



Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard™ General Regulations

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Sustainable Food Group
Part of the
IPM Institute of North America, Inc.
211 S. Paterson St., Suite 380
Madison, WI 53703

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Introduction

- i. The Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard™ Certification is a private scheme that incorporates mandatory and optional requirements for the certification of specialty crop products at an international level.
- ii. These General Regulations detail the Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard Certification process and the duties and requirements of the Scheme Owner, its Certification Bodies (CBs) and applicants seeking certification for their agricultural products.

Standard Scope

- i. The scope of the certification is focused on sustainability of practices used to produce crops. Certification is available to farm (field or greenhouse) and facility operations (packers, processors and distributors). Group certification for facility operations or shippers certifies that the facility(ies) as well as the farms they source product from meet the Sustainability Standard criteria for certification.
- ii. The Sustainable Food Group, a project of the IPM Institute of North America, Inc., has established minimum requirements for applicant performance in growing, storing, cooling and packing or processing agricultural products.
- iii. Applicants are certified by an approved third-party Certification Body (CB), recognizing performance in sustainability categories associated with each production stage.
- iv. Applicants can undergo the audit as a stand-alone sustainability inspection or in conjunction with a food safety audit.
- v. An explanation of the audit requirements is provided in the current documents of the Sustainability Standard Scheme:
 - a) Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard - General Regulations
 - b) Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard – Checklist
 - c) Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard – Audit Guidelines
- vi. The Sustainable Food Group may issue additional normative documents as needed.
- vii. The Sustainable Food Group will internally review audit documentation annually and make changes as needed. Reissuing documentation will take place as needed.
- viii. Periodic, triennial review of the scheme will be conducted with feedback from all users taken into consideration. Changes to the scheme will be sent to stakeholders for comment.
- ix. The Scheme Owner shall carry out triennial reviews of the operation of the scheme and take any necessary action to ensure conformance with sustainability best practices.
- x. English is the primary language for the audit documentation. Translations in different languages will be made as needed.
- xi. Official documentation and translations can be found on the Sustainable Food Group website: www.sustainablefoodgroup.org.

Legislation

The Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard uses existing laws, regulations and recommendations as parameters in the development of the standard to help ensure applicant conformance and to establish a set of minimum requirements for a sustainability certification. If

laws or regulations are not in place regarding the current practices that the applicant is using, a certain level of risk assessment is recommended to ensure minimum requirements for certification are being met.

Guidance for the Management of CBs

- i. Certification for the Sustainability Standard can only be performed by approved CBs. Certification activities shall be carried out by personnel who have the competence requirements to meet all management, administrative, technical and auditing functions.
- ii. The CB must have a documented and implemented quality system that contains all the needed requirements for conformance with the scheme. The information of the quality system required for conformance must be made available to the Scheme Owner when requested.
- iii. A designated member of the CB staff shall be responsible for the quality system's development, implementation and maintenance. This person, the Scheme Manager, will be the contact for the management of the Scheme.
- iv. The CB must be managed according to ISO/IEC 17021 or ISO/IEC 17065.
- v. The list of approved and provisionally approved CBs will be made publicly available by the Scheme Owner on the Sustainable Food Group website.
- vi. The Scheme Owner will define a set of indicators of performance for CBs, which will be monitored according to a risk-based program that will consider the number of certifications issued by the CB, products certified, the types of operation, complaints received and any other that the Scheme Owner considers representative.
- vii. The Scheme Owner has the faculty to execute on-site inspections at the CB offices, evaluate the auditors regarding their technical skills (which can include shadowing auditors), review audit reports, review any materials conducted under the Sustainability Standard scheme certification process or request information or documentation regarding CB's accreditation, audit reports and corrective actions and anything pertaining to the fulfillment of this agreement. All costs associated with these supervisions are to be covered by the CB.
- viii. CBs shall notify the Scheme Owner in a timely manner regarding any relevant changes to their ownership, management structure or constitution.
- ix. In the case of any possible conflict or problems that could bring the Sustainability Standard into disrepute, the Scheme Owner and the CB shall agree on the appropriate action to take.
- x. CBs are required to use the Azzule database to facilitate the Scheme Owners ability to analyze performance and make improvements to program documents and procedures.

Audit Duration and Frequency

- i. An approved CB will be responsible for evaluating if an organization meets the requirements of the Sustainability Standard to receive certification. The CB will also determine audit duration.
- ii. The audit duration should be approximated by the CB when scheduling audits and adjusted as needed with the following considerations:
 - a) Type of operation(s) to be certified (e.g. farm or facility)

- b) Number of operations to be inspected
 - c) Size of the operation(s)
 - d) Number of products and similarity of production process
 - e) Complexity of the production and/or handling processes
 - f) Company preparation level
- iii. The audit duration will be recorded per organization and the operations included in the certification process. The audit duration comprises the entire audit process, from the opening meeting to the closing meeting with the organization where non-conformances are indicated. CBs should justify significant audit duration deviations. The following table provides guidelines for approximate audit durations:

Operation Type	Approximate Duration (hours)
Field Operations	4
Greenhouse	3
Storage & Distribution Center	3
Cooler/Cold Storage	3
Packinghouse	3
Processing	5
<i>Estimated audit duration table</i>	

- iv. The due date for the subsequent audit will be 36 months from the date of the previous audit and not from the previous certificate issue date. In years one and two, the CB will conduct a desk audit document review of the certified organization to confirm continued conformance with minimum requirements and other questions selected by the CB. The Scheme Owner may also suggest questions for document review to the CB based on the audit report and/or other communications. The desk audit will consist of a documentation review and non-conformance follow up (if needed).

