



Invitation to tender for REAL's Research Hub Project:

Alternative control growing media for REAL CCS plant response tests

Tender Invitation Document

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Renewable Energy Assurance Limited (REAL) invites contractors to tender for the work outlined below. Following a competitive tender process, REAL will appoint the successful contractor to deliver the project.

Purpose of the tender

The purpose of the tender opportunity is to appoint a contractor to develop and deliver REAL's Research Hub project titled '*Alternative control growing media for REAL CCS plant response tests*'

Tender timeframe

Deadline for receipt of tender submissions: **21st March 2025**

Deadline for questions in relation to this tender: **19th February 2025**

Tenderers receive written notification of REAL's decision: **1st April 2025**

Work programme

Contract start date: **21st March 2025**

Contract duration: **Up to 12 months**

**REAL reserve the right to change this timetable*

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Section introduces Renewable Energy Assurance Ltd. and explains its work in administering the Organics Schemes and the Research Hub.

Renewable Energy Assurance Ltd (REAL) is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Association for Renewable Energy and Clean Technology (The REA). REAL carries out a range of certification and consumer protection activities, all of which promote sustainable energy and circular resource use (organic material recycling). REAL's activities fall under two headings; certification schemes and consumer codes.

Among other codes and schemes, REAL owns and administers the following quality certification schemes related to the organics recycling sector: the Compost Certification Scheme (CCS), the Biofertiliser Certification Scheme (BCS) and the Compostable Materials Certification Scheme (CMCS). The CCS and BCS enforce high quality standards for compost and biofertiliser (i.e., quality-certified anaerobic digestate), respectively. Together, these schemes provide assurance to consumers, farmers, food producers and retailers that quality-certified compost and digestate is safe for human, animal, and plant health.

In 2019, through collaboration with the CCS/BCS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), REAL established the Research Hub. The Research Hub functions as a tool to source research funding from the composting and anaerobic digestion industries. With these funds, the Research Hub commissions projects aimed at developing the technical and regulatory aspects of certified compost and digestate production, improving testing and usage of certified compost and digestate, and reinforcing certified compost and digestate markets.

REAL wishes to appoint a contractor to develop and deliver project commissioned by the Research Hub titled '[Alternative control growing media for REAL CCS plant response tests](#)'

The appointed contractor will be required to work with the REAL-appointed Steering Group, the Research Hub's Research Panel and REAL staff.

This document sets out the scope and parameters of the work which REAL wishes to commission and describes how contractors may tender to undertake this work for REAL.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

This Section explains project's relevance to REAL's work and the wider organics recycling industry and outlines the project's intended contributions.

2.1 Project Background

The current REAL Compost Certification Scheme (CCS) plant response test (PRT) compares the growth of tomato plants in a 'control' peat medium against a mixed medium of peat and 'test' compost sample. The optional CCS field bean test, used to detect certain herbicide residues in compost, similarly compares plant growth in peat against a peat and test compost mix. With changes in planning requirements for peat extraction in the Republic of Ireland, and a proposed ban on peat sales for amateur garden use in England in 2024, there is increasing concern from various stakeholders about the long-term availability of peat for these tests. Additionally, the continued use of peat in these tests contributes to the damage of an important natural habitat and carbon sink. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to evaluate and test alternative control growing media for use in the CCS PRTs.

2.2 Project Scope

This project aims to provide evidence to inform potential updates to the methodologies and quality control criteria in the Compost Certification Scheme's plant response tests (tomato and field bean).

To fulfil this aim, the project's key objectives are as follows:

1. To evaluate various peat-free growing media (including those made from mixed materials) as potential alternatives to Irish Sphagnum Moss Peat for use in CCS PRTs via desk research and laboratory/glasshouse test data.
2. To identify an alternative control growing media and demonstrate its suitability (for instance, by comparing the growth of Shirley tomato variety and field bean in the alternative control media against Irish Sphagnum Peat Moss and against test compost samples mixed with the alternative control media).
3. To advise on changes to the CCS PRT methods and quality control criteria.

3 SERVICES REQUIRED

This Section describes the work which will be required of the contractor to deliver the project.

