



# Leading Harvest Certification Body Administration

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## I. Introduction and Scope

The Leading Harvest (LH) Certification Body (CB) administration presents a clear process for how CBs can be included and carry out LH auditing services. Varying from the processes described in this document must be documented and justified.

All audits to support certification to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard shall be conducted by certification bodies accredited by the ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB), or within a provisional approval from Leading Harvest.

Accredited and provisional certification bodies that provide certification services for Leading Harvest Farmland Management Program are required to maintain audit processes and conduct audits consistent with the requirements of:

- ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems; and
- ISO/IEC TS 17021-2:2016 Conformity assessment – Requirements for certification bodies providing audit and certification of management systems (Part 2: Competence requirements for auditing and certification of environmental management systems).

This Leading Harvest documented procedure is intended to support, but not replace the audit process requirements contained in ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 and ISO/IEC TS 17021-2:2016, by providing specific requirements to Leading Harvest Certified Program Users and certification bodies.

## II. Terms and Definitions

Additional definitions of terms can be found in the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard.

**Nonconformity:** non-fulfilment of a requirement

**Major nonconformity:** nonconformity that affects the capability of the management system to achieve the intended results Nonconformities could be classified as major in the following circumstances:

- If there is a significant doubt that effective process control is in place, or that products or services will meet specified requirements;
- A number of minor nonconformities associated with the same requirement or issue could demonstrate a systemic failure and thus constitute a major nonconformity.

**Minor nonconformity:** nonconformity that does not affect the capability of the management system to achieve the intended results

## III. Accreditation of Certification Bodies

### Accreditation Requirements

The Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard Program requires certification bodies to be accredited in order to conduct Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard audits and issue certificates. A provisional approval from Leading Harvest is possible, as described further in this document.

**Certification Body (CB) Definition:** an independent third party that is accredited by ANSI-National Accreditation Board (ANAB) as being competent to conduct certifications to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard.

### Certification Bodies New to Leading Harvest

Leading Harvest supplies an application for CBs to apply for eligibility to conduct audits to the program. The application process requests:

- 1) Information about CB, including proposed scope
- 2) Evidence of current ISO 17021 and/or ISO 14001 accreditations (if any)
- 3) If no accreditations exist, completion of a self-assessment form that includes description and documentation of their quality management systems.

Applications will be reviewed by Leading Harvest personnel with experience (3+ years) in certification body and/or accreditation body auditing (internal or external audits), or extensive (5+ years) experience working directly with ISO management system standards. A decision will

be made whether to issue provisional approval based on the information provided in the application.

Upon provisional approval the CB will have twelve months to obtain Leading Harvest CB Membership and pay a licensing fee for use of our trademarks and other resources.

Eighteen months from the provisional approval date the CB will be required to have achieved accreditation to ISO 17021 through ANAB.

All audit work and certificates issued under a provisional approval will be valid.

## **IV. Procedures for Certification Bodies**

ISO 17021-1:2015 Section 4 addresses general principles associated with auditing, including impartiality, competence, responsibility, openness, confidentiality and responsiveness to complaints.

All information and documents, including working drafts and reports, shall be considered confidential. CBs shall not release any information or documents without the prior written permission of the Leading Harvest Certified Program User. Auditors shall conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner.

### **Initial Certification**

For the initial certification audit to be completed, the auditee must be a Leading Harvest Program User or be in the process of becoming one in which case the final certification decision is conditioned on becoming a Leading Harvest Program User. The Leading Harvest certificate cannot be issued by the CB until the applicant has become a Leading Harvest Program User. It should be noted that the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard is a publicly available document and, as such, anyone who wants to can offer their “opinion” on an organization’s conformance to it. However, because “Leading Harvest” is a registered service marks, an entity would infringe on this ownership in violation of the federal intellectual property laws if they were to use the service marks in a public claim about the “opinion” without becoming a Leading Harvest Program User.

### **Certification of Multiple Sites**

Multi-site organizations may be audited on a site-by-site basis (all sites visited each year) or, in some cases, on a sample basis. Multi-site certifications shall adhere to the requirements in IAF MD 1: 2018.

### **Substitution and Modification of Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard Indicators**

Certified Program Users, with consent of their CB, may substitute or modify indicators in the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard to address the scope and scale of operations and local conditions based on a thorough analysis and adequate justification. The CB is responsible for ensuring revised indicators are consistent with the spirit and intent of the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard performance measures and indicators and with the principles of Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard, and that the changes

are appropriate for specific local conditions and circumstances and the Certified Program User's scope and scale of operation. Additional indicators beyond those identified in the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard, if included by the Leading Harvest Certified Program User, shall be audited like all other indicators.

### **Determination of Conformity**

The CB shall assess conformance to each element of the Leading Harvest's objectives, performance measures and indicators within the scope of the audit. Evidence shall be compiled by examining operating procedures, materials relating to farmland management practices and on-the-ground field performance, and through meetings or correspondence with employees, contractors and other third parties (e.g., government agencies, community groups, affected Indigenous Peoples, conservation organizations), as appropriate, to determine conformance to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard.

The CB shall ensure that the audit objectives and scope as well as the auditor time allocated to the audit:

- Allow for accurate determination of conformance for the operating units within the scope of the audit;
- Verify that the farmland management program conforms to Leading Harvest objectives, performance measures, indicators, and any additional indicators that the Certified Program User chooses; and
- Verify whether the Certified Program User has effectively implemented its Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard program requirements on the ground.

If a major nonconformity is found, a certification shall not be issued until the certification body verifies that corrective action approved by the lead auditor has been implemented. A revisit may be required to verify implementation of corrective actions.