Audit Activity	Deadline
Initial on-site audit	N/A
Desk audit document review	12 months from initial audit date
Desk audit document review	24 months from initial audit date
On site audit for continued certification	36 months from initial audit date

- a) The CB is responsible for providing the auditee with written and electronic reminders of document reviews and subsequent audits 30 to 60 days prior to the deadlines calculated from the initial audit date.
- b) The auditee is responsible for scheduling the first document review within one year from their initial audit date, and the second document review within two years from the initial audit date.
- c) The auditor will request documentation confirming continued conformance with the minimum requirements and other questions selected by the Scheme Owner.
 - 1) The auditee has two weeks to provide this documentation. The CB will provide a written reminder one week prior to the deadline.
 - 2) An auditee may request one extension if an explanation is provided as to why they do not have the resources to respond within the given timeline.

Criteria include the auditee does not have resources to respond due to extenuating circumstances such as short staffing and/or the auditee is exceptionally busy with planting/harvest or another audit. Extensions are to be granted at the discretion of the CB but may not exceed four weeks.

- 3) If an auditee fails to provide the requested information by the deadline, including any extension granted by the CB, their certification will be suspended. Should an auditee wish to pursue certification after a suspension, they must begin the certification process again with an initial on-site audit.
- d) The auditor will review the documentation provided by the auditee within two weeks and conduct any necessary follow up, including notifying auditee of any non-conformances and required additional information or corrective action. The auditee has two weeks from the date of the notification to provide additional information or a plan for corrective action.
 - 1) An auditee may request one extension if an explanation is provided as to why they do not have the resources to respond within the given timeline. Criteria include the auditee does not have resources to respond due to extenuating circumstances such as short staffing and/or the auditee is exceptionally busy with planting/harvest or another audit. Extensions are to be granted at the discretion of the CB but may not exceed four weeks.
 - 2) If an auditee fails to provide the requested information by the deadline, including any extension granted by the CB, their certification will be suspended. Should an auditee wish to pursue certification after a suspension, they must begin the certification process again with an initial on-site audit.
- e) After all documentation has been reviewed, including additional information and/or a plan for corrective action provided by the auditee, the auditor will send a document review report to the Scheme Owner and auditee.
 - 1) If the auditee is no longer conformant to a minimum requirement, the certification will be suspended. Should an auditee wish to pursue certification after a suspension, they must begin the certification process again with an initial on-site audit.
- v. In the case of Group certification, the addition of new farms to the certification after the initial audit is limited on an annual basis to 20% of the total number of farms in the initial certified Group. New facilities or farms in excess of the 20% threshold can only be added to the certification following an on-site audit from the CB. All new farms are subject to the Internal Management System (IMS), a formalized system of documents, processes, procedures and responsibilities for achieving quality policies and objectives in line with the Sustainability Standard which is determined by the IMS holder and adhered to by the Group. An internal auditing system covering all farms and facilities in the Group is an integral component of ensuring Group compliance to the IMS. The IMS is reviewed annually by the CB.
- vi. This frequency may be modified by factors such as:
 - a) Modification of the scope and/or operation's location during the certificate validity.
 - b) Seasonality of the products; up to a three-month extension of current certificate expiration date with justifiable circumstances.

- c) Quantity and type of non-conformities detected at the time of the audit (e.g., a re-audit or a re-visit may be required in order to receive certification).
- d) Insufficient evidence of corrective action requiring additional visits.
- vii. These or other situations must be evaluated and documented by the CB defining the audit frequency required for each applicant as well as justification for any modification.
- viii. Flowchart diagrams of the initial certification audit timeline, desk audit document review timeline and three-year audit cycle are available at <http://sustainablefoodgroup.org/program-documents/>.

Auditor Requirements

CBs are responsible for ensuring that auditors performing the inspections are in conformance with the following minimum requirements and have evidence to demonstrate their conformance.

- i. Qualification/education
 - a) Auditors must have education in an agricultural/crop-based, food or bio-science-related discipline or, as a minimum, have successfully completed a higher education course or equivalent qualification in one of those disciplines with a degree, diploma or a certificate from a recognized institution.
- ii. Experience
 - a) Work experience
 - 1) It is preferred that an auditor have five years of experience in the agricultural and/or food industry, but as a minimum, they must have at least two years of experience in areas such as quality assurance or food safety functions in food production or manufacturing, retailing, inspection or enforcement.
 - 2) All auditors must pass the Sustainability Standard exam to be initially approved and subsequently when there is a new version of the scheme or as required by the Scheme Owner. Auditors are given three attempts to pass the exam with a score of 85% or better. If an auditor fails three times, they must participate in the next scheduled auditor training and re-take the exam. After additional training is completed, the exam will be made available again for auditors. The exam includes knowledge and understanding of the following topics:
 - (i) Sustainability Standard normative documents.
 - (ii) Relevant food/agriculture-related legislation.
 - (iii) Agricultural production (horticultural, grains and pulses)/manufacturing processes.
 - 3) This examination should be taken by all approved auditors each time there is a new version of the scheme and before conducting audits using the new version.
 - b) Audit experience
 - 1) Auditors must have a minimum of 10 audit days or 5 audits of practical auditing experience on performing audits of agricultural operations. This experience can be as third- or second-party auditor or shadowing an approved auditor. Information about the audit experience shall be documented, including details like dates, audited organization, type of operation being audited and role of the candidate auditor.

- iii. Formal auditor training
 - a) The auditors must have successfully completed the following courses:
 - 1) Recognized training in audit techniques based on QMS or FSMS with a duration of one week/40 hours or equivalent.
 - 2) Approved Sustainability Standard Auditor Training as defined by the Scheme Owner.
- iv. Auditor assessment
 - a) For an auditor's initial approval, a shadow audit assessment must be performed by an already approved auditor during an official Sustainability Standard audit. This will include an assessment of the new auditor's knowledge of the following items:
 - 1) Sustainability Standard normative documents.
 - 2) Agricultural production (horticultural, grains and pulses)/manufacturing processes and access to relevant laws and regulations and ability to apply them when appropriate.
 - 3) Quality systems and specific audit techniques.
 - b) The auditor assessment shall be documented and contain all the information found in the example template distributed by the Scheme Owner. The assessment report will describe the details and outcome of the assessment.
- v. Technical supervisor
 - a) The CB must appoint at least one person to be a Technical Supervisor (TS) who has the qualification/education and working experience of an auditor.
 - b) The TS will have the following responsibilities:
 - 1) Maintain the competence of CB personnel by training them when there is a new scheme version.
 - 2) Be the person who clarifies technical issues with CB personnel and audited organizations.
 - 3) Act as a technical contact with the Scheme Owner.
 - 4) Sign-off approval of new auditors for the CB.
- vi. Continued training
 - a) The CB is responsible for ensuring that their auditors are current on good practices for each audit form their auditors are approved for and are able to apply relevant laws and regulations. The CBs shall maintain records of all relevant training taken by the auditors.
- vii. Attributes and competencies
 - a) The CB must have a system in place that ensures auditors are conducting and behaving in a professional manner. The assessment (including shadow audit assessment) of the auditors should cover evaluation of their personal attributes and behavior.
 - b) CBs must be able to demonstrate that the auditors meet the requirements for approval to maintain their competence for the Sustainability Standard. CBs must keep complete records of auditors' qualifications, experience, training, supervised audits, assessments, sign-off, re-approval and others while they have a work relationship and during a minimum period of two years.
 - c) CBs will be responsible for registering auditors in the Sustainability Standard database, providing information about their qualifications, experience, training,

assessment, auditing scopes, etc., and keeping this registration updated when changes occur.

Conflicts of Interest

- i. CBs and the personnel involved in the certification process must have a signed contract or agreement that commits them to:
 - a) Avoid any conflict of interest in the certification activities with regard to services (training and/or consultancy) provided to those applying for certification. There must be a minimum of three years between providing any services and performing a Sustainability Standard audit.
 - b) Declare any potential conflicts of interest to the CB management when assigned duties related to an applicant in the program.
 - c) Be free from any commercial interest in the companies or products to be certified.
 - d) Maintain the confidentiality of all client specific information except as required by this standard or by law.

Certification Process

- i. Application
 - a) Applicants must provide the CB with the information defining the scope of the certification they want to achieve for their operations. The information should at minimum include the following:
 - 1) Organization details
 - 2) Contact information
 - 3) Details about the operation(s) to be included in the scope of the certification. For farms, each site can either be called a “Field Operation” or a “Greenhouse”. In the case of a facility operation, each site could either be called a “Storage & Distribution Center”, “Cooling/Cold Storage”, “Packinghouse” or “Processing”.
 - 4) Whether Group certification is being pursued, and if so, the name of the group and which facilities and farms are to be included in the scope of certification.
 - 5) Commodities covered in the scope of the certification.
 - 6) Desired audit period based on the seasonality of the crop and validity of the current audit certificate.
 - 7) Language for the audit to be performed in and language to be used in the audit report.
 - b) The commodities will ideally be present in the field, greenhouse or facility at the time of the audit.
 - 1) Where a commodity is not present at the time of the audit, but the operation wishes to include it the scope of their certification, it may be considered if this commodity has similar growing and processing practices as the commodities audited.
 - 2) The auditor will indicate on the audit report which products were observed at the time of the audit, similar products not observed and products which are neither similar nor seen at the time of the audit. The auditor will include specific details in the scope of the audit and throughout the audit report as

- to which products were observed at the time of the audit and which records were reviewed.
- 3) If the commodity is not present at the time of the audit, but the operation wishes to include it in the scope, at least 12 months of records of production of additional products included in the scope of the audit must be available for review.
- c) The facility must be running, and the commodities will ideally be present in the operation during the audit.
 - 1) Where a commodity is not present at the time of the audit, but the operation wishes to include it the scope of their certification, it may be considered if it has similar growing and processing practices as the commodities audited.
 - 2) The auditor will indicate on the audit report which products were observed at the time of the audit, similar products not observed and products which are neither similar nor seen at the time of the audit. The auditor is to include specific details in the scope of the audit and throughout the audit report related to which products were observed at the time of the audit and which records were reviewed.
 - 3) Process descriptions, e.g., a flow chart with step-by-step details of the production process and equipment moved, must be available during the time of the audit. If the product is not present in the facility at the time of the audit, at least 12 months of records of production of additional products included in the scope of the audit should be available for review.
 - d) If Group certification is being pursued, the facility must have an IMS in place, which will be reviewed at the time of audit.
- ii. Audit execution
 - a) The audit will be conducted with the most recent versions of the Sustainability Standard normative documents.
 - b) The Sustainability Standard Audit is split into 19 categories. Each section contains questions detailing practices under that theme.
 - 1) Environmental Certifications
 - 2) Minimum Requirements
 - 3) Environmentally Sensitive Areas
 - 4) Environmental Emergency Management
 - 5) Fertilizer and Pesticide Drift
 - 6) Air Quality
 - 7) Soil Erosion
 - 8) Soil Health
 - 9) Waste Disposal
 - 10) Advisory Team
 - 11) Water Conservation
 - 12) Energy Conservation
 - 13) Natural Resource Reuse
 - 14) Materials Recycling
 - 15) Work Environment
 - 16) Sustainability and Stewardship
 - 17) Crop-specific standards
 - 18) Internal Management System (Group certification only)

- 19) Informational
- c) Each section of the audit has its own point value for a cumulative total of 1242 points.
 - d) The scope of certification should be clearly defined to determine how the audit will be structured for each applicant organization. Ownership of the different areas, locations, activities or crops of the company applying for certification are elements to consider when deciding what type of operation(s) will be included in the scope. The auditee defines the scope of the audit. The auditor must perform the audit based on the defined scope.
 - e) For Group certification, all facilities within the group being certified will receive an on-site audit. Additionally, a random selection of the square root of the total number of farms included in the Group (rounded up to the next whole number) will undergo an on-site audit. The CB will randomly select the farms.

Evaluation

- i. Conformance to individual questions
 - a) To verify conformance to the Sustainability Standard requirements, the Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard Checklist will be used.
 - b) Each question of the Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard Checklist has its own possible score.
 - c) The auditor must evaluate and answer each individual question.
 - d) The possible answers are:
 - 1) Yes
 - 2) No
 - 3) Not applicable (N/A) (for questions that do not apply to all operations)
 - e) Each question in the Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard – Checklist will be reviewed individually at each farm or facility receiving an on-site audit. The auditor will use observations, document review and interviews to assess compliance with each question.
 - f) For Group certification:
 - 1) At the on-site audit of the IMS holder, the auditor will review the Group's IMS against the IMS Checklist.
 - 2) At the on-site audits of the square root of farms in the Group, auditors will evaluate adherence to the IMS against the Sustainability Standard certification criteria.
 - g) If an auditee does not achieve complete conformance with one of the questions in the Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard Checklist, partial points may be awarded. Partial points are awarded at the discretion of the auditor. In this case, there is a section in the audit document named "Rationale".
 - 1) In this section, the auditor will explain in detail why the program participant met full, no or partial conformance.
 - 2) Automatic failure results if an auditee does not achieve complete conformance of a Minimum Requirement. No partial points may be awarded.
- ii. Scoring
 - a) Each question in the Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard™ Checklist has an assigned possible score. Minimum requirements related to the

- IMS and IMS Checklist are worth zero points, and therefore do not contribute to the overall points total, but are still required in order to achieve certification.
- b) Depending on the level of conformance the participant has met, full, partial or no points will be awarded. Points awarded are determined by the auditor based on their observations.
 - c) If a question is not applicable to the type of operation being audited, point values for that question will not be included in the possible total score.
 - 1) Not applicable is an acceptable response based on the Question Applicability Matrix.
 - 2) Not applicable is an acceptable response if the operation does not use a specific type of practice. E.g., if an operation does not apply pesticides or fertilizers, “not applicable” is an acceptable response to questions 1.05.01-1.05.03 regarding fertilizer and pesticide drift.
- iii. Score calculation
- a) An overall total score will be calculated for each operation by taking the total sum of points obtained in the audit and dividing by the total possible points in the audit, represented as a percentage.
 - b) The scores shall be displayed as integers in rounded down percentages.
 - c) This calculation should be repeated for each audited operation included in the scope of the certification.
 - d) For Group certification, an individual total score will be calculated for each facility and farm operation that received an on-site audit. In addition to individual total scores, an average score for the Group will also be calculated.
- iv. Automatic failure
- a) There is a section named Minimum Requirements in the Sustainability Standard Checklist. If **full conformance** is not met for any of these questions, the audit will result in automatic failure.
 - b) The applicant will be informed of the automatic failure by the auditor during the time of the audit. The auditee has the option to continue the audit and verify remaining practices. Auditor will indicate if a modified on-site audit or document review must be scheduled within six months of the initial audit date to demonstrate full compliance with the minimum requirements only.
 - 1) Should an auditee fail to schedule the modified audit or document review per auditor direction within six months, they must restart the certification process.
- v. Special circumstances
- a) Automatic Failure
 - 1) Besides failing to meet the minimum requirements, automatic failure can result from deliberate illegal activities, violence or threats towards an auditor, attempted bribery, falsified records, etc., or finding serious safety issues during the audit.
 - b) Corrective Actions
 - 1) The CB has the right to use all information the organization has provided as evidence of corrective actions to affect other questions in addition to the one being evaluated.
 - c) Certification Decision

- 1) The CB has the right to take all information collected during the certification process into consideration when making the decision to grant certification to the specific organization.
- d) Suspension/Revocation of Certification
- 1) The CB has the right to use all of the information gathered on the certified organizations and operations to suspend or revoke current certifications if illegal actions or serious safety issues are discovered.
 - 2) There are two types of possible sanctions to organizations:
 - (i) Suspensions - an organization's certification shall be suspended if:
 - (a) A non-conformance is found to be an immediate threat to the public.
 - (b) An inspection results in an automatic failure.
 - (c) A critical safety issue is detected during an audit (e.g., automatic failure, special circumstance, etc.). The CB should then consider suspending existing certificates related to this new observation(s).
 - (d) The organization improperly uses the Sustainability Standard logo or trademark.
 - (e) An organization is involved with an illegal activity or serious food safety issue.
 - (ii) Revocations - an organization's certification shall be revoked if:
 - (a) An organization does not pay the agreed-to fees.
 - (b) Evidence of fraud is found.
 - (c) A suspension related issue is not adequately resolved.
 - (d) The organization declares bankruptcy.
 - (e) An organization that has had its certification revoked shall not be accepted for certification in the Sustainability Standard program for a period of six months after the date of revocation.
 - (iii) If the CB finds a non-conformance with the Scheme documentation during inspection of a certified organization, a sanction (suspension or revocation) will be issued.
 - (iv) All sanctions will be in writing and include the nature of the non-conformance, the time frame of resolution (if applicable) and provisions for escalation of sanctions if the non-conformance is not corrected within the specified period.
 - (v) Only the CB may lift a suspension sanction after sufficient corrective actions have been submitted with verification either through written or visual evidence and/or an on-site visit.
 - (vi) The CB can issue the sanction to an entire certified organization or narrow it to a specific certified product(s) or specific operation(s) within the scope of the current certification.
 - (vii) The CB shall always notify the Scheme Owner in a timely manner and in writing of any sanction applied to a certified organization as well as update the system to reflect those changes.
 - (viii) A list of all suspended operations (those suspended after receiving certification), and those operations "not certified due to special circumstances" where the operation was "not certified" based on reasons other than score, is compiled and available to CBs.

- e) Significant Safety Events
 - 1) All certified organizations must inform their CB about any safety related prosecutions or any other issues related to safety that affect the overall scheme.
- f) Early Re-Evaluation of a Certification Organization
 - 1) The certified organization must inform the CB of any changes that affect the sustainability of their product, changes to the requirement of the certification scheme standard and changes of ownership and/or management.
 - 2) If the CB has reason to believe there is a conformance issue regarding certification requirements, this is cause for re-evaluation. In this case, a second site visit may be conducted to verify conformance of Sustainability Standards.
- g) Significant Events for Certified Organizations and their Operations
 - 1) All certified organizations shall inform their corresponding CB and the Scheme Owner about any related prosecution, significant regulatory non-conformity, product recall related to food safety or any other issues that could bring the Scheme into disrepute. CBs shall ensure the integrity of certification after notification and consider the need to suspend or revoke certification. CBs should communicate these significant events to the Scheme Owner within seven days of the occurrence.
- vi. Surveillance audits
 - a) Surveillance Audits Performed by the CB
 - 1) Each CB has the option to perform surveillance audits. Surveillance audits will be performed using the current Sustainable Food Group Sustainability Standard Checklist, and the selected organization with certified processes will need to pass the audit as if it were a regular audit in order to maintain certification. For Group certification, surveillance audits may be of the operation holding the certification (IMS holder) and/or any farms or facilities included in the scope of certification.
 - (i) This is currently an option for CBs that will later be mandated by the Scheme Owner with an allotted percentage of the certified operations that will need to receive surveillance audits.
 - 2) The CB will notify the operation in writing of the surveillance audit no sooner than 48 hours prior to the day of the audit.
 - 3) An operation can only reject a surveillance audit once. A second surveillance audit rejection from the operation will result in a suspension of certification.
 - b) Surveillance Audits Performed by the Scheme Owner
 - 1) As part of the Sustainability Standard Integrity Program, the Scheme Owner will perform sporadic auditor assessments. The purpose is to ensure that qualified auditors are performing the audits properly according to the Sustainability Standard scheme.
 - (i) The audited operations will be required to accept a second person on-site during the audit.
 - (ii) The additional person on-site during the auditor assessments will have no say during the audit nor will they point out any deficiencies to the auditor at the time of the audit.

- 2) The Scheme Owner will also have the option to perform auditee assessments, which will consist of the Scheme Owner performing an on-site audit for a certified operation or operation within a Group certification. These Surveillance audits will be performed using the most current Sustainability Standard Checklist, and the selected organization with certified processes will need to pass the audit as if it were a regular audit in order to maintain certification.
 - (i) By performing these audits, the Scheme Owner will be able to verify auditor performance (based on the prior audit report) to what was observed at the time of the Surveillance audit.
 - (ii) The audited operations will be required to accept a second person on-site during the audit.

Requirements for Audit Reports

- i. The audit report will be distributed through the Azzule database.
- ii. The auditor must enter the information into the Azzule database to generate a preliminary audit report within 15 days of the on-site audit.
- iii. The audit report will be written in the language that the applicant requests. Any language used by the CB to generate the audit reports is acceptable by the Scheme Owner, but the information entered into the Azzule database must be available in English.
- iv. Every audit report shall include as a minimum the following information:
 - a) Name of the CB
 - b) Name of the applicant organization
 - c) Individual or Group certification
 - 1) For Group certification, the name of the Group, and all farms included in the scope of certification.
 - d) Details about the operation under certification
 - e) Date and time of the audit
 - f) Name and version of the Sustainability Standard normative documents used for certification
 - g) Audit scope – details of the process under certification
 - h) Product(s) observed during audit, similar product(s) not observed and product(s) applied for but not observed
 - i) Names of all personnel involved in the audit from the applicant organization, including the organization contact
 - j) Auditor name
 - k) Audit scoring summary
 - l) Answers and comments for each of the questions in the Sustainability Standard Checklist.
 - m) Shippers (customers of the auditee) designated during the application process (if applicable)
- v. Every audit will generate a non-conformance report that will give a summary of all non-conformances found in the audit with the corresponding comments and details for each non-conformance.

Non-conformances

- i. Non-conformances are questions where the criteria for full points (full conformance) are not met in the audit.
- ii. If the applicant organization does not pass the audit, they can submit corrective actions into the Azzule database for review by the CB to attempt to achieve a passing score. Corrective actions can address non-conformances where no points or partial points were achieved.
 - a) The submission of comments and/or corrective actions does not guarantee that the score will change but should demonstrate the actions that were taken or are to be taken by the applicant organization.
 - b) The choice of non-conformances to address falls to the applicant.
- iii. Some non-conformances may not be able to be corrected, depending on their nature.
- iv. The corrective actions from the organization should include the determination of cause(s), any action plan(s) to address immediate issue(s) regarding the non-conformance, the corrective actions taken, and the development of preventive actions to help avoid future occurrences if necessary.
- v. Corrective action evidence can be in the form of documents, records and/or photographs and must show that the applicant complies with the criteria needed to achieve full points on a question.
- vi. Evidence must be verified and accepted by the CB. The CB has the right to determine if a re-visit to the audited organization is necessary to verify corrective actions for non-conformances.
- vii. The time period from the initial onsite audit until the CB makes a certification decision must be no longer than 45 days.
- viii. Corrective action evidence for each non-conformance must be submitted to the CB by the organization within 30 calendar days from the original audit date.
- ix. The CB has 15 calendar days to review the corrective action evidence, notify the organization if it was accepted or rejected and close the non-conformance(s).
- x. If time allows (within the 30-calendar day corrective action submission timeframe), when corrective action evidence is rejected by the CB, the organization can re-submit additional evidence to close the non-conformance.
- xi. Once the applicant organization has responded to the CB regarding the non-conformances and the CB has reviewed all corrective actions submitted, the CB will close the corrective action phase in the Azzule system, which allows for a certification decision to be made.
- xii. Flowchart diagrams of the initial certification audit timeline, desk audit document review timeline and three-year audit cycle are available at <http://sustainablefoodgroup.org/program-documents/>.

Certification Decision

- i. Evaluation of scores
 - a) Based on the outcome of the final audit report, the online auditing system will calculate the score for each operation. The CB will use this score to determine if the organization attained the minimum score needed for certification.
 - b) The certification decision shall be based on a combination of scores from each question.

- c) To achieve individual certification, operations must meet all Minimum Requirements (Table 1) and attain an 85% audit score or higher (1056 points out of 1242) in order to become certified at the advanced level.
- d) To achieve Group certification, all audited operations must meet all Minimum Requirements of the Sustainability Standard and of the IMS Checklist and all operations in the group including farm and processing operations must attain an 85% audit score or higher.

Table 1. Sustainability Standard Minimum Requirements

Section	Q#	Question	Total Points	Available Answers	Expectations
Minimum Requirements	1.02.01	Is there a written policy statement prohibiting the application of both untreated and treated biosolids to production sites for at least one year prior to production?	10	Y/N	A written policy available for inspection contains a clear statement prohibiting the application of both biosolids (treated sewage sludge) and untreated sewage to all sites in production for at least one year prior to production. The policy is communicated and applied to all operations in the scope of the application.
Minimum Requirements	1.02.02	Is there a policy that any genetically modified (GM) ingredients will be disclosed to the buyer?	10	Y/N	A written policy available for inspection includes a clear statement that any GM content will be disclosed to the buyer. If a GM variety of the product is available on the market (e.g., zucchini, yellow squash, sweet corn, potato, papaya) and the organization does not communicate GM content to buyers, a written seed-supplier certification and/or third-party test results are available indicating no GM content.
Minimum Requirements	1.02.03	Is there a policy that legal requirements be met for all pesticide and nutrient applications and for employment and employee health and safety?	10	Y/N	A written policy available for inspection includes a clear statement that all operations in the scope of the application will comply with all applicable laws and regulations of the jurisdiction(s) governing the production location and addressing labor, worker health and safety and handling, storage and application of all pesticides and nutrients.

Minimum Requirements	1.02.04	Are there complete and legible pesticide application records for the current season that include location, date, time, material applied, rate, applicator name, application method, wind speed and direction, air temperature and target pest?	10	Y/N	Pesticide application records are complete, legible and available for at least three years for all operations in the scope, including location, date, time, material applied, rate, applicator name, application method, wind speed and direction, air temperature and target pest. For new or second-year applicants, there is a written policy clearly stating that these records will be maintained for a minimum of three years going forward.
Minimum Requirements	1.02.05	Are there complete and legible nutrient application records for the current season that include date, time, material applied, rate, applicator name and application method?	10	Y/N	Nutrient application records are complete, legible and available for at least three years for all operations in the scope, including location, date, time, material applied, rate, applicator name and application method. For new or second-year applicants, there is a written policy clearly stating that these records will be maintained for a minimum of three years going forward.
Minimum Requirements (Group Certification only)	1.02.06	Does the Group maintain an Internal Management System (IMS) to ensure facility and producer group member compliance with the Sustainability Standard certification criteria? Does the IMS meet all minimum requirements identified in the IMS Checklist?	0	Y/N	

ii. Issuing certification

- a) For individual applicants, certification will be issued individually to each operation that meets the requirements of certification. If there is more than one farm or facility operation, separate audits should be conducted at each operation.
- b) For Group certification, certification will be issued to the IMS holder that has undergone the audit. The certification covers (list) all farms and facilities in the Group. Any farm or facility in the certified Group may request a certificate.
- c) Certification is valid for a maximum of 36 months from the certification date.
- d) The certification decision will be made by the CB and the certificate will be issued by the Sustainable Food Group.

- e) The certificate will be generated by Azzule software and provided to the certified operation within 30 days of the certification decision by the CB. The Sustainable Food Group will receive a copy as well.
- iii. Complaints and appeals
 - a) The CB shall have a procedure in place to handle the complaints and appeals which will be available publicly.

Sanctioning CBs

- i. A CB will be suspended if:
 - a) The CB does not pay the agreed fees.
 - b) The CB improperly uses the Azzule or Sustainable Food Group Logo.
 - c) An issue is discovered by the Sustainability Standard Integrity Program.
 - d) The CB does not abide by the requirements of the General Regulations, License Agreement or other Scheme requirement.
- ii. A CB will have its approval revoked if:
 - a) Evidence of fraud is found.
 - b) The CB declares bankruptcy.
 - c) A suspension related issue is not adequately resolved.

Distribution of Audit Reports

- i. CBs must provide information for each certification process, including but not limited to audit details, outcome and the certification status to the Scheme Owner by using the Azzule database or other means established by the Scheme Owner.
- ii. The documented audit reports generated by the certification process for each operation, including those submitted through the Azzule database, should be provided to the applicant, the CB and the Scheme Owner.
- iii. Ownership of the audit report, determination of details made available and authorization for access shall remain with the applicant. The CB will ensure confidentiality except where required by law. The CB will document all communication between the CB and applicant. The CB will not distribute any communication or certification activity information to an outside party without the applicant's authorization.

