legislation	No animal welfare legislation	High
	Animal welfare legislation in place, but not strongly enforced	Medium
	Strong local legal enforcement of animal welfare legislation	Low
Force-feeding	Known force-feeding in the region	High
	No known force-feeding in the region, but force-feeding is legal	Medium
	No known force-feeding in the region and force-feeding is illegal	Low
Live-plucking	Known live-plucking in the region	High
	No known live-plucking in the region, but live-plucking is legal	Medium



Risk Factor		Level
	No known live-plucking in the region and live-plucking is illegal	Low
Additional Risk Factors for Live-Plucking	Goose supply chain	Medium
	Recent drop in meat prices	Medium
	Birds slaughtered at an older age (more than 6 months)	Medium
	Parent Farm is combined with raising farm	High
Farming Practices <i>(Farm Group and Farm Area only)</i>	High degree of variation of farming practices between sites	High
	Medium degree of variation of farming practices between sites	Medium
	High degree of homogenous farming practices among sites	Low
ICS Performance <i>(Farm Group and Farm Area only, N/A for initial audit)</i>	CB auditor identified critical or major AW non-conformities not identified by the ICS during the previous audit	High
	CB auditor identified minor AW non-conformities not identified by the ICS during the previous audit	Medium
	CB auditor did not identify AW non-conformities not identified by the ICS during the previous audit	Low
Other Factors	High volume of down	Medium
	No availability of third-party information or standard	Medium
	Collectors purchase down from outside the region (Collector Area only)	Medium

D2.5.2 The certification body should also consider whether or not farms keep goose and duck breeds that can be force-fed (ducks: mulard and barbarie/Muscovy; geese: grey geese) in its risk assessment.



D2.6 Audit Types

D2.6.1 The following audit types shall be used:

- a. *Announced audits*;
- b. *Semi-announced audits*, where one of the following options for notice are used, at the discretion of the certification body:
 - i. The site receives up to 72 hours' notice of the audit, to ensure that the site is open and the correct people are available; or
 - ii. The site receives notice of a 2-month window during which the audit will be conducted, but does not receive any additional notice prior to the auditor's arrival.
- c. *Confirmation visits*, where the site receives less than one hour's notice of the visit and the auditor limits the evaluation to a visual check for animal welfare only. (Note that a confirmation visit is not considered to be a full audit.)

D2.6.2 Where confirmation visits are required, the certification body shall make efforts to avoid the site predicting when the confirmation visit will occur, aside from what may be inferred from D2.6.3.

D2.6.3 Where there is a substantial variation in weather conditions or farming practices seasonally, the certification body shall conduct at least 75% of all confirmation visits during a different season than when the audit was conducted and should occur when riskier practices (e.g. transport) may take place.

D2.6.4 On-site audits shall be conducted during a time when birds are present at the site.

D2.7 Audit Duration

D2.7.1 The following minimum time shall be spent on-site to conduct each audit. This does not include auditor travel or reporting time.

- a. Individual farms: 2 hours
- b. Farm group ICS evaluation: 4 hours
- c. Farm group member farm: 2 hours
- d. Slaughter site: 4 hours
- e. Confirmation visit to a farm: 0.5 hours



- f. Farm area: Total time is determined based on the base days calculation and risk assessment. See **Error! Reference source not found.** A minimum of 1 hour shall be spent at each farm visited.

Note: The audit times listed in D2.7.1 are presented as a minimum. Individual farm and farm group audits should typically have a longer duration than the minimum, and certification bodies should allow for more time in planning.

D3. Certification Types

D3.1 Auditing Individual Farms

The following criteria apply to Individual Farm Certification only.

- D3.1.1** All farms included in an Individual Farm Certification shall be audited annually.
- D3.1.2** All audits shall be announced for the first year of certification. After the first year of certification, audits shall be conducted as follows:
- a. At high risk farms, all audits shall be semi-announced, and a minimum of 30% of farms shall receive an additional confirmation visit each year.
 - b. At medium risk farms, at least 50% of audits shall be semi-announced. The remaining audits may be announced. A minimum of 10% of farms shall receive an additional confirmation visit each year.
 - c. At low risk farms, audits may be announced. A minimum of 5% of farms shall receive an additional confirmation visit each year.

Note: Percentages of farms in D3.1.2 apply per certification body, per year. They should apply per country/region per year and for each scope certificate over time, though sampling may focus more on farms where more risk factors have been identified within each risk category.

D3.2 Auditing Farm Groups

The following criteria apply for Farm Group Certification, and are in addition to ACP Appendix E.

