



LEADING HARVEST

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**A Toolkit for Preparing
Written Statement Indicators for the
Leading Harvest Standard 2020**

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Five Leading Harvest (LH) Standard 2020 Indicators require written statements to be presented to auditors: Indicators 1.1.1, 7.3.2, 9.3.1, 10.3.1, 11.2.1. They form a substantive bridge between your operation and the LH Standard 2020. Your written statements should be clear and practical. A well written statement needs to be backed up by your compelling narrative which shows how you methodically implement your written commitments on the ground and achieve conformance with the LH Standard 2020. Moreover, you should also be able to provide evidence that appropriate family workers and/or employees understand and are able to implement written policy or statement. This document provides guidance for preparing written statements for these five indicators and examples of written statements to help users craft their own written statements.

Indicator 1.1.1 Farmland Stewardship Commitment:

A written commitment statement and list of goals that describes the sustainable agricultural stewardship of farmland.

A written sustainability commitment statement and list of stewardship goals helps farms achieve agricultural sustainability by communicating their purpose and direction to their employees, customers, vendors, and other stakeholders and ensuring consistent strategic direction and operations. It also provides a clear vision to employees necessary to jointly achieve stewardship goals. All owners, family workers, and employees should understand and be able to implement your Farmland Stewardship Commitment statement.

A commitment statement can be formulated by asking: What commitments or deep priorities to agricultural sustainability drive your farm business? Is it profitability? Farm productivity? Environmental stewardship? Being a leader above other farmers? Having the best team of people? Preparing the next generation to exceed this generation's farming accomplishments?

Answering the question of one's deep sustainability priorities is essential for everyday farming. By clearly articulating what matters deeply—those things that mobilize, energize, and guide decision-making—it becomes easier to support one's internal commitments. Since farm management often involves more than one person, a commitment statement can help communicate your stewardship commitment to employees, other business stakeholders, and the local community.

Examples of commitment statements:

X Farm is a producer of coarse grains. We are committed to becoming one of the top producers in our area and to making sure that productivity and stewardship translates into prosperity and growth for everyone involved with our farm and a healthy environment.

At X farms, we are committed to long-term stewardship and profitability that maintains the productivity of our farmland, conserves nature, and contributes to the well-being of our employees and local community.

To make the world a better place by applying good business practices and agricultural stewardship to our farmland.

At X Farms, we are committed to meeting the highest standards for agricultural stewardship. We combine leading farm management techniques with outstanding environmental stewardship to maximize productivity and profitability.

Stewardship goals are broad statements that indicate general goals for a farm, typically on a 5 to 10 years scale. The number of goals you have is determined by what you think is necessary to communicate your commitment and values. They should be realistic and apply to your operation and property. There may be a simple single goal or more than one goal for each of the triple bottom-lines: financial, social, and environmental. Stewardship goals can address these and other related topics: profitability, long-term financial sustainability, productivity, safety, teamwork, lifestyle and quality of life, conservation (e.g., soils, water, wildlife, energy), and resource use.

Examples of stewardship goals:

- *Achieve long-term profitability with a purpose by balancing income and the family life of our employees*
- *Maintaining and enhancing the long-term soil health and productivity of our cropland*
- *Farming efficiently while conserving the soil, air, water, and wildlife resources*
- *Optimally managing land, soil, and water resources to achieve farm productivity*
- *Being a good steward and neighbor where we work*
- *Being a work place of choice for all of our employees*
- *Applying a practice of continual improvement to enhance crop productivity, stewardship of land and people, employee safety, and natural resource conservation.*

Indicator 7.3.2 Deforestation:

(a) A written policy to demonstrate the Standard user's commitment to a zero deforestation policy that identifies the regions of application, relevant natural forest types, and appropriate deforestation cut-off date in areas with biome-specific...

Globally, deforestation to create cropland is a major threat to climate and biodiversity. Deforestation protocols are voluntary programs used to help prevent the conversion of forest to farmland. Farmland created by deforestation after a regional cut-off date cannot be enrolled in LH Standard 2020; however, the U.S. lacks deforestation protocols, so U.S. farms are not at risk. Protocols have been developed for Canada and other countries. For example, Canada has the *Boreal Forest Conservation Framework* for boreal forest with cutoff year of 2003.

A written *zero deforestation policy* should identify the regions of application, relevant natural forest types, and appropriate deforestation cut-off date(s) in areas with deforestation protocols. Farms seeking certification may elect to have simple *zero deforestation policy* with a self-selected cutoff date, which identifies the application region and relevant natural forest types because the U.S. lacks a deforestation protocol. Only family workers and employees who are involved in deals for land purchases and/or renting or managing forest land on the farm may need to understand and be able to implement your Deforestation Policy.

Examples of written deforestation policies:

X Farm acquires and manages agricultural lands to further its stewardship goals. Consistent with its Farmland Stewardship Commitment, X Farm is committed to protecting natural forests and will not engage in deforestation of natural forests in [where you operate, e.g., Iowa], including [list of common forest types which can be found at web site of a state forestry agency, e.g., "oak savannah, bottomland forests, upland forest, and mixed upland forests"]. Further, X Farm will not acquire or rent farmland on which deforestation of natural forests has occurred after ##### [cutoff date that you select]. We will ensure that our land purchases do not directly or indirectly contribute to deforestations of natural forests.

