

National Livestock Quality Scheme
Application for production specification approval

Sheet 6
‘Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas’

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Sheet 6
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1. Foreword

The proposed Production Specification sets out the process for the production of high-quality beef bearing the designation ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’ (*Vitellone e Scottona allevati in Altura*) in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Decree of 16 December 2022 (National Livestock Quality System – SQNZ).

The distinctive feature of this specification is that it will enable meat produced on farms located in hilly and mountainous areas to be marketed under a recognised brand.

The production specification requires compliance with minimum animal welfare standards and sets out the obligations that farmers must adhere to if they choose to follow the ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’ production specification, to produce meat of high quality and safety standards, as well as the rules that other operators in the supply chain must implement (from the abattoir to the point of sale) to preserve the quality and safety of the meat throughout the entire production chain.

The distinctive feature of this specification lies in the fact that its implementation is intended to promote extensive beef farming in hilly and mountainous areas, which undoubtedly represents an opportunity for the national beef farming sector, particularly in areas that are climatically and topographically disadvantaged.

Furthermore, the specification promotes the use of high-altitude and local forage (the use of local forage contributes to environmental sustainability by reducing the need to transport feed from areas far removed from those of production).

Ultimately, the ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’ label aims to promote environmental sustainability, provide greater assurance to consumers and stem the inexorable decline in the number of animals reared in these areas, which are severely disadvantaged by environmental factors but also hold an indispensable social value, representing a fundamental safeguard for the preservation of the local area.

2. Definitions and abbreviations

Breed	A bovine animal entered in the herd book or the offspring of a sire and dam both entered in the herd book of the same breed. In the latter case, verification of the ‘breed’ information must, in all cases, be carried out in accordance with the procedures specified by the organisation that maintains the herd book.
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Genetic type	Information obtained from the ‘Individual Identification Document for Bovine Species’ (passport) issued by the competent authority, or from another document verifying the breed of the animal’s sire (Certificate of Insemination – CIF for cattle with a national passport). On the label, information such as “genetic type: cross-breed (followed by the father's breed)” shall be recorded. In the absence of information, the genetic type is indicated as ‘crossbreed or hybrid’.		
Category: adult cattle	The following classification applies to cattle over 12 months of age:		
	Category:	Classification	Sales designation
	A	Carcasses of uncastrated male animals aged 12 months or over but under 24 months	Adult cattle
	AND	Carcasses of other female animals aged 12 months or over that have not calved.	Adult cattle
Self-testing	Internal control by each operator in the supply chain, through documentary checks and/or audits of the procedures implemented at each stage of the SQNZ supply chain.		
Control	Inspection carried out by an independent body authorised by the competent authority and appointed by the Operator or Organisation participating in the SQNZ supply chain.		
Supervision	Inspection carried out by the public administration to ensure compliance with the provisions laid down by the legislation governing the SQNZ.		
Traceability	Ensuring a unique and documented link between the carcass, the quarter, the first cuts on the bone, and the portioned meat, on the one hand, and the individual bovine animal of origin, on the other, identified by an official ear tag in accordance with current legislation. Traceability is guaranteed throughout all stages of the supply chain – rearing, slaughter, processing and marketing – and also in the stages following slaughter, where operations may be carried out in processing batches. It ensures that the meat can be traced back to the individual animals from which it originated at all times.		
Traceability Elements	The set of identification and registration systems to be implemented across the various stages of the ‘SQNZ’ beef supply chain, applied to ensure a link between the identification of the meat and the animal concerned.		
Ear tag number	Animal identification number (official ear tag)		

Identification code or traceability code:	Unique code identifying the link between the meat and the animal from which it was sourced (cattle ear tag number; sequential slaughter number; batch number)
Ageing process	The post-slaughter maturation phase of meat, carried out under controlled conditions of temperature, humidity and time, during which the meat tenderises as a result of biochemical changes in the muscle fibre.

- o **Rearing:** Each animal must be identified and traced from birth. Information on the farm includes origin, diet and veterinary practices. This data is recorded in a computerised system that enables constant monitoring of the animals' condition.
- o **Slaughter:** Traceability continues throughout the slaughter process. Each animal is identified using a unique tagging system. Details of the date, place and conditions of slaughter are recorded to ensure the safety and quality of the meat.
- o **Stores:** *'Young bulls and heifers reared in uplands areas'* beef is sold exclusively through authorised outlets. Each pack includes information on the origin, the date of slaughter and the rearing practices, ensuring complete transparency for consumers.