- D3.2.1** The certification body shall carry out annual on site of farm group members based on the group risk level, determined based on D2.5.1, with separate sampling for farms and *small slaughter sites*. The number of sites audited shall be determined as follows, where n is the number of farms in the farm group:
- a. High risk level farms: audits of at least $3\sqrt{n}$,
 - b. Medium risk level farms: audits of at least $2\sqrt{n}$,



- c. Low risk level farms: audits of at least \sqrt{n} , and
- d. Small slaughter sites (all risk levels): audits of all sites.

D3.2.2 In addition to D3.2.1, on-site audits shall be conducted for all parent farms which are group members.

D3.2.3 The certification body shall conduct confirmation visits to at least 10% of farms in high-risk groups each year. The certification body may conduct additional confirmation visits to farms in Farm Groups of any risk level.

D3.3 Auditing Farm Areas

The following criteria apply for Farm Area Certification.

Update for V3.3: Textile Exchange is placing a moratorium on farm area certification. See [RDS-105 Policy for a Moratorium on Farm Area Certification in the Responsible Down Standard](#).

D3.3.1 Audits of farm areas shall consist of:

- a. an audit of the *organization* which manages the farm area;
- b. an audit of a sample of *small farms* within the farm area;
- c. an audit of a sample of *small slaughter sites* within the farm area, if any; and
- d. an audit of each site included in the scope certificate which is not covered by b or c, if any (e.g. farms which are not small farms, slaughter sites which are not small slaughter sites).

D3.3.2 The audit of the organization shall include:

- a. an evaluation of the ability of the organization to manage the farm area certification;
- b. an evaluation of the documentation of purchases from the area; and
- c. interviews with local stakeholders including veterinarians, farmer organizations and animal welfare groups, where possible.

D3.3.3 The certification body shall conduct a risk assessment on the farm area to determine the sampling rate to be used, based on the risk criteria in D2.5.1. For the first year, a risk level of medium or high shall be assigned.

D3.3.4 The certification body shall calculate a base level of audit days based on the following criteria:



- a. The certification body shall compile an estimate of the number of birds in the farm area, and identify any small slaughter sites to be included, based on data provided by the ICS.
- b. The time to audit a sample of farms which represent 10% of the birds in the farm area shall be calculated, taking into account the minimum audit duration listed in D2.7.1.
- c. The time to audit the square root of the number of small slaughter sites included in the farm area shall be determined.
- d. The typical local travel time sufficient to audit the sites identified in b. shall be determined.
- e. The base audit time shall be calculated as the sum of the times identified in b. and c.

D3.3.5 The certification body shall spend a minimum amount of time auditing the farm area during each audit. This time includes local travel between sites but excludes all other travel and reporting time, as well as auditing required by D3.3.1.a and d.

- a. High risk level: 3x the base audit time,
- b. Medium risk level: 2x the base audit time; and
- c. Low risk level: 1x the base audit time.

D3.3.6 Farms and slaughter sites shall be selected for audit as follows:

- a. Based on identified areas of risk;
- b. To represent the geographic and operational range of sites included in the area; and
- c. Randomly, as much as possible while also meeting a. and b.

D3.3.7 During audits of slaughter sites, the certification body shall conduct or evaluate a volume reconciliation.

D3.3.8 Non-conformities shall be issued to the organization rather than to a farm or slaughter site in the area.

D3.3.9 Confirmation visits may be conducted but are not required for Farm Area Certification.



D3.3.10 Effective March 1, 2024, the certification body shall not accept any new RDS Farm Area applications for organizations that wish to become certified.

D3.3.11 Effective April 1, 2024, the certification body shall not issue a farm area scope certificate including any farm area which was not included on a valid RDS Farm Area scope certificate during 2023.

D3.4 Parent Farm Certification

The following criteria apply if the organization is choosing to implement the Parent Farm Certification criteria (see RDS B1.1.1).

D3.4.1 If an organization chooses to include Parent Farm Certification in its certificate scope, the certification body shall conduct on-site audits of all parent farms supplying farms included in the scope certificate annually.

D3.4.2 Parent Farm Certification shall not be applied to Farm Area Certifications. Parent farms included in an area shall be subject to audits on the same basis as all other farms in the area.

D3.4.3 Scope and transaction certificates for RDS down with parent farm certification shall use the raw material codes identified as “(PFC)” in *ASR-213 Materials, Processes, & Products Classification* if claims about the parent farm certification are to be passed along.

D3.4.4 Down with parent farm certification may be mixed with other RDS down, in which case the down shall be listed as two elements of the material composition on the scope and transaction certificates, using the two applicable raw material codes.