



# Fair Trade USA ISEAL Assurance Code Public Systems Report

Fair Trade USA

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## Assurance System Structure

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Fair Trade USA is the scheme owner and responsible party for the assurance systems for all Fair Trade USA Standards. Fair Trade USA contracts with 3<sup>rd</sup> party conformity assessment bodies (CABs) who must adhere to the eligibility criteria as outlined in the [Fair Trade USA Quality Manual](#) and in the relevant Program Assurance Manual in order to enter into a working relationship with Fair Trade USA.

The Agricultural Production Standard (APS) sets the requirements for all agricultural producers, or groups of producers, worldwide. Fair Trade USA currently works with SCS Global Services and Control Union, as stated on the [website](#), to assess compliance against the APS. CABs review applications, scope and conduct audits, write reports, make certification decisions, manage Corrective Action Plans (CAPs), and issue certificates. These activities are conducted on behalf of Fair Trade USA in accordance with the assurance procedures related to compliance assessment and certification laid out in the [Agriculture Program Assurance Manual](#).

A CAB carrying out compliance against the APS must hold current ISO 17065 accreditation for the scope of a relevant and comparable scheme and must use the ISO 17065 decision-making process when evaluating performance and making certification decisions regarding Fair Trade USA certificates.

Additionally, Fair Trade USA continues to fully recognize and accept producers certified against Fairtrade International standards to sell Fair Trade Certified products. Acceptance of Fairtrade International certification serves as an effort to encourage all eligible producers to become (or remain) certified under Fairtrade International standards and to avoid duplicative audits. Fair Trade USA and FLOCERT coordinate to ensure the sharing and transfer of records necessary to maintain compliance.

Any stakeholder may submit allegations, grievances, complaints or comment with regard to specific certified producers, the assurance process or the conduct of auditors and/or assessment bodies to Fair Trade USA or the assessment body directly at all times.

## Personnel Competence

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Fair Trade USA requires that all personnel involved in the assurance process, including auditors, are sufficiently qualified and competent, as defined in the Fair Trade USA Quality Manual and Agriculture Program Assurance Manual.



Auditors are qualified experts who conduct evaluation, surveillance, re-certification, follow-up, and unannounced audits. Auditors may be employees of the CAB or subcontractors. It is the individual auditor that is ultimately approved to audit on behalf of Fair Trade USA upon demonstrating that minimum competency requirements and additional qualifications, including all necessary trainings, have been met.

CABs must ensure ongoing training and calibration of auditors and personnel to ensure sufficient competence is maintained, retaining all auditor training records, evaluation records, and credentials.

## Assessment

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Fair Trade USA enables certification against the APS by requiring 3rd party CABs to follow a standardized assessment process applicable across all types of agricultural production systems, including groups, as detailed in the Agriculture Program Assurance Manual.

The CAB identifies an appropriate auditor or audit team with the necessary competencies, geographical location, and language to conduct each audit according to the required scope and confirms there is no potential conflict of interest.

The certification process is based on a six-year certification cycle, with the initial certification decision made during audit Year 0 and subsequent certification decisions made in audit Years 3 and 6. Annual surveillance audits are conducted between evaluation and re-certification audits in Years 1, 2, 4 and 5 to assess ongoing compliance with the APS compliance criteria, along with full implementation of CAPs developed as a result of non-compliances issued during previous audits. All Certificate Holders receive an on-site audit annually.

The range of compliance criteria assessed, the number of sites visited, and interviews conducted are dictated by the audit year within the certification cycle, the scope and size of operations and the relevant sampling method.

The APS has two types of compliance criteria: Critical and Progress.

- Critical criteria must be met by a specified timeline and Progress criteria describe continuous improvement requirements against which the Certification Holder must show a minimum level of compliance and progress over time. Compliance with all criteria must be met by audit Year 6.
- Each Progress criterion is worth a specified number of Progress points. The Certificate Holder may select which Progress criteria to comply with to reach the minimum percentage of Progress points required in modules containing Progress criteria, according to the relevant timeline.
- Criteria are designated based on farm and facility size, which are defined in the APS as Small (SF), Mid-sized (MF) or Large (LF). A single criterion can be weighted different for farms or facilities of different sizes.

Where audit findings identify that the Certificate Holder does not meet the requirements related to any applicable Critical criteria or does not meet the required score for Progress criteria in a given module, a report of non-compliances (NCs) is created and remediation through a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is required.



[The Score System Guide for the APS](#) provides further guidance on the requirements for score calculation and compliance.

When any and all NCs have been closed, and the CAB confirms that all certification requirements have been met, the certification decision is recorded and a certificate may be issued by the CAB. An unwillingness or inability to correct NCs identified in audit reports or comply with the requirements of the assessment process may result in the denial of certification following an initial evaluation audit or the suspension or withdrawal of the certificate of an existing Certificate Holder. Further guidance and circumstances to this effect are outlined in the Agriculture Program Assurance Manual.

Certification decisions are made by qualified CAB personnel who did not participate in the audit process or, where possible, the review of CAP. This separation of responsibilities ensures impartiality and objectivity in the certification decision process.

## Oversight

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Fair Trade USA regularly reviews CABs to ensure competent and consistent performance, as described in the Fair Trade USA Quality Manual and the Conformity Assessment Body Oversight Procedure. The oversight mechanism for the Agriculture program is detailed further in the Agriculture Program Assurance Manual.

Fair Trade USA independently conducts oversight activities of the compliance assessment process and program implementation by the approved CABs on an annual basis, and no additional accreditation or oversight bodies are used.

As a component of oversight, Fair Trade USA confirms continued adherence to eligibility criteria for CABs and competency requirements for assurance personnel and carries out activities that ensure the ISO 17065 decision-making process is applied. Such activities include:

- Monitoring of communications related to audit reports or a change in certification status;
- Supporting documentation review;
- Reviewing the results of CAB internal audits for compliance with program requirements; and
- Witness audits.

To facilitate a model of continuous improvement, additional feedback received by Fair Trade USA is shared with CABs through regular communication.

## On-going Scrutiny

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All use of the Fair Trade Certified™ seal is in accordance with the Seal and Language Use Guide and must be approved by Fair Trade USA. Compliance with the seal guidelines is a requirement of the Fair Trade USA Trade Standard and thus a part of the assessment process.



Any misuse or fraudulent use of the Fair Trade Certified seal may result in sanctions depending on the severity and nature of the case. Suspicion of fraud may be reported by any stakeholder through Fair Trade USA's site for further follow up or potential audit review.