3. Facilities

Animals may be reared in the following ways

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- 1) **Pasture-based rearing**, which is the predominant method for most of the year, with temporary shelter in loose-housing systems only when weather, environmental or animal welfare conditions do not permit the animals to remain outdoors;
- 2) **Rearing in loose-housing systems**, for the entire cycle or part thereof.

In the case of pasture-based rearing, the animals must

- have continuous access to suitable grazing land, sufficient to ensure effective grazing;
- have adequate, accessible and constantly replenished watering points;
- be provided with natural or artificial shelter (e.g. trees, canopies, shelters) designed to safeguard animal welfare in the event of adverse weather conditions;
- where environmental conditions are incompatible with grazing (persistent snowfall, frost,

excessive rainfall, heatwaves, lack of forage), the animals must be moved to facilities that comply with the requirements set out in paragraph 3.

It is specified that the feeding requirements set out in paragraph 5 shall also apply in full during the grazing period. Grazed grass constitutes fresh forage within the meaning of paragraph 5. Where the grass available on pasture is insufficient to meet the planned feeding regime, supplementation with fodder (hay, cereals and feedstuffs complying with the requirements set out in paragraph 5) is mandatory.

In the case of a loose-housing system:

- a) farms adhering to the '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' specification must ensure that the animals are reared in accordance with minimum animal welfare standards; therefore, the animals must not be tethered but must be able to move about freely. Grazing and free-stall housing in pens are therefore permitted, but fixed housing is not.
- b) Housing facilities must be constructed using materials that ensure the barn's proper temperature, adequate air circulation and humidity, and low concentrations of gases and dust, so as not to harm the animals.
- c) The covered area available for each adult bovine animal in the barn must be at least 5 square metres per animal.
- d) The front of the feeding trough must be of a suitable size to allow easy access to the trough; where a 'unifeed' system is used, the layout of the feeding stalls for animals of different sizes and weights must allow at least 70% of the animals in the barn to be fed simultaneously.
- e) The barn must have an area designated as an infirmary.
- f) The barn must have a suitable area for the temporary accommodation of new animals to be introduced to the herd.

4. Farm conditions

The conditions that must be met to certify meat under the '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' label are as follows:

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- a) The main farm premises for rearing cattle (stables and shelters) must be situated at an altitude of more than 350 metres above sea level. This requirement must be evidenced by appropriate cadastral or cartographic documentation, or by other official attestation proving the altimetric location of the business centre (GPS readings).

- b) The animals to be reared under this specification must be males and females of the species '*Bos Taurus*', belonging exclusively to breeds or genetic types classified by as beef breeds, dual-purpose breeds (milk and beef) and their crossbreeds. Animals belonging to types not consistent with the beef production guidance are excluded;
- c) The animals, from birth to weaning, must be fed a milk-based diet (preferably natural; suckling feeds are permitted) for at least 3 months. In the cow-calf system, calves must remain with their mothers for at least 6 months. For purchased calves, compliance with the minimum period of stay with the mother must be certified by self-certification from the original farmer, accompanied by the official identification and traceability documentation required by current legislation;
- d) The purchase of cattle intended for fattening (restocking) and their subsequent marketing under the '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' label is permitted provided that:
 - the farm at which the production cycle ends and which requests certification is situated in a 'high-altitude' area within the meaning of point a);
 - the animals remain on that farm for a minimum and continuous period of 6 months immediately before slaughter;
 - During this period, all the conditions set out in this specification are fully complied with;
 - the animals introduced must have been born, reared and slaughtered in the same country. They must be identified and traced in accordance with current legislation on the identification and registration of cattle. For certification purposes, compliance with the minimum period of stay in the barn and the conditions set out in this specification is required.
- e) Where new animals are introduced onto the farm, a quarantine period of not less than 3 weeks must be provided for, in designated separate areas, in accordance with current health regulations;
- f) animals must be slaughtered at an age of between 12 and 24 months. Age is verified based on the data contained in the official identification documentation;
- g) cattle that have undergone therapeutic treatment with antibiotics in the 6 months before slaughter are excluded from SQNZ certification. Only any mandatory treatments prescribed by the competent health authority are permitted, provided they are duly recorded and carried out in accordance with the withdrawal periods;
- h) the area designated for the animals to lie down must be covered with bedding that is replenished

and redistributed at least once a week to ensure a dry surface suitable for animal welfare, allowing freedom of movement, standing up, and lying down without the risk of slipping. The bedding must be completely replaced at least every 6 months or, in any case, at the end of each production cycle, before a new batch of animals is introduced;

