

REAL Compost and Biofertiliser Certification Schemes' Research Hub

Introduction

Renewable Energy Assurance Ltd (REAL) carries out a range of certification and consumer protection activities, which promote circular economy principles and sustainable energy. REAL's certification schemes support / encourage the use of waste-derived products and ensure that a range of organics recycling sector participants comply with the relevant quality standards and end of waste criteria.

REAL is the owner and administrator of the Compost Certification Scheme (CCS) and Biofertiliser Certification Scheme (BCS). The CCS and BCS provide assurance to consumers, farmers, food producers and retailers that compost produced from composting processes and biofertiliser produced from anaerobic digestion processes are safe for human, animal and plant health. As of February 2018, there were 170 certified processes under the CCS and 70 certified plants under the BCS.

The Research Hub is a tool to source funding from the compost and AD industries in order to develop the technical and regulatory aspects of certified compost and digestate production, testing and usage.

Research Hub

It is REAL's responsibility to ensure that the CCS and BCS are robust and fit for purpose. Among other actions, this is achieved through continuous stakeholder engagement and revision of the scheme documents. Where scientific evidence is needed to improve the schemes, REAL has been able to rely on existing evidence from research projects funded by other organisations like WRAP.

WRAP used to play a vital role within the organics recycling industry by working with Universities, providing financial and technical support, promoting the quality standards and maintaining market confidence. Unfortunately funding from WRAP is no longer available and its engagement with the industry is greatly limited.

Currently there is no other body that provides new, accessible research and evidence for development for the composting and AD industries. The dynamic within the industry might have changed but the need for new scientific evidence to support innovation and improve specifications in the scheme documents still exists. The quality standards (BSI PAS) and laboratory test methods must be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to reflect changing legislation and relevant scientific developments.

Research brings a huge influx of knowledge to the industry, which is essential for continuous development. Without research & development (R&D) work the industry may stall or even be perceived as going backwards, and struggle to maintain its reputation. To this end, REAL considers it is necessary to establish appropriate cooperation frameworks.

In cooperation with the members of the CCS Technical Advisory Committee/BCS Oversight Panel and in discussion with the industry, REAL decided to pursue an initiative to set up a mechanism for raising funds and sponsoring the development work in the form of a **Research Hub**.

The main benefit of the Research Hub will be the increased amount of evidence available for the industry to develop and ensure long-term competitiveness and growth.

Management of the Hub

The Research Hub would be managed by REAL and its operation would be overseen by a Research Panel (the Panel). The Panel would manage the funds and outline the process for appointing organisations to deliver the objectives of projects funded by the Research Hub. The Panel would also decide which projects will be funded and determine the ways in which the results from the projects may be used and help to disseminate the outcomes.

The Panel would consist of people representing the composting and AD industries, representatives from academia, the environmental regulators and operators. The Panel would hold a chaired meeting at least twice a year. The first meeting of the group is envisaged for autumn 2018.

The funds will support a wide range of technical projects, including research studies, evidence gathering and gap analysis. The Research Hub may also fund or contribute towards rewriting protocols for testing compost and digestate and maintaining the industry standards.

REAL intends to charge an administrative fee (to be decided) to cover the management of the Hub.

Research fees

The Research Hub would be funded by scheme participant compost and biofertiliser producers through research fees based on annual feedstock inputs. The research fees were established following a cost benefit analysis that considered the costs of independent certification under CCS and BCS and the charges associated with controls required by environmental regulators for the use of waste-compost and waste-digestate.

The proposed groups based on annual feedstock inputs and corresponding research fees were considered reasonable by members of the TAC/Oversight Panel when presented at the last meeting. The initiative was widely supported by members and the fees will be decided after the next TAC meeting in summer 2018 where approval will be sought. All scheme participants would need to pay the research fees as part of their annual fee for being a participant in the certification schemes. The first annual research fees would be charged once the next version of the CCS/BCS Scheme Rules have been published later in the year.

Invoices will be sent by the certification bodies to operators at renewal or initial application, together with the invoice for certification services. REAL will then recover the research fee from the certification bodies. The funds will be managed independently and in a transparent manner. REAL plan to set up a separate website for the Research Hub where participants of the scheme could follow the development of the Hub, see available funds and research projects.

Queries

If you have any questions about the proposed Research Hub, please don't hesitate to contact Gabor Hasznos, Technical Manager for CCS and BCS at REAL, gabor@realschemes.org.uk.