



# **Sustainability** Standard™

## A Quick Guide: Comparing Individual and Group Certification Version 1.0

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**The Sustainability Standard** is a comprehensive sustainable agriculture certification prioritizing the needs of growers, food companies and the environment. The objective of the program is to assess and communicate performance on sustainability metrics and inspire continuous improvement of sustainability practices. The standard is applicable to farming operations and facilities and covers a comprehensive set of environmental and social best practices, with a focus on advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM). In addition to IPM, it addresses environmental protection, soil health, nutrient management, air quality, waste and recycling, water and energy conservation, worker welfare and emergency management.

### Quick Comparison Guide

	Individual Certification	Group Certification
<b>Who is certification for?</b>	Individual certification is for a single organization/entity. The scope of certification is defined by the auditee and is generally a crop or crops with similar production and sustainability practices.	Group certification is for a self-designated assemblage of farm and facility operations (a Group) whose practices adhere to a set of standards defined by an Internal Management System (IMS) that is maintained and implemented by a Group leader. For example, packers/shippers, importers or exporters that source product from multiple farms and facilities may choose to form a Group.
	Certification is for farm and facility operations including field and indoor production, and cooling, packing and processing facilities.	
<b>Standard Normative Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>General Regulations</u></li> <li>• <u>Checklist: Organizations, Farms and Facilities</u></li> <li>• <u>Audit Guidelines</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Internal Management System Checklist for Group Certification</u></li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All farms and facilities seeking certification receive an on-site audit</li> <li>• Audits are all third-party, i.e., conducted by an approved auditor from an approved Certification Body (CB)</li> <li>• Audits follow the Sustainability Standard Checklist and Audit Guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The square root of the total number of farms and the square root of the total number of facilities in the Group receive third-party on-site audits from a CB</li> <li>• The Group leader conducts internal audits of all Group members upon joining the Group. Internal audits occur before third-party audits from the CB</li> <li>• Audits (both internal and third-party) of Group members follow the Sustainability Standard Checklist and Audit Guidelines</li> <li>• Audits of the Group leader also include the IMS Checklist</li> </ul>

	Individual Certification	Group Certification
<b>Achieving Certification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet all Sustainability Standard Minimum Requirements</li> <li>Attain a 70% audit score or higher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet all Sustainability Standard Minimum Requirements, including the questions only applicable to Group Certification</li> <li>Attain a 70% or higher average audit score across all Group members</li> <li>Meet all Minimum Requirements of IMS Checklist</li> </ul>
<b>Audit Cycle</b>	Three-year audit cycle: CB conducts initial on-site audit(s), desk audits at years 1 and 2 and recertification audit(s) at year 3.	
<b>Types of Auditors</b>	<b>Third Party-Auditors</b>	<b>Internal Auditors</b>
<b>Auditor Requirements and Qualification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pass the Sustainability Standard auditor exam</li> <li>At least two years of related work experience in sustainable agriculture and/or sustainability in the food or agriculture industry*</li> <li>Attend Sustainability Standard Auditor Training*</li> <li>Recognized training in audit techniques*</li> <li>IPM and nutrient management training*</li> </ul> <p><i>*Ideal but not required for internal Group auditors</i></p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must work with at least one approved Sustainability Standard CB</li> <li>A post-high school degree or equivalent in a discipline related to the scope of certification</li> <li>At least ten audit days or five audits of practical experience performing audits of agricultural operations</li> <li>Supervised audits for new auditors</li> <li>Must conduct at least one Sustainability Standard audit per year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be a permanent employee, contractor, or consultant of the Group leader, so long as they meet the qualification requirements for third-party auditors</li> </ul>

### Flexibility between Individual and Group Certification

Individual certification does not preclude a farm or facility from forming or joining a Group in the future. An individual farm or facility that is certified may be added into a new or existing Group. When adding to a new Group, the certified entity counts as one of the required audits if the on-site audit occurred within the last 12 months. More information can be found in the [Guidelines for Group Certification](#).

## Relevant Glossary Terms

### **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 covered area for the production of fresh produce for human consumption. Farms include field and greenhouse operations.

### **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.

### **Group leader**

The designated organizer of the Group, often a packer or shipper, who maintains and implements the Group IMS and is responsible for internal audits of Group members. Also referred to as the IMS holder.

### **Group member**

A farm or a facility within a Group that is not the Group leader.

### **Internal audit**

An audit conducted by the Group leader (IMS holder) of Group members (may be performed by contractor). This may be a first- or second-party audit provided that all requirements outlined in the General Regulations are met.

### **Internal auditor**

Staff position within the Group leader organization that conducts audits of Group members to ensure conformance to Sustainability Standard criteria and the Group IMS. The Group leader may contract out this role if sufficient internal capacity does not exist.

### **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.