Extension of Scope of Certification

- i. An organization's certified operation can apply for an extension of scope to their current certification for:
 - a) Increased growing area of products included in the scope of an already certified operation along with justifiable circumstances.
 - b) Adding similar products not in the scope of an already certified operation with justifiable circumstances. Similar products are those with similar growing and processing practices.
 - c) If products are approved and added to the current report, the product(s) will be added to the "similar product(s) not observed" category.
- ii. Justifiable circumstances will be reviewed by the CB regarding a request for extension of scope of increased growing area and/or adding new commodities. All relevant information, such as similarity (risks, processes, growing practices, location and personnel) between new products and already certified products and

- any additional information the CB considers as part of their risk assessment, will be evaluated before a decision is made.
- iii. The CB will determine the need for an on-site audit in order to increase the growing area, add commodities to already certified operations and/or add a new process to the certificate (e.g., a new packing line, automated chopper, etc.).
 - iv. If a new operation to an already certified organization is added more than 30 days after the original audit date, the organization will be required to undergo another full audit. This is required because the standards may have changed since the original organization and/or implementation of these standards may be different relative to previous operation audits.

Use of Logo and Registered Trademark

- i. The Sustainability Standard trademark and logo may only be used with permission from the Scheme Owner.
- ii. The Sustainability Standard logo must always be obtained by the CB from the Scheme Owner. This will ensure that it contains the exact corporate color and format.
- iii. The CB is responsible for the control of the use of the Sustainability Standard trademark and logo on certified operations. The rules for the use of the logo and trademark will be defined in the License Agreement signed between the Scheme Owner and the CB (Exhibit C of the CB license agreement) and in the Sub-License Agreement signed between the CB and each organization. Infringement of the rules by either CBs or organizations could lead to sanctions.
- iv. Organizations can only use the trademark and/or logo when there is a valid Sustainability Standard certificate linked to that organization and clear reference to the certified operations. The logo can only be used for business to business communications.
- v. Approved CBs can use the trademark and/or logo for promotion of their accredited Sustainability Standard certification activities in business-to-business communication and on their accredited Sustainability Standard certificates.

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Glossary

Aggregate stability

The ability of soil aggregates, or groups of soil particles, to resist disintegration when tillage, water, wind erosion or other disruptive forces act on the soil. Wet aggregate stability suggests how well a soil can resist raindrop impact and water erosion. Size distribution of dry aggregates can be used to predict resistance to abrasion and wind erosion.

Agricultural inputs

Materials used in the production of crops including seeds, transplants, rootstock, cuttings, fertilizers, crop protection products, adjuvants, growth promoters, predator additions, irrigation water and any other material inputs to the growing process.

Application equipment calibration

Process to ensure that input application equipment is operating properly by testing equipment measurements against a known value. Improperly calibrated equipment may cause either too little or too much of an input, e.g., pesticides, fertilizers, manure, compost, to be applied.

Available water capacity

The maximum amount of plant available water a soil can provide. It is an indicator of a soil's ability to retain water and make it sufficiently available for plant use.

Beneficial insect

Insects that provide a benefit, such as suppressing pests or providing pollination. The term “beneficials” in the context of a question addressing insects is used as a synonym to beneficial insects.

Beneficial species

Organisms that provide an agroecosystem benefit, such as suppressing pests. The term “beneficials” in a non-specific context refers to all beneficial species.

Biopesticide

Certain types of pesticides made up of living organisms or derived from the products of living organisms, such as microbes, bacteria, plant extracts, fatty acids or pheromones, and used to control pests.

Biosolid

Organic matter recycled from sewage for use in agriculture.

Buffer zone

An area of permanent vegetation that is maintained between agricultural fields and environmentally sensitive areas, including bodies of water. These buffers are intended to mitigate impacts of production on adjacent or nearby areas that can be impacted by agricultural activity by, for example, intercepting wastewater runoff or pesticide drift.

Commodity

An agricultural product that can be bought and sold. Also referred to as product.

Compaction

A compression of soil and decrease in pore space that results in poor water drainage, air movement and root growth.

Cover crop

A crop planted between or simultaneously with cash crops to help manage soil erosion, soil fertility, soil quality, water, weeds, pests, diseases, biodiversity and wildlife. Examples include legumes, cereals, grasses etc.

Cultural practice

Agricultural practices that aim to disrupt the pest's environment without the use of chemical substances to enhance crop health and prevent weed, pest or disease problems. Examples include turning under crop residues, sterilizing tools and equipment and harvesting early.

Drip irrigation

Irrigation method that saves water and fertilizer by allowing water to drip slowly, either onto the soil surface or directly onto the root zone, through a network of valves, pipes, tubing and emitters.

Evapotranspiration (ET)

The loss of water from the earth's surface through the combined processes of evaporation from soil and plant surfaces and plant transpiration. ET information is critical for irrigation system design and water management.

Facility operation

A handling operation carried out in one or several buildings where product is being handled.

The type of Facility operation can be classified as: "Storage & Distribution Center", "Cooling Cold Storage", "Packinghouse" or "Processing".

Auditees should not apply for multiple Sustainability Standard audits of different operation types at the same address, unless there is a processing facility and growing operation with the same address, is of different ownership or the auditee is pursuing **Group** certification.

Farm

A collection of growing operations carried out in an open or in a covered area for the production of fresh produce for human consumption. Farms include field and greenhouse operations.

Field operation

A growing operation carried out in the open for the production of fresh produce for human consumption.

Filter strips

An area of permanent herbaceous vegetation used to reduce sediment, organics, nutrients, pesticides and other contaminant loadings in runoff.

Furrow irrigation

Irrigation of farmland by water run in open furrows created in soil between the crop rows.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

Organisms (i.e., plants, animals or microorganisms) in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination.

Green manure

Living plant material incorporated into the soil or killed and left on the surface for soil improvement, or when composed of legumes, to increase the soil N supply.

Greenhouse gases (GHGs)

Compounds that trap heat in the atmosphere. These gases include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases.

Greenhouse

A temporary or permanent enclosed structure where crops are grown in a controlled environment (also can be referred to as indoor agriculture). Greenhouses do not include shade or hoop houses.

Ground nests

Similar in appearance to ant holes from above, about 70% of native bees nest in the ground and need access to the soil surface to dig their nest. Each female excavates her own nest tunnel and brood cells and stocks the cells with nectar and pollen.

Group

A self-designated assemblage of farms or facilities and its suppliers whose products and conduct adhere to a set of standards as designated through an Internal Management System.

Infiltration rate

The rate at which water on a soil surface enters the soil profile.

Integrated pest management (IPM)

A science-based decision-making process that identifies and reduces risks from pests and pest management related strategies. IPM coordinates the use of pest biology, environmental information and available technology to prevent unacceptable levels of pest damage by the most economical means while minimizing risk to people, property, resources and the environment.

Internal Management System (IMS)

The collection of documents, SOPs, policies and protocols that dictate the standards to which members adhere in supplying their products to the Group.

IMS holder

The entity or organization that administers, implements, manages and/or maintains the IMS for the Group.

Invasive species

Designated by state or national agricultural authorities as threatening to agricultural and/or horticultural crops and/or humans and livestock.

Key pest

An insect, disease, weed, mite, nematode or other organism that frequently causes crop damage exceeding a quality and economic threshold unless an action is taken to reduce the impact.

Large Producer

Any producer that does not fit the criteria for small producer.

Micronutrient

A chemical element necessary in only extremely small amounts (less than 1 part per million in the plant) for the growth of plants. Micronutrients include boron, chloride, copper, iron, manganese, molybdenum and zinc.

Mitigation plan

Set of strategies that have been identified and implemented to reduce or eliminate the negative impact of pesticide applications on air, soil, water, plants, animals and humans.

Mode of action

Refers to how a particular chemical pesticide operates on the target pest. The Insecticide Resistance Action Committee (IRAC), Fungicide Resistance Action Committee (FRAC) and Herbicide Resistance Action Committee (HRAC) classify insecticides, fungicides and herbicides, respectively, by modes of action. Rotating chemical modes of action or combining multiple modes of action in a single application are primary strategies to delay the evolution of resistant pests.

Packinghouse

A type of facility where whole commodities are sorted and/or sized, may be minimally trimmed (not altered in form), washed or not washed, treated with post-harvest fungicide and/or wax applications and packed for commercial distribution and use by consumer or retail establishment. In this type of facility, no processing activities are performed, if so, a different type of facility operation shall be used. A Packinghouse facility covers the activities involved in the Storage & Distribution Center and Cooling/Cold Storage facilities.

Pest scouting

Systematic inspection of plantings to evaluate crop health, identify threats and inform and evaluate treatment decisions. Scouting can include counting pests or pest-damaged plants or plant parts, checking insect or disease spore traps, using drones to visually survey remote parts of fields, etc.

Pesticide

General term for a formulated chemical containing an active ingredient designed to kill, repel or otherwise suppress populations or activity of a particular pest or group of pests. This includes insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, miticides, fumigants, plant growth regulators, defoliants, desiccants, etc. Pesticide products approved for use in organic crops, such as spinosad or Bt, are included in this definition.

Pesticide drift

Airborne movement of pesticides away from the intended target. Pesticide drift can affect everyone, both urban and rural communities, by having negative effects on human health and the environment.

Processing facility

A type of facility where whole commodities are processed and altered in form by peeling, slicing, chopping, shredding, coring, or trimming, with or without washing, prior to being packaged for use by the consumer or a retail establishment (e.g., pre-cut, packaged, ready-to-eat salad mixes). In this type of facility, processing activities are being performed, if not, a different type of facility operation shall be used. A Processing facility covers the activities involved in the Storage & Distribution Center, Cooling/Cold Storage and Packinghouse facilities.

Reduced tillage

Method of tillage in which the soil has been disturbed to a lesser extent relative to conventional tillage (plowed/harrow till). Reducing tillage can reduce soil erosion, loss of carbon from the soil into the atmosphere and energy consumption and costs.

Refuge

An area of a field not treated with pesticides to allow beneficial insects and susceptible pest organisms to survive. Also refers to a traditionally bred (non-GMO) crop area planted within GMO crop acreage to allow for the reproduction of pest species to mitigate the development of pest resistance to the pesticide incorporated into the GMO plant.

Resistance trait: A genetic trait or set of traits that provide a crop variety with the ability to withstand attack by a pest, disease or pesticide and remain virtually unaffected. May be bred traditionally, genetically engineered or arise inadvertently within a plant or pest population.

Resistant pests: Weeds, insects or other pests that have naturally evolved genetic resistance to specific chemical compounds or chemical modes of action after repeated exposure to the same chemical.

Riparian buffer

A vegetated region next to streams, rivers or wetlands designed to mitigate the flow of agricultural or wastewater runoff into the body of water.

Rotation

Alternating plantings of one type of plant with at least one other (e.g., corn followed by soybeans); alternating pesticides of one type (mode of action) with at least one other type (e.g., an organophosphate followed by a biopesticide).

Sensitive site

Areas of the natural or built environment that may be negatively impacted by agricultural activities. Most growing operations have sensitive sites that can be protected from production activities, for example, wetlands, aquifers, well heads, forests, schools, office buildings, endangered species habitat, etc.

Small Producer

A producer with a GCFI of <\$350,000 and ≤5 permanent workers, with no more than 25 total workers on-site at the management unit at any time.

Undeveloped reserve

A section of land that has been left untouched by farming, construction, etc. to preserve the natural habitat.

Wastewater

Any water that has been adversely affected in quality by man-made influence or pollutants. It comprises liquid waste discharged by domestic residences, commercial properties, industry and/or agriculture and can encompass a wide range of potential contaminants and concentrations.

Wood tunnel nest

Artificial nests consisting of wood blocks drilled with a large number of dead-end tunnels used to attract bees and promote their local population growth.