X Farm is committed to stopping deforestation and protecting natural forests. It will not engage in deforestation of natural forests on its land in [state or region where you operate, e.g., Iowa], including [list of major forest types in your state or region where you operate, e.g., oak savannah, bottomland forests, upland forest, and mixed upland forests if you are in Iowa]; nor will it acquire or rent farmland where natural forests were converted to other cropland or pasture after ##### [cutoff date that you select].

Indicator 9.3.1 Local Community and Indigenous Peoples Policy:

A written policy demonstrating a commitment to recognize and respect the rights of local communities and treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Respect for local community and treaty rights is essential for supporting the social dimension of agricultural sustainability and achieving legal compliance. These rights vary among state and/or county jurisdictions. Local communities may have rights concerning public health and safety, land use, water quality, soil erosion, invasive species, and wildlife. *Treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples* (i.e., Native Americans) also vary depending on *Indigenous Peoples* local group(s) and are often identified during due diligence of title searches when land is purchased. Treaty rights may include access to *Special Sites*, and water, hunting, fishing, wild food procurement, and other land access rights.

Conformance to this Indicator can be a brief and very simple statement describing your commitment to abide by local regulations and respect treaty rights of *Indigenous Peoples*. You may still apply for local regulatory variances (e.g., code and ordinance exemptions) if enrolled. In many states, *Indigenous Peoples* nations lack off-reservation treaty rights and so a written statement does not create any new obligations to Native Americans. Farm co-owners (e.g., business partners and family members) may need to understand and be able to implement your Local Community and Indigenous Peoples Policy.

Examples of a written commitment policy:

X Farms is committed to recognize and respect the rights of local communities and treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples. We abide by the regulatory requirements of local communities and respect the decisions of local land use boards and elected councils of local communities. We welcome and respect the cultures, customs, and values of the Indigenous Peoples in [state or region where you operate, e.g., Iowa] and the local communities where we conduct business and appreciate their concerns and aspiration regarding their history, heritage, and traditions. We respect the right of Indigenous Peoples to determine their own way of life, on their own lands, and to do so according to their time-honored cultures, traditions, and beliefs.

X Farm recognizes that the identities and culture of Indigenous Peoples are tied inextricably to the lands on which they live and the natural resources upon which they depend. We acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples, as social groups, can be among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of humanity. We welcome and respect the cultures, customs, and values of the Indigenous Peoples in [state or region where you operate, e.g., Iowa], and the local communities where we conduct business and appreciate their concerns and aspiration regarding their history, heritage, and traditions. We respect the right of Indigenous Peoples to determine their own way of life, on their own lands, and to do so according to their time-honored cultures, traditions, and beliefs.

We recognize the rights of these communities to meaningful and appropriate consultation regarding issues affecting their lands and natural resources. X Farms is committed to engaging with Indigenous communities where we conduct business operations. Meaningful engagement begins with respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, whose legally recognized lands and traditional territories are near the areas where we operate.

Indicator 10.3.1 Sustainability Policy Commitment:

Standard users shall provide a written policy demonstrating commitment to the Leading Harvest Standard 2020 that is communicated throughout the organization, particularly to facility and farm managers.

The sustainability policy commitment statement provides clear direction to employees and helps ensure consistent conformance with the LH Standard 2020. It also communicates to supply chains and other key stakeholders (e.g., lenders, government programs staff, regulatory agency staff) how you are committed to sustainability, which can also help maintain a social license and working relationships. This can be a brief and very simple statement describing a commitment to abide by the LH Standard 2020 Principles, Objectives, Performance Measures, and Indicators. The auditors will assess whether all owners, family workers, and employees have seen the statement and understand its meaning.

Example of Sustainability Policy Commitment:

At X Farms, we believe farmers play a vital stewardship responsibility and commitment to society and future generations. This includes maintaining viable commercial and family farmland and supporting an agricultural system that renews its ability to provide food and other agricultural products and sustains rural communities and natural resources. We seek to appropriately apply and improve regional agricultural best management practices on the farmland that we manage and promote such practices on other farmland to advance sustainable agriculture. We are committed to abide by the Leading Harvest Standard 2020 Principles, Objectives, Performance Measures, and Indicators and communicate our Leading Harvest Standard 2020 commitment to our employees.

Indicator 11.2.1 Written Compliance Policy:

A written policy demonstrating commitment to comply with social laws, such as those addressing civil rights, equal employment opportunities, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures, workers' compensation and living wage, Indigenous Peoples' rights, workers' and communities' right to know, prevailing wages, workers' right to organize, and occupational health and safety.

The written compliance policy can be a brief statement describing a simple commitment to comply with local, state, and federal social laws as they apply to farming in the state or region where you operate. Legal compliance is the process by which a farming operation adheres to the complex rules, policies and processes that regulate business practice in a particular jurisdiction. This can include regulations having to do with employee and neighbor health and safety, environmental responsibilities (e.g., land, water, air, pesticides, fuels and lubricants), financial and accounting requirements, employment law, tax law, business law. State Farm Bureaus may have a web page that can help farmers understand their regulatory environment and understand what a commitment might entail.

Example of Written Compliance Policy:

At X Farms, we are committed to complying with all social laws, including those that address civil rights, equal employment opportunities, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures, workers' compensation and living wage, Indigenous Peoples' rights, workers' and communities' right to know, prevailing wages, workers' right to organize, and occupational health and safety. We are an equal opportunity employer and abide by all U.S. fair labor laws and occupational health and safety laws.