3.1 The appointed contractor will develop and deliver REAL's Research Hub Project titled '*Alternative control growing media for REAL CCS plant response tests.*'

The appointed contractor will be responsible for fulfilling the project objectives outlined in Section 2.2 of this Tender Invitation Document. In addition to these objectives, the project should include the following key elements:

3.1.1 Key Elements

- Identify the characteristics of Irish Sphagnum Moss Peat (sieved to < 10mm as specified in the test procedure) which make it a suitable control medium, such as particle size distribution within the 0-10mm size range, bulk density, pH, water holding capacity, nutrient status, etc. Examine the variability in these characteristics considering different batches, starting grades (0-10 and 0-20 mm) and suppliers of Sphagnum Moss Peat.
- Identify alternative potential control growing media (e.g. wood fibres, wood bark, arable straw waste, a standard compost, or standard mixes of these materials).
- Evaluate different growing media (including those made from mixed materials) as potential alternatives to Irish Sphagnum Moss Peat for use in CCS PRTs in terms of their properties such as particle size distribution within the 0-10mm size range, bulk density, pH, water holding capacity, nutrient status, etc. and their variability between different batches.
- Compare growth of Shirley tomato variety in alternative control media against Sphagnum moss peat.
- Compare growth of Shirley tomato variety in alternative control media against test compost samples mixed with the alternative control media.
- Identify preferred alternative control growing media for the CCS PRTs.
- Based on analysis of results, suggest changes to the CCS PRT methods and quality control criteria (considering factors like the environmental credentials of the Scheme, test costs, practical usability of the methods, etc.).

3.1.2 Project Deliverables

- Regular meetings with the Steering Group to provide project updates and agree project milestones.
- Fulfilment of the key objectives of the project, taking into account the key elements outlined above, in Section 3.1 of this document.
- A final meeting with REAL to discuss the project in its entirety, during which the appointed contractor shall present the findings enclosed in the final report.
- A final report '*Alternative control growing media for REAL CCS plant response tests.*'

3.2 Competence requirements

REAL will appoint a contractor (an individual, organisation or consortium) with:

- Knowledge of current CCS PRT methods and quality control criteria.
- Expertise in testing and evaluating different growing media (including those made from mixed materials) in terms of their properties and their variability between different batches.
- Experience of developing methodologies and quality control criteria.
- Access to appropriate testing facilities (growth room/glasshouse)

4 TENDER REQUIREMENTS

This Section provides instructions for preparing tenders.

4.1 Your tender should be submitted by email and should be limited to no more than 10 x A4 sides at minimum 10pt font (excluding appendices).

4.2 Your tender must include the following information in the order indicated:

I. An executive summary

This should be no longer than one side of A4 paper, outlining the proposed work and including the total cost of the proposed work, inclusive of Value Added Tax (“VAT”) and anticipated expenses.

II. Company/Organisation details

Please include the following information:

- The name of the Company submitting the tender;
- The registered office name, address, VAT number (if applicable) and company or charity registration number;
- The name of the nominated contact person within the tenderer’s organisation;
- Contact details including address, telephone number and e-mail address

REAL will accept tenders from both individual companies and from consortia. Should you decide to tender as part of a consortium, you will need to identify one member of the consortium (the “Lead Contractor”) to act as the contracting party. All other consortium members will be sub-contractors to the Lead Contractor.

III. A description of your working methods

You will need to make clear how you intend to deliver the work and provide estimated timescales for delivery.

IV. A description of the project team who will manage and deliver the work

This should include a list of individuals, their respective roles within the organisation and, for the purposes of this work, their relevant skills and experience including any relevant professional qualifications.

V. An identification of any sub-contractors to be used

You should include a list of any sub-contractors you intend to use to deliver the work.

VI. Evidence of a track record in undertaking work similar to that described in this document

VII. Breakdown costs (exclusive of VAT) including;

- Individual day rates and number of days of each staff member involved in delivering work
- Expenses

VIII. Identification of any conflicts of interest

Please disclose any conflicts of interest which might arise if you were selected to undertake the work. Please also include a contingency plan for addressing any identified conflict(s) of interest, should conflict(s) arise. Where you tender as part of a consortium, all members of the consortium should be considered.

- IX. A copy of your Environmental Policy and evidence of any accredited Environmental Management System.**
- X. Written confirmation that you have the necessary permits, licences or exemptions required for the services.**
- XI. Appendices**

Tenderers should include the following documents as appendices:

- Audited or management accounts for the last 2 financial years;
REAL reserves the right to reject bids from Contractors where the accounts show that the Contractor might be at risk of insolvency.
- A statement of any material litigation, pending or threatened, or other legal proceedings;
REAL reserves the right to reject bids from Contractors subject to legal proceedings where in REAL's reasonable opinion such proceedings could impact upon the Contractor's ability to deliver the services required.
- Evidence of the level of professional indemnity, public liability and property damage insurance cover held.
REAL will require minimum cover levels of:
 - £1 million professional indemnity;
 - £2 million public liability;
 - £2 million property damage.To be considered for evaluation, Contractors must have this cover in place at the time of bidding or must include (as part of the tender submission) a commitment to take out such cover in the event of being appointed.

- 4.3** Should you have any questions in relation to the type of information required by REAL, please contact the person identified in Section 6 of this Tender Invitation Document to discuss.
- 4.4** All tender submissions will be treated on a confidential basis by REAL and its advisers, subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

5 EVALUATION CRITERIA

This Section specifies the criteria REAL will use to evaluate the tender submissions and appoint a contractor.

- 5.1** REAL must be satisfied that each potential contractor has the appropriate capabilities and resources available to undertake the work to REAL’s requirements and provide the necessary services.
- 5.2** REAL will select its Research Hub contractors through a competitive process. Your tender submission should be written to address the key requirements and scope of the work and demonstrate how it meets the evaluation criteria below:

Evaluation criteria	Weighting
Cost of work	20%
Methodology proposed to deliver required services	40%
Authority of allocated personnel, their skills and technical capability	20%
Corporate environmental commitment – submission of credible environmental policy and/or environmental management system details	5%
Relevant experience	15%

6 SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

This Section provides instructions for submitting tenders.

Please send one electronic copy (via email) of your tender submission to Jackie Robinson, Research Hub Project Manager at Renewable Energy Assurance Limited at jackie@recc.org.uk

Emails containing Tender submissions should clearly state the following in the subject field: 'Alternative control growing media for REAL CCS plant response tests – Tender Submission Document'

The deadline to submit a tender for this project is: **21st March 2025**

If you wish to ask any questions relating to this tender, please contact the Research Hub Project Manager in writing only.*

**NOTE: All questions submitted to REAL about this Tender Invitation Document will be anonymised and uploaded to the Research Hub website as a Q&A at least one week prior to the deadline for tender submissions.*

7 TENDER PROCESS & TIMETABLE

This Section explains the tender process and outlines the expected timeline.

- 7.1** All tender submissions must remain valid for a minimum period of 90 days following the deadline for receipt of tender submissions.
- 7.2** All tender submissions will be competitively assessed against the evaluation criteria, outlined in Section 5 of this document.
- 7.3** The target timetable for this process is as follows:
- Deadline for tender submissions: **21st March 2025**
 - Deadline for questions in relation to this tender: **19th February 2025**
 - Tenderers receive written notification of REAL's decision: **1st April 2025**
- 7.4** All tenderers will receive written notification of REAL's decision and will have the opportunity to discuss feedback on their tender submission.
- 7.5** This information is offered in good faith for the guidance of interested parties, but no warranty or representation is given as to the accuracy or completeness of any of it. REAL and its advisers shall not be liable for any error, misstatement, or omission. No aspect of this procedure shall constitute a contract or part of a contract. Tenderers participate in the process on the strict understanding that the procedure may be altered or that REAL may not proceed for any reason. REAL reserves the right not to follow up this Tender Invitation Document in any way and in particular not to enter into any contractual arrangement with any of the tenderers. REAL does not bind itself to enter into negotiations or proceed with or accept any tender. Any decision to tender is at the sole discretion of the tenderer and REAL excludes all liability in respect of any tendering costs incurred.
- 7.6** Any contract entered into as a result of this tender process shall be in accordance with REAL's terms and conditions of contract.
- 7.7** Tenderers taking part in this process acknowledge and accept that REAL may publish details about the winning bid (such as the contract value and the name of the winning bidder) on appropriate webpages under its control.