

# Insight into remote audits for the AFMA Code of Conduct

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The Animal Feed Manufacturers Association (AFMA) has recently revised its auditing protocol to provide a more functional and logistically flexible auditing process. A key enhancement includes the introduction of remote audits for specific categories of members, namely traders who do not use warehousing and move products directly from the ship to the client; and manufacturing facilities located in neighbouring Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries that do not export feed products to South Africa.

The new provision for remote audits aligns with AFMA’s commitment to maintaining a high industry standard with a robust risk-based approach, while offering a practical and cost-effective compliance verification method.

This audit is a self-regulating mechanism that verifies compliance of all AFMA full and associate member facilities with the relevant legal requirements and industry standards related to animal feed and feed manufacturing. The audit process promotes integrity and consumer confidence within the animal feed and food sectors.

### The standard audit process

Traditionally, the AFMA Code of Conduct audit requires an on-site assessment conducted every two years by an independent auditor. The process includes:

- Telephonic pre-screening assessment to verify operations at the facility.
- On-site audit to verify compliance.
- Compiling a comprehensive audit report detailing non-conformances.
- Corrective action process to address non-conformances within an agreed timeframe.
- Follow-up verification by the auditor to close findings.
- AFMA Code of Conduct certificate issued upon full compliance.

The industry Code of Conduct was initiated in 2008 and since then, all AFMA feed manufacturers and feed ingredient suppliers have shown continuous compliance with the industry code, creating a responsible industry that provides safe feed for safe food.

AFMA has initiated a modernisation of the Code to ensure its continued relevance, and as part of the re-assessment process, remote audits were adopted as acceptable audit protocols for qualifying members.

### How remote audits work

Remote audits use electronic methods to obtain evidence and evaluate conformity to audit criteria, and can include sharing files via email, OneDrive, or Google Drive; video conferencing by using tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom; or live video or surveillance video to gather evidence. Remote auditing is useful for any kind of audit where evidence is gathered via documentation review, records evaluation, and interviews with people. This requires certain arrangements for the location of the auditor and safe and reliable technology.

Remote audits are acknowledged by ISO 17065 as a standard auditing process and have been adopted by AFMA as part of its Code of Conduct audit protocol for certain membership categories. These audits are designed to deliver the same outcome as an on-site audit and is based on the same audit criteria. Remote audits

are especially efficient for reviewing documents and records at facilities where no product is manufactured and/or stored.

### Eligibility for remote audits

AFMA management, in conjunction with the assessment body, thoroughly evaluated the risk of adopting remote audits as part of the Code of Conduct audit protocol, and have identified two membership categories where this will be allowed, as well as a set of criteria to determine eligibility.

**New members:** It is important to note that the first audit for ALL new (provisional) members will be an on-site audit and determines a risk profile for the business. Subsequent audits during the next audit cycle at trading companies and SADC manufacturers may qualify for a remote audit subject to AFMA approval. SADC manufacturers may only qualify for a remote audit every alternate audit cycle.

**Existing members:** Traders (without warehousing) may opt for a remote audit in the next renewal cycle following implementation. Eligibility for remote audits will be discussed during the pre-screening assessment with AFMA

**Table 1: Membership categories and criteria necessary to determine eligibility.**

Membership category	Criteria	Audit frequency*
<b>Traders</b>	Direct delivery of products from ship to client without storage at a warehouse.	First audit = on site Subsequent audits = remote
<b>SADC feed manufacturers</b>	Manufactured feed products are not exported to/traded in South Africa.	First audit = on site Second audit = remote Every alternate audit must be on site

before each renewal, and written confirmation will be given upon approval. AFMA then notifies the assessment body when a remote audit process has been granted, based on the information gathered during the pre-screen process and previous audit risk assessments.

**Warehousing**

It is often overlooked that farm feed product specifications and safety must be upheld throughout the process, from manufacturing in the feed mill until presentation to an animal for consumption. This also includes the storage and transportation of feed products. The registration holder of a farm feed is therefore responsible by law to guarantee product compliance throughout the supply chain.

The AFMA Code of Conduct was designed to independently verify member compliance across the whole supply chain – from ingredients used in feed manufacturing, its transport and storage, the manufacturing process, to the storage and transport of the finished product to the animal.

It is clear that warehousing is an integral part of the process, and AFMA members have proven to store products under good warehousing practices that support the integrity and safety of animal feed. All warehouses subjected to a Code of Conduct audit are listed on the AFMA certificate issued to compliant member companies. Clients and consumers can obtain assurance that product safety and integrity were maintained during storage at all compliant AFMA members.

Physical verification (on site) is needed to ensure that feed products are stored effectively, and hence the reason why remote audits will only be granted for members that do not make use of warehousing as part of their distribution.

**Preparing for a remote audit**

Proper preparation for an audit is crucial to facilitate an efficient process. This is also true for remote audits and includes reviewing operational compliance with the AFMA Code of Conduct audit criteria; ensuring all required documentation is organised and available for the audit; preparing staff for virtual assessments; ensuring availability

of effective technology to conduct virtual assessments; and co-ordinating with the assessment body in advance.

**Implementation**

The introduction of remote audits was implemented on 1 March. AFMA is fully committed to enhance the industry’s ability to manage risk via the Code of Conduct and to assure our clients and consumers that AFMA members contribute responsibly to the animal agricultural value chain.

Further developments in the modernisation of the Code of Conduct are expected this year, including the introduction of an updated audit scope based on FSSC 22000 principles, and additional assessment bodies that will be approved for auditing against the AFMA Code of Conduct.❖

For more information regarding the Code of Conduct, audit protocol, and approved assessment body, visit [www.afma.co.za](http://www.afma.co.za) or send an email to Wimpie Groenewald at [admin@afma.co.za](mailto:admin@afma.co.za).

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