



Sustainability
Standard™

SUSTAINABLE FOOD GROUP SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD

Internal Management System (IMS) Checklist for Group Certification

Version 2.0

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Name of document	Effective Date	Expires by
Sust Stnd IMS Checklist v2.0	January 01, 2025	Valid until further notice
To be used in conjunction with		
Sust Stnd General Regulations v2.0 Sust Stnd Checklist v2.0 Sust Stnd Audit Guidelines v2.0 Sust Stnd Question Applicability Matrix v2.0		
Replaces		Applicable to
Sustainability Standard Group Certification IMS Checklist v1.1 051823 FINAL		Approved Sustainability Standard Certification Bodies

Scheme owner

Sustainable Food Group (SFG) is a part of the IPM Institute of North America, a non-profit with over 25 years of experience in implementing sustainability best practices in agriculture and communities. As experts in agricultural supply chain sustainability, SFG has developed high-impact, science-based programs for food industry leaders.



SFG envisions a world where food is grown in sync with natural processes and where agriculture and food companies are a force for good, directly benefiting workers, consumers, water, air, climate, biodiversity and soil. Read more at <https://ipminstitute.org/branch/sfg/>.

Data partner

Azzule Systems is a leading global data management solution provider, helping companies maintain visibility over their supply chains.



More information

For more information about the Sustainability Standard certification, visit the Sustainability Standard webpage, <https://ipminstitute.org/services/sustainability-standard/>, or contact Sustainable Food Group at certification@sustainablefoodgroup.org.

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Glossary of Terms for Group Certification:

For a full glossary of relevant sustainable agriculture terms, see the Sustainability Standard Audit Guidelines or Sustainability Standard General Regulations.

Group

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

IMS (Internal Management System)

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

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 auditor

Staff position within the Group leader 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 audit

An audit conducted by the Group leader (IMS holder) of Group members (may be performed by contractor).

Checklist Overview:

This checklist evaluates if the Internal Management System (IMS) in place is sufficiently robust to ensure that the registered producer members comply in a uniform manner with the Sustainability Standard requirements. The Minimum Requirements must be passed in order for the Group to achieve certification, while the Recommendations are best practices encouraged for a Group but are not required for certification under the Sustainability Standard.

IMS Checklist Minimum Requirements

Question Number	Question	Available Answers	Notes
Group Administration and Structure			
1.01.01	Does the scope of the Group IMS match the audit scope, i.e., covers the crop or crop group to be observed?	Y/N	
1.01.02	Is there a register maintained of all Group members and of all applicable sites used for production, handling and processing (farms and facilities) in accordance with the Sustainability Standard certification?	Y/N	
1.01.03	Does the register contain the following information for each Group member (sub questions a-e below should be answered “No” if Group internal register does not exist):		
1.01.03a	Name of the Group member	Y/N	
1.01.03b	Products included in the certification scope	Y/N	
1.01.03c	Details of the individual production sites, including acreage and volume of certified products	Y/N	
1.01.03d	Group member status (status as a result of the last second-party audit: approved, suspended, etc.)	Y/N	
1.01.03e	Date of most recent second-party audit	Y/N	

1.01.04	Are roles and expectations clearly communicated to Group members upon establishing the Group and are relevant updates given when changes occur?	Y/N	
1.01.05	Is the organizational structure of the Group documented and does it include individuals responsible for (sub questions a-d below should be answered “No” if Group structure is not documented):		
1.01.05a	Managing the IMS	Y/N	
1.01.05b	Conducting second-party audits of each Group member against the Sustainability Standard (i.e., internal auditor)	Y/N	
1.01.05c	Conducting an internal audit of the IMS, including reviewing the second-party audits of Group members	Y/N	
1.01.05d	Verifying qualifications of second-party auditors as defined in the most current version of the Sustainability Standard General Regulations	Y/N	
Document Control and Record Keeping			
1.02.01	Does the documentation of the IMS include (sub questions a-b below should be answered “No” if IMS is not documented):		
1.02.01a	Policies and procedures for operation of the Group and adherence to Sustainability Standard requirements?	Y/N	
1.02.01b	Internal audit procedures?	Y/N	
1.02.02	Are policies and procedures sufficiently detailed to demonstrate conformance to the requirements of the Sustainability Standard?	Y/N	
1.02.03	Are policies and procedures available to relevant staff and all Group members?	Y/N	
1.02.04	Are policies and procedures reviewed periodically to ensure continued conformance with the Sustainability Standard?	Y/N	

1.02.05	Are relevant changes to Sustainability Standard normative documents incorporated into the Group IMS within one year? Question N/A if no new Sustainability Standard normative documents have been released in the last year.	Y/N/NA	
1.02.06	Are obsolete versions of Group IMS documents rescinded within one year of new Sustainability Standard normative document release? Question N/A if no new Sustainability Standard normative documents have been released in the last year.	Y/N/NA	
1.02.07	Do all sites included in the Group have copies of documentation needed for conformance with Group IMS? Documentation should include, but is not limited to: Group IMS, Sustainability Standard Audit Guidelines, Group member audit reports.	Y/N	
1.02.08	Are records kept for a minimum of three years?	Y/N	
1.02.09	Are all records genuine, legible, stored and maintained in suitable conditions, and accessible for inspection as required?	Y/N	
Internal Audits			
1.03.01	Are qualifications of internal auditors (as defined in the Group Certification General Regulations) checked and documented by the Group leader?	Y/N	
1.03.02	Are internal audits carried out at each farm and facility at least once every three years against all the relevant Sustainability Standard Checklist questions and using the Sustainability Standard Audit Guidelines?	Y/N	
1.03.03	Is there a policy requiring that new Group members are internally audited upon joining the Group?	Y/N	

1.03.04	Are the second-party audit reports and notes maintained and available for inspection by the Certification Body?	Y/N	
1.03.05	Do audit reports contain the following information (sub questions a-g below should be answered “No” if internal audit reports do not exist):		
1.03.05a	Identification of Group member and audited location?	Y/N	
1.03.05b	Date of the audit?	Y/N	
1.03.05c	Auditor name?	Y/N	
1.03.05d	Audited products?	Y/N	
1.03.05e	Evaluation result against each Sustainability Standard Checklist question?	Y/N	
1.03.05f	Details of any non-compliances identified and time period for corrective actions?	Y/N	
1.03.05g	Audit score (percentage achieved)?	Y/N	
1.03.06	Does the Group leader make the decision on whether the producer is compliant with the Sustainability Standard requirements, based on the audit reports produced by the auditor?	Y/N	
1.03.07	Are there documented procedures and timelines to handle non-compliances and corrective actions which may result from internal audits or failures of the IMS?	Y/N	
1.03.08	Does the IMS give the Group leader the authority to sanction (suspend or remove) a Group member that does not resolve corrective actions within the appropriate timeframe?	Y/N	
1.03.09	Are records maintained of all sanctions including evidence of subsequent corrective actions and decision-making processes?	Y/N	

1.03.10	Does the IMS include a process to ensure that the amount of certified product (product that meets the criteria for certification) is equal to the amount of product that is sold as certified?	Y/N	
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Recommendations

Question Number	Question	Available Answers	Notes
Group Administration and Structure			
2.01.01	Is production currently certified under any other program(s) addressing elements of sustainable agriculture and requiring an on-site audit? (Informational only, answer will not affect score. If yes, list certification(s) held.)	Y/N	
2.01.02	Has the Group leader been granted the legal right to carry out agricultural production and/or trading, and be able to legally contract with and represent the producer members/production sites?	Y/N	
2.01.03	Are the Group members responsible for their respective production sites and have the authority to implement practices as needed?	Y/N	
2.01.04	Does the Group internal register contain the following information for each Group member (sub questions a-e below should be answered “No” if Group internal register does not exist):		
2.01.04a	Name of contact person	Y/N	
2.01.04b	Full address (physical and postal)	Y/N	
2.01.04c	Contact information (telephone number, e-mail and fax number, if available)	Y/N	
2.01.04d	Other Group member ID (e.g., VAT number, GLN, etc.)	Y/N	
2.01.04e	If the Group leader is sourcing from farms or facilities not in the Group, are these listed separately?	Y/N	
2.01.05	Does the Group leader have mechanisms in place to notify the Sustainability Standard-approved Certification Body immediately of suspensions or cancellations of registered producers or production sites?	Y/N	
2.01.06	Does the structure of the Group enable the appropriate implementation of the IMS across all Group members?	Y/N	

2.01.07	Is the organizational structure of the Group documented and does it include individuals responsible for (sub questions a-b below should be answered “No” if Group organizational structure is not documented):		
2.01.07a	Technical advice to the Group	Y/N	
2.01.07b	Does the management give internal auditors sufficient authority to conduct audits and determine audit outcomes (approved, suspended, etc.)?	Y/N	
2.01.08	Are there defined and documented qualification requirements and training for key staff managing the IMS?	Y/N	
2.01.09	Does the management ensure that all personnel with responsibility for compliance with the Sustainability Standard are adequately trained and meet the defined qualification requirements?	Y/N	
2.01.10	Where the internal auditor does not have all Ideal Qualifications outlined in the Group Certification General Regulations, does another person with these qualifications participate in performing audits and making audit decisions?	Y/N	
2.01.11	Are records of qualifications and training maintained for all key staff (managers, auditors, etc.) involved in conformance with IMS and Sustainability Standard requirements?	Y/N	
2.01.12	Do internal auditor(s) undergo auditor calibration to ensure consistency in their approach and interpretation of the standard (e.g. by training, evaluation and/or documented shadow audits)?	Y/N	
2.01.13	Is there a system in place to demonstrate that key staff are informed and aware of developments and legislative changes relevant to the conformance to the Sustainability Standard?	Y/N	
Documents and Recordkeeping			
2.02.01	Are there written signed contracts between each Group member and the Group leader?	Y/N	

2.02.02	Do the contracts include the following information (sub questions a-h below should be answered “No” if contracts do not exist):		
2.02.02a	Group name and legal identification (if different than name)	Y/N	
2.02.02b	Group member name and legal identification (if different than name)	Y/N	
2.02.02c	Group member contact address	Y/N	
2.02.02d	Details of the individual production sites, including certified and non-certified products, and acreage or volume of both (the contract may refer to the Group’s internal register for this information)	Y/N	
2.02.02e	Group member commitment to comply with the requirements of the Sustainability Standard	Y/N	
2.02.02f	Group member agreement to comply with the group’s documented procedures, policies, and where provided, technical advice	Y/N	
2.02.02g	Sanctions that may be applied in case of Sustainability Standard and any other internal requirements not being met	Y/N	
2.02.02h	Signatures of representative(s) of Group member and Group leader	Y/N	
2.02.03	Are all controlled documents identified with an issue number, issue date, review date, page number and changes since previous version, if applicable?	Y/N	
Internal Audits			
2.03.01	Are internal auditors independent of the area being inspected, i.e., are not inspecting their own daily work?	Y/N	

2.03.02	Do audit reports contain the following information (sub questions a-b below should be answered “No” if internal audit reports do not exist):		
2.03.02a	Duration of the audit?	Y/N	
2.03.02b	Signature of the registered producer or production site responsible?	Y/N	