



Assurance Code System Report, December 2015

Sustainable Agriculture Network/Rainforest Alliance

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Assurance System Structure

The SAN/RA assurance program is based on conformity criteria with a basis in ISO 17065 accreditation and additional criteria for certification bodies as defined by the Sustainable Agriculture Network in its accreditation requirements. The International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS) serves as the sole oversight provider to ensure that certification bodies comply with the requirements of the program and are periodically evaluated. Certification bodies that wish to participate in the program in order to provide Rainforest Alliance certification to farms, farm groups and chain of custody operations, must complete an initial pre-authorization by SAN, before they can complete the IOAS accreditation process. The SAN Secretariat issues the pre-authorization decision, but the final decision on accreditation status and ongoing accreditation evaluation is made by IOAS.

List of standards that are assessed through the assurance system

The below standards are assessed through the assurance system:



- SAN Sustainable Agriculture Standard. July 2010 (version 4).
- SAN Group Certification Standard. March 2011 (version 2).
- Standard for Sustainable Cattle Production Systems. July 2010.
- Chain of Custody Standard. July 2015.
- Accreditation Requirements for Certification Bodies. June 2015

All certification bodies are required to comply with ISO7065. A list of certification bodies currently participating in the scheme can be found on the [SAN website](#).

Stakeholders in the assurance program can provide feedback to the SAN Secretariat directly through the SAN complaints and appeals process.

The SAN is actively working on improvements to its assurance program in order to make it more cost effective and efficient for its participants, with the ultimate goal of adding more value to producers in order to support the SAN mission. A revised assurance program will be implemented in 2017 and will include new approaches to risk management which will guide the SAN's work to improve SAN standards compliance assessment while providing opportunities for clients to receive technical support to implement sustainable agriculture best practices.

Personnel Competence

The SAN assurance program places strong emphasis on auditor preparation, ongoing training and calibration since auditors have a critical role in the assurance process. The SAN Auditor Competence requirements outline the training framework for approved auditors and their trainers as part of the conditions for accreditation of certification bodies. The requirements also describe the conditions that any applicant for the SAN auditor-candidate course has to meet. Conditions include academic degrees, professional experience and communication skills. All auditor candidates who pass the SAN auditor course have to complete practice hours under the leadership of a lead auditor during agriculture farm or group administrator audits to be considered as support auditors. Auditors working in the program must complete predetermined auditing hours in the field in order to be able to achieve four different auditor levels.

These requirements promote the high quality and competence of SAN-approved auditors worldwide, support harmonization in the selection and training of auditors and their trainers, and ensure the application of corrective actions to improve auditor's performance. The SAN evaluates the consistency of auditor competence through ongoing auditor and certification body evaluations conducted by the SAN Secretariat.



Assessment

The SAN assessment process relies primarily on on-site assessments of its clients within a 36 month certification cycle. Different audits are conducted according to the performance of the operation or other indicators requiring additional evaluation of the operation. These audits include certification, annual, research and non-programmed audits. Some of these audits may be conducted via documentation reviews only (desk audits). The frequency and intensity of audits is applied consistently to all operations, and while risk scenarios are considered, the SAN is still working to incorporate risk management as part of the ongoing assessment process. The certification body must have a documented procedure for determining the composition of the audit team used for audits, but the SAN dictates the audit evaluation tool to be used by the team (SAN Scoring Tool). The SAN Certification Policy outlines the follow up actions required in order to resolve non-conformities.

The SAN includes specific rules in order to evaluate the performance of farm groups and chain of custody multi-site operations. Farm group rules include requirements for the group's internal management system and its periodic evaluation. The group's Internal Management System must have a description of roles and competencies of its personnel, an agreement signed by each group member indicating they understand their rights and responsibilities, and descriptions of the following: approval process of new group members, annual status of group members, record keeping requirements, annual internal inspection, and the sanctions and appeals process. Groups that handle both certified and non-certified products have to obtain a chain of custody certificate.

The Group Administrator is assessed against the Group Standard, and a sample of farms is assessed against the Sustainable Agriculture Standard (and Cattle Standard, when applicable). In general, the sample size is equal to the square root of the total number of producers in the group. It could increase up to 1.4 times the square root (in high risk scenarios), or decrease even by half, but only in annual audits of top performing clients.

The assessment of groups by the certification body is conducted via a representative sample of its operations as part of the standard audit process.

Oversight

The SAN assurance model relies on the oversight procedures of its accreditation body, IOAS which are based on the requirements of ISO 17011. Accreditation cycles are 4 years and include annual or bi-annual on-site visits to certification bodies, and regular evaluation of documentation including samples of audit reports. These methods are also used to evaluate the



certification bodies' conformity with the SAN Accreditation Requirements (and Auditor Competence Requirements).

Proxy accreditation is not used in the SAN/RA system.

On-going Scrutiny

The SAN and Rainforest Alliance are currently working to develop documented policies to identify, mitigate and address fraud and misrepresentation relating to the use of the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal on products originating from certified operations.