If a minor nonconformity is found, a certification may be issued only after the lead auditor approves a corrective action plan that is to be implemented within an agreed-upon period, not to exceed one year. Verification that the corrective action has been effectively implemented shall occur during the next audit.

### **Recertification**

To maintain current Leading Harvest Farmland Management Program certificates, Certified Program Users shall recertify their Leading Harvest programs to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard every three years.

### **Transfer of Certification**

When one Certified Program User acquires the certified farmland of another Certified Program User, the certification bodies shall work with the parties involved to review the acquisition or sale. This review will determine the significance of changes that may occur with the transfer of ownership of the farmland to determine the actions necessary in order to issue a new certificate to the party receiving the new assets. It is imperative that Certified Program Users notify their respective certification body as soon as possible when farmland is being purchased or sold to

ensure that lapses in certification status can be eliminated or minimized. In order to minimize disruptions in operations due to the transfer of certified farmland from one Certified Program User to another, Leading Harvest will honor current Leading Harvest certifications for the farmland involved in the transfer for a period of 90 days for Leading Harvest off-product mark uses provided:

- a. The parties involved request this grace period in writing prior to the transfer of the assets with documentation confirming that there will not be significant variation in the current operations, environmental management systems, personnel, etc. during the transfer,
- b. The party receiving the assets must provide documentation demonstrating the timeline for obtaining their new Leading Harvest certification from an accredited certification body.
- c. The party desiring to utilize the Leading Harvest off-product marks must be in full conformance with all aspects of the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Program.

Transfer of an existing certification to another certification body will meet the requirements of IAF MD2.

## V. Competence and Evaluation

### Competence of Audit Teams

Audit teams shall have the competence (knowledge and skills) to conduct an audit in accordance with the principles of auditing. The certification body shall select audit team members appropriate to the scope, scale and geography of the operation being audited. Additionally, at least one member of the audit team shall have knowledge of agricultural operations in the region under-going the audit, at least one member shall have knowledge of applicable laws and regulations, and at least one member shall have knowledge of the socio-demographics and cultural issues in the region.

### Qualifications of Auditors

ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015, sections 7.1 and 7.2 addresses general competence requirements for certification bodies providing audit and certification of management. This is supplemented by the environmental management system-specific competence requirements contained in ISO/IEC 17021-2:2016.

## VI. Reporting

### Leading Harvest Technical Audit Report to the Certified Program User

ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015, Section 9.4.8 defines the audit report contents. In addition, the Leading Harvest audit report to the Certified Program User shall cover:

- a. The audit plan;
- b. Description of the audit process used;

- c. The number of auditor days used to conduct the audit, including both on-site and off-site audit activities;
- d. Information regarding any meetings or correspondence between the audit team and government agencies, community groups, affected Indigenous Peoples and conservation organizations;
- e. Documentation of the rationale for the substitution or modification of any indicators;
- f. A schedule for surveillance and recertification;
- g. Any specific focus areas for the next audit visit.

### **Leading Harvest Summary Audit Report**

The certification body shall also prepare the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard summary audit report, which shall include, at a minimum:

- a. A description of the audit process, objectives and scope; This shall include:
  - The specific Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard objectives that were within the scope of the audit;
  - A description of the sampling approach (consistent with IAF MD-1:2018 and, where appropriate, adopting a risk-based approach) outlining the strata, location and number of sites sampled and the percentage of sites sampled within each stratum;
  - The sampling size, including the number of operations and managed farmland acres physically inspected during the audit.
- b. A description of substitute indicators, if any, used in the audit and a rationale for each;
- c. The name of Certified Program User that was audited, including its Leading Harvest contact person;
- d. A general description of the Certified Program User's farmland included in the audits. This shall include:
  - A general description of the management plan outlining farmland management policies and objectives;
  - An outline of the area of ownership (including the number of acres/hectares under management and provide a description of key features);
  - A general description of major crop types with a general characterization of management and conservation approaches used.
- e. A description of the audit team. This shall include the names and professional qualifications of the lead auditor, all audit team members and any technical experts who participated in the audit. This may include the names and affiliations of any audit observers and an explanation of their role;
- f. The dates the audit was conducted and completed. This shall include the number of auditor days spent to conduct the audit, broken down by auditor time spent off and on-

site. This shall include the specific farmland operations visited if there is more than one operation/region associated with the certificate, and

g. A summary of the findings, including general descriptions of evidence of conformity and any nonconformities (reported at the performance measure level) and corrective action plans to address them, opportunities for improvement, and exceptional practices.

This shall include:

- A description of the evidence examined for each Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard objective within the scope of the audit.
- An update on the status of previous non-conformities, if any.

h. The audit team recommendation.

### **Summary Audit Reports from the Certified Program User**

Certified Program Users who wish to make public claims about being certified must submit summary audits within 90 days of the certificate being issued that can be made public by Leading Harvest.

Certified Program Users that only use certification for internal reporting and business to business communications related to selling product must submit an audit report (which will not be publicly available) to Leading Harvest for validation within 90 days of the certificate being issued, and also shall share with Leading Harvest information regarding acres and general geographies certified for aggregated reporting across Program Users.

## **VII. Normative References**

Certification bodies and auditors conducting third-party audits to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard must conform to the requirements of ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015: and ISO/IEC TS 17021-2:2016. In addition, all certification bodies and auditors conducting third-party audits to Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard must conform to all applicable ANAB requirements and International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Mandatory Documents (e.g., IAF MD 1, IAF MD 2, IAF MD 4, IAF MