

**Title:** “The Biosolids Assurance Scheme: new clothes for the Emperor?”

**Themes:** Landbank security (Market confidence, HACCP, product quality and safety)

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**Overview:**

Biosolids have been safely applied to agricultural land for many years. In the three decades since introduction of the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations, there have been occasional periods of supply-chain scrutiny that resulted in the introduction of the Code of Practice, the Safe Sludge Matrix and the Nutrient Management Matrix. Whilst there have been discussions around updating the legislation to reflect these voluntary initiatives, it has not changed. Instead, in an effort to retain and improve food-chain confidence in the use of biosolids, the Biosolids Assurance Scheme was launched in 2013. This brought together the various regulatory and good practice requirements into a single, auditable standard. From operational experience, it is clear that the standard is open to significant interpretation – particularly around the location of sampling points and application of HACCP principles. Whilst this flexibility allows for site-specific process variations, the absence of any absolute requirement to demonstrate microbial quality in the end product itself risks undermining confidence in the scheme – and (more importantly) – the use of biosolids. With a focus on microbiological outcomes, grey areas in the scheme will be explored and compared with the underpinning evidence base. Recommendations to improve scheme rigour and transparency will also be made.