- i) farms must comply with current regulations governing the agricultural use of livestock manure and with any other applicable environmental provisions;
- j) on farms participating in the SQNZ scheme, the rearing and feeding conditions set out in this specification must be applied to all cattle on the same production unit, and not only to those intended for certification. Consequently, within the same barn or production area, animals reared and fed in accordance with this specification must not be kept alongside animals reared using conventional methods. Where the farm has several stables or structurally distinct units, an exception to this principle is permitted, provided that a clear and rigorous structural and management separation between the different rearing methods is ensured. In such situations, the clear identification and traceability of the animals, the separation of feed and spaces, and the distinction between production flows must always be maintained, thereby avoiding any mixing.

5. Nutrition

- a) A farm applying to adhere to the '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' specification must draw up and keep up-to-date feed ration plans that take into account the nutritional requirements of the cattle at the various stages of development. In particular, different feed rations must be defined for the growth and fattening phases. The feed requirements set out in this paragraph apply to animals covered by the specification for the entire rearing period following weaning and up to slaughter, regardless of the rearing method used (pasture-based or loose housing). For SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' certification, it is in any case mandatory that the final six months before slaughter fully comply with all the requirements of this product specification (structural, dietary and animal welfare);
- b) From weaning until slaughter, cattle must be fed on forage (fresh or hay), with the addition of simple raw materials (cereals and their by-products, products and by-products of legume and oilseed crops), or mixtures of raw materials, which may be supplemented with mineral and vitamin supplements and additives permitted under current legislation. These requirements apply to both animals reared predominantly on pasture and those reared in loose-housing systems, as there are no differences in nutritional requirements between the two rearing methods;

- c) Fodder, whether obtained from sown grassland or from meadows, must be mixed swards consisting of at least two species, one of which is a legume. The ration must always contain at least 30% hay. Rations consisting solely of feed are prohibited. These requirements must be complied with throughout the period of adherence to the specification;
- d) the products used in the feed ration must come predominantly from the farm's own production. In particular, at least 60% of the herd's feed requirements must be met by land managed and cultivated by the farm itself. Where part of the feed is purchased from other farms, the products (fodder, grain, etc.) must come exclusively from farms located within 100 km of the livestock farm;
- e) the diet must be free from added animal fats. The requirement applies without distinction between pasture-based rearing and loose-housing systems;
- f) where feed of non-on-farm origin is used, farmers must request from suppliers a declaration of conformity of the feed with the requirements set out in point 5(e). Compliance must be guaranteed for the entire period of adherence to the specification;
- g) livestock feed must be properly identified and stored, and kept physically separate from other feed not permitted under this specification and/or intended for other animal species reared on the farm;
- h) livestock feed must be free from any spoilage or toxic substances that would render it unsuitable for animal consumption, in accordance with current legislation.

6. Rules relating to slaughter

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- a) The transport of animals to the abattoir must minimise distress to prevent suffering and the resulting quality issues in the meat. Therefore, the loading of animals onto transport vehicles must be carried out in accordance with the relevant regulations, and the slaughterhouse must be

located within 200 km of the farm;

- b) to ensure the tenderness of the meat, meat produced under this specification must undergo a maturation process of at least 7 days for females and 10 days for males before being placed on the market. The use of electrical stimulation of the carcass to accelerate the meat's maturation process is not permitted;
- c) the carcass may be removed from the refrigeration chambers of the slaughterhouse no earlier than 48 hours after slaughter.

7. Recording and traceability criteria

The production chain involved in the production of meat designated as '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' comprises the following operators: farms, abattoirs, cutting and portioning facilities, and retail outlets.

The role of the Supply Chain Leader is provided for in this specification solely for organisational coordination of the SQNZ scheme and is not mandatory or operational. In the absence of a Supply Chain Leader, the obligations set out in these regulations remain entirely the responsibility of the individual participating operators. The Supply Chain Leader:

- does not constitute a new legal entity;
- does not relieve operators of their responsibilities;
- does not perform any supervisory or certification functions;
- nor does it independently validate or approve procedures or operating methods.

Its role is limited to organisational coordination and ensuring the proper flow of information and documentation between operators in the supply chain and the Controlling Body (CB), in accordance with the objectives of the SQNZ. It is understood that:

- each operator is directly responsible for the correct application of the regulations;
- the verification of conformity and approval of procedures are the sole responsibility of the designated Controlling Body.

The following describes, for the various operators in the SQNZ supply chain, the identification and registration systems, the traceability elements and the description of the production process on which the national quality scheme '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' is based.

7.1 Livestock farms

By applying for admission to the SQNZ, farmers undertake to comply with the requirements set out

in this specification and, in particular, to certify that the cattle have been reared under the SQNZ ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’; they must ensure the conditions set out in this specification are met, namely:

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- a) on each farm adhering to the SQNZ specification, records detailing the feed ration administered must be present and available for inspection;
- b) traceability for home-produced feed is, however, ensured by the farm logbook and the records of production for the agricultural year under the headings ‘verification of quantities produced’ and ‘verification of quantities purchased’;
- c) traceability of food and feed/feedstuffs of non-on-farm origin used by the livestock farmer is guaranteed by:
 - purchase documents (delivery notes/invoices), from which it is possible to verify that the farmer has purchased feed/base feed/food from feed mills/suppliers holding product certification;
 - accompanying documents for the feed/nucleus from which it is possible to verify the formulation and absence of added animal fats and the batch of provenance;
- d) for animal traceability, the registration details consist of ear tags, identification documentation, and movement records, as required by current national legislation. Cattle from abroad are not permitted, in particular:
 - cattle born abroad, even if subsequently reared and slaughtered within the country;
 - cattle born in Italy and subsequently reared, even for a short period, in other countries;
 - cattle slaughtered in a country other than that in which they were born and reared.

Any reference to documentation relating to cattle of foreign origin is to be considered

inapplicable to this specification, as cattle intended for SQNZ certification must be born, reared and slaughtered exclusively in the same country;

e) the farmer must therefore:

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- keep the register of cattle movements up to date at the intervals specified by current legislation and check that all animals are fitted with ear tags or electronic identification;
- upon delivery of supplementary feed, verify the required transport and supporting documentation and ensure it corresponds to the incoming product;
- maintain and update, every month, the food loading and unloading register and/or other traceability system;
- in order to comply with the specification, cattle must be reared under the conditions set out above and must be sent for slaughter at an age of between 12 and 24 months;

f) when handing over the cattle for slaughter, the farmer must:

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- send the animal to the abattoir accompanied by the documentation required by current health and cattle registration regulations, designed to ensure:
 - the accuracy of the information relating to the breed or genetic type;
 - the full traceability of the animal;
 - proof that the animal of the bovine species was born, reared and destined for slaughter in the same country, as a mandatory requirement for SQNZ certification. Verification of compliance with the requirement that the animal be ‘born, reared and slaughtered in the same country’ is an essential condition for the animal’s eligibility for certification and must be clearly evident from the official identification and movement records held in the BDN.
- update the livestock register;
- provide the accompanying documentation referred to in Article 8(7) of Legislative Decree No. 134 of 5 August 2022 (Form 4) together with:
 - a declaration in lieu of affidavit, issued in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 445 of 28 December 2000, issued by the keeper/breeder, certifying that each animal or batch of animals sent for slaughter has been reared in full compliance with all the requirements set out in the SQNZ specification ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’ for the entire minimum period required (the last 6 months);
 - a specific certificate issued by the Controlling Body, certifying the farm’s adherence to the SQNZ scheme and the compliance of the rearing operations with the requirements set out in the specification.

- g) A farmer wishing to qualify and, where applicable, indicate on the label the ‘breed’ or ‘genetic type’ of animals participating in the National Livestock Quality System (SQNZ) ‘*Young bulls*

and heifers reared in upland areas must adopt the following verification and documentary traceability procedure:

- the designation 'breed' is recognised only where there is documentary evidence certifying the animal's registration in the official herd book of the declared breed or the registration of both parents in the same herd book. To this end, the breeder must:
 - obtain and retain a copy of the certificate of entry in the Herd Book for the animal, issued by the relevant National Breeders' Association,or
 - obtain and retain a copy of the documentation certifying that both parents are registered in the Herd Book for the declared breed.

The documentation must be kept on the farm and presented during inspections by the Certification Body.

- The status of 'genetic type' is recognised where there is documentary evidence attesting to the animal's genetic origin through:
 - the Certificate of Artificial Insemination (CIF), stating the identification of the breeding animal used,or
 - equivalent documentation issued by the competent authority or by the body managing the breeding programme, which makes it possible to trace the declared genetic line with certainty.

The documentation must enable traceability between the identified animal and the breeding animal used.

- h) The breeding farm must implement a manual of good breeding practices covering at least the following aspects:
 - animal registration and traceability;
 - procurement and feed management;
 - farm healthcare management;
 - livestock sewage management;
 - cleaning, disinfection, pest control and rodent control;
 - staff training.
- i) The records required by this specification may be kept in electronic and/or paper form;
- j) the documentation certifying the above shall be filed and retained by the operator/organisation

for at least two years. It must be available for verification purposes (self-monitoring and checks carried out by the Independent Body).

7.2 Slaughterhouse

a) Upon receipt of the cattle, the slaughterhouse must:

- verify that the cattle belong to the SQNZ scheme;
- obtain the accompanying documentation required under Article 8(7) of Legislative Decree No. 134 of 5 August 2022, including Form 4 issued by the Veterinary Service of the relevant Local Health Authority (ASL);
- obtain and verify:
 - the declaration in lieu of affidavit, issued by the farmer in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 445 of 28 December 2000, certifying that the animal or consignment complies with the requirements of the SQNZ specification for the specified period;
 - the certificate issued by the Controlling Body attesting to the farm's adherence to and compliance with the SQNZ system;
- verify, including by consulting the National Cattle Register Database (BDN), that the animal has remained on the declared farm for the minimum period specified in the specification;

if even one of the above documents is missing, or in the event of inconsistencies between the information provided, the animal cannot be admitted to the SQNZ scheme;

- b) in the case of organisations adhering to the SQNZ specification, verification of the accuracy of the information regarding 'breed' or 'genetic type' may be carried out directly by the slaughterhouse, should this information be included on the label;
- c) the documentation referred to in point (a) must be retained by the slaughterhouse for two years and must be made available to the technicians responsible for self-monitoring or for the checks carried out by the Independent Body;
- d) during the pre-slaughter phase, the person in charge at the slaughterhouse compares the identification code on the bovine's ear tag or electronic tag with the details set out in Form 4 and the accompanying documentation required by current legislation. Following verification, bovines that comply with the requirements are sent for slaughter. For each specific ear tag/electronic identifier, record the order of entry into the slaughter chain on the appropriate document (Form 4, farm computerised register, etc.), to ensure correct matching with the

sequential slaughter number assigned to the carcass;

- e) The order of entry of the cattle onto the chain is entered into the slaughter facility's computer system. This is followed by slaughter and the sequential arrival of the carcasses, which are individually weighed, graded and numbered automatically and sequentially, with a unique link to the ear tag/electronic identification code of the animal of the bovine species from which they originate;
- f) only for carcasses classified in categories 'A' and 'E' and not falling within the commercial classifications (SEUROP) of categories O and P (conformation classes 'S', 'E', 'U' and 'R') and not falling within fat cover classes 1, 4 and 5 (fat cover classes 2 and 3 are permitted), is it possible to print and affix to the carcasses the slaughter label certifying that the meat belongs to the SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*', stating only the information specified in paragraph 8. The labels must also bear a barcode suitable for traceability. Three labels are affixed to each half-carcass (one for each of the sixth). The carcass is then divided into two halves;
- g) before cutting, the halves are identified by means of slaughter labels positioned at the potential cutting points;
- h) the information on the label is taken from the National Cattle Register Database (BDN) and from the accompanying documentation required under Article 8(7) of Legislative Decree No. 134 of 5 August 2022, including Form 4;
- i) the IT system must ensure the entry of data, the printing of slaughter labels and the archiving of information;
- j) the information printed on the label is derived from the documentation referred to above and uploaded, at the time of slaughter, to the establishment's computer database. The computer programme must be capable of flagging or blocking the printing of labels should the requirements set out in this specification not be met;
- k) the establishment must ensure, by means of a suitable IT system, that there is a correlation between the intake of each slaughtered animal and the dispatch of the meat obtained from it and sent to the customer. Shipments are recorded in the database and must allow the recipients to be traced at any time;
- l) the establishment must ensure that staff responsible for data management are properly trained and that the IT system operates correctly;
- m) upon dispatch of the meat (half-carcasses, quarters or sixths), the establishment must issue an 'SQNZ Certificate': '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' attesting to compliance

with the requirements set out in the specification, or indicating in the accompanying documentation that the batches comply with the aforementioned SQNZ. These documents may be issued in paper and/or electronic form and must be kept at the establishment;

- n) documentation certifying compliance with the SQNZ must bear a barcode (EAN 128, QR Code or a similar system suitable for computerised reading) or a copy must be transmitted in electronic format, to ensure a smooth flow of information between operators;
- o) documents and data relating to the dispatch of SQNZ meat must be archived in paper and/or electronic form for at least 2 years. Regular backups ensure the long-term preservation of data.

7.3 Cutting/Portioning Laboratory

- a) A processing plant adhering to the SQNZ specification, which intends to cut and/or portion beef from the SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*', must ensure the identification of all products, maintain the traceability of the meat through a suitable IT system and affix an appropriate label to all finished products in accordance with this specification;
- b) the half-carasses, quarters or sixths obtained from the preceding operations at slaughterhouses affiliated with the SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' may be cut up in facilities adjacent to the slaughterhouses or in cutting plants not adjacent to the slaughterhouse;
- c) at the time of cutting, the half-carasses are already identified by means of slaughter labels;
- d) upon joining the SQNZ, the cutting plant must inform the Supply Chain Manager of the methods used for identification, traceability and mass balance control (e.g. 'all-in/all-out' processing or the use of processing flows separated by appropriate markers, etc.) adopted during cutting operations to ensure that the meat is not mixed with meat not covered by the specification. The Supply Chain Leader is required to liaise with the Controlling Body (CB), which, before accepting membership, assesses the cutting/portioning facility's proposed operating procedures. The procedures adopted must be made available to the operator, in paper format, for control and supervision activities;
- e) the methods used by the cutting plant to collect data are computerised. Data can be captured by importing files, scanning barcodes or scanning the QR code on the slaughter label. Manual entry of data into the cutting identification and traceability system is permitted only where it is impossible to capture the digital data, the barcode or QR code is illegible, or there is a documented fault in the scanning systems;
- f) the half-carasses, intended for sale under the label '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*', are cut according to the order received from the customer. For each anatomical cut

obtained, at the time of weighing, the operator uses an optical scanner connected to the IT system to scan the code on the slaughter label or enters the traceability code on the scales/weighing machine/labelling machine relating to the meat in question, thereby retrieving the animal's identification data from the computer database of the cutting plant. Once this operation is complete, the cutting labels are printed and affixed to each anatomical cut intended for sale. The dissection label contains the information specified in paragraph 8 of the specification and features a barcode of the type described above;

- g) further processing, from anatomical cuts through to portioned (pre-packaged) products, must ensure traceability and follow procedures to prevent the mixing of meats as described above;
- h) Where the cutting plant establishes processing batches, these must consist exclusively of meat labelled in accordance with the SQNZ specification '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*', in compliance with the requirements of the quality system. To ensure the batch is correctly formed, the cutting plant carries out a preliminary check of the information on the labels affixed to the cuts of meat using specialised barcode or QR code readers. Only cuts of meat that comply with the aforementioned SQNZ specification and bear the same mandatory information required by the labelling system may be included in the production batch. Furthermore, where present, any optional information provided for in paragraph 8 of the specification below must also be consistent. The IT system used by the laboratory simultaneously carries out an automatic check on the consistency of the data recorded, flagging any inconsistencies or discrepancies between the information associated with individual cuts of meat. Where such discrepancies are found, the system prevents or flags the creation of the batch, thereby ensuring traceability, the uniformity of the declared characteristics and compliance with the provisions of the SQNZ specification '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*'.
- i) The cutting plant, regardless of the traceability system adopted, must
 - enter the data relating to SQNZ meat into the database and, where necessary, relabel the product if the original label does not bear a barcode or QR code that is readable by the cutting plant's own system;
 - debone and portion individual cuts or homogeneous batches of product, ensuring they are not mixed with other meat present in the cutting plant;
 - automatically print labels for the cuts obtained from individual processing operations or processing batches;
 - affix the label to boned/portioned products in accordance with the indications of the

SQNZ specification '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*';

- j. at the time of dispatch of the meat (large boneless cuts, anatomical cuts, portioned cuts, etc.), the cutting plant must issue an SQNZ Certificate: '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*', certifying, for each portion of meat supplied, that the meat meets the requirements of the aforementioned SQNZ; alternatively, the accompanying documentation for the outgoing product must state that the batches comply with the SQNZ: '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*'. This documentation must be issued in accordance with the same procedures as those laid down for the slaughterhouse;
- k. the cutting/portioning plant must ensure, using a suitable IT system, that the delivery of each consignment of meat from the slaughterhouse is matched with the dispatch of the meat produced from it and sent to the customer. Meat consignments are recorded in the database by the cutting/portioning workshop. At any time, it is possible to consult the database to identify the recipients of every SQNZ meat consignment dispatched (mass balance);
- l. the IT system must ensure the entry of data and the printing of cutting/portioning labels to be affixed to the meat or packaging, as well as the archiving of the information;
- m. the cutting/portioning facility must ensure that the technician responsible for entering data into the computerised database is properly trained and that the IT system operates correctly;
- n. the archiving of copies of documents and data relating to the dispatch of SQNZ meat: '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' is recorded on paper and/or electronically at the cutting plant for a period of at least 2 years. Regular backups ensure the long-term preservation of data stored electronically.

7.4 Points of sale

- a) Any retail outlet (POS) applying for membership of the SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' must notify the Supply Chain Leader in advance of the procedures adopted for the identification, traceability, storage, any processing, the sale of the meat and the monitoring of mass balances. These procedures must be suitable for ensuring, throughout all operations carried out at the point of sale, that there is no mixing with meat not covered by this specification (for example: storage in dedicated and identified cold stores; processing using the 'all-in/all-out' method or via appropriately marked separate flows; use of sales counters with dedicated areas). The Supply Chain Leader is required to liaise with the Controlling Body (CB), which, before accepting membership, assesses the operating procedures proposed by the retail outlet (POS);

- b) traceability management by retail outlets may be carried out using computerised systems. Paper-based/manual management is permitted exclusively for the ‘traditional retail’ sales category. The Controlling Body (CB) must approve the operational procedures – whether manual or computerised – proposed by the retail outlet and verify that any paper-based/manual processing relates to a minimum percentage of products not exceeding 10%, before accepting the application;
- c) the procedures adopted by the point of sale must be made available to the operator, either in paper form or electronically, for control and monitoring activities;
- d) the methods used by the retail outlet to collect data must preferably be computerised, either by importing files or by scanning the barcode or QR code on the slaughter or cutting label. In the event of illegibility or a documented malfunction of the IT system, manual entry of data is permitted based on documentation certifying the product’s compliance with the SQNZ;
- e) half-carasses or other certified cuts of meat delivered to points of sale must be identified at the time of delivery by slaughter or cutting labels;
- f) the point-of-sale IT system must ensure the entry of data, the printing of labels to be affixed near the meat offered for sale or on the packaging of pre-packaged products, and the archiving of information;
- g) the retail outlet must ensure that there is a correlation between the receipt of meat from slaughterhouses or cutting/portioning facilities and the dispatch of meat sold to the end consumer. Deliveries and sales must be recorded on paper or electronically by the retail outlet;
- h) the point of sale must ensure that copies of documents and data relating to beef certified as SQNZ ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’ are archived in paper and/or electronic form at the point of sale for a minimum period of two years. In the case of electronic storage, the long-term preservation of the data must be ensured through periodic backups;
- i) the point of sale (POS), regardless of the traceability system used, must check, upon arrival of the goods, that they are correctly identified and, in particular:
 - each cut must bear the label specified in the product specification; furthermore, the goods must be accompanied by a delivery note and the SQNZ certificate ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’ or by accompanying documentation for the batch stating compliance with the SQNZ standard ‘*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*’;
 - download the traceability data onto paper and/or into an IT system by importing the file or scanning the barcode or QR code on the label: this allows the consignment to be

registered on arrival, and the goods are unloaded based on the weights of the various cuts produced;

- in the cold store and on the sales counter, the meat identified under the SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' must be kept physically separate from the rest of the beef (e.g. in a dedicated section of the cold store or on a dedicated sales counter, identified with a specific label, etc.);
 - in the event of processing (cutting, preparation, etc.), an appropriate system must be used (for illustrative purposes only: processing in 'all-in/all-out' mode or the use of separate processing flows marked by suitable indicators) to prevent any mixing between meat certified under the SQNZ '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' and meat not covered by this specification;
 - arranges the goods by separating them into individual batches and attaches an identification tag, visible to the consumer, bearing the batch number that links the various cuts to the SQNZ certificate '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*'. Where products are pre-packaged and sold on a self-service basis, the goods retrieved from the cold store are processed as indicated in the fourth paragraph above, and at the time of weighing, the staff member enters the traceability code and automatically prints the label to be affixed to the pre-packaged item, bearing the details required by the specification (no new batches are formed at the point of sale);
- j) Incoming goods – Incoming meat is identified with the labels specified in the specification and accompanied by documentation certifying compliance with the SQNZ standard '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*': a certificate or other accompanying documentation;
- k) Storage – During storage, the goods retain their original label if they have not yet been cut up; after cutting, they are identified with a label or tag bearing the traceability code that links the various cuts to the SQNZ certificate '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' issued by the slaughterhouse or the cutting/portioning facility;
- l) Assisted sales counter – At the sales counter, goods are identified by labels or tags bearing the traceability code, which allows the cut to be linked to the label affixed near the meat. This label may also take the form of the SQNZ certificate: '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*';
- m) Self-service counter – On the self-service counter, the goods are displayed pre-packaged and labelled with all the information required by the specification. The label is printed whilst the product is being weighed, using the relevant traceability code;

- n) retail outlets (POS) that sell exclusively pre-packaged products from portioning facilities must always comply with the specification.

8. Product Labelling

Food information other than the mandatory information provided for in Articles 13, 14 and 15 of Regulation (EC) No 1760/2000, as amended, which is voluntarily added to labels, shall be objective and verifiable by the chosen Certification Body, as well as comprehensible to consumers and compliant with horizontal legislation on labelling in accordance with Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Information relating to

- Item identification number;
- Gender;
- Date of birth;
- Race or Genetic Type;
- Date of entry into the barn by the last keeper;
- Breeding farm of the last keeper;
- Date of slaughter;
- Slaughterhouse;
- Carcass data (classification, weight, etc.);

must always be present on the product label.

Labels must also bear a barcode or QR code suitable for traceability.

9. Supply Chain Leader

For this SQNZ specification '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*', the term 'Supply Chain Leader' is used exclusively in a functional and descriptive sense; it does not identify a new legal or operational entity, nor does it refer to any entity other than the individual operators within the supply chain expressly provided for (farms, abattoirs, cutting/portioning facilities and retail outlets). The Supply Chain Leader may be the same as:

- a) an operator within the supply chain who already complies with the code of practice,
- or
- b) a party formally appointed by the supply chain to manage and coordinate the SQNZ system.

Should the Supply Chain Leader be an operator within the supply chain, they may under no

circumstances carry out any validation, approval or control functions in relation to their own procedures, which remain subject exclusively to verification by the Controlling Body.

Within the framework of the SQNZ system, the Supply Chain Leader is assigned exclusively the following functions:

- a) organisational coordination, through:
 - the collection and systematisation of the procedures for identification, traceability and management of mass balances drawn up by individual operators;
 - formal verification of the completeness of documentation before submission to the CB;
 - standardisation of document templates amongst participating operators.
- b) Technical and organisational liaison with the Controlling Body (CB), through:
 - the submission of procedures;
 - the handling of requests for additions or amendments;
 - the coordination of document updates by operators.

It is the responsibility of the Controlling Body to verify compliance with the specification and current legislation.

In summary, the Supply Chain Leader serves a coordinating and facilitating role in relation to the flow of information, without assuming any decision-making authority or operational responsibilities regarding compliance with the specification.

10. Self-assessment by the SQNZ Operator/Organisation

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12.

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- a) The SQNZ specification '*Young bulls and heifers reared in upland areas*' is subject to a self-monitoring plan covering the requirements set out in this specification, applicable to all operators in the supply chain (livestock farming, slaughterhouse, cutting plant and retail outlet).
- b) The controlling body (CB) verifies the existence, adequacy and implementation of the Self-Monitoring Plan.

11. Data reporting

The SQNZ Supply Chain Leader referred to in this specification shall ensure, by electronic means, that the following information is made available to the competent authorities:

- a) The list of participating farms with their respective unique identification codes;
- b) The list of abattoirs/cutting plants with their respective unique identification codes;
- c) The list of participating retail outlets.

12. Annexes

- a) Annex 1 – “*Self-Monitoring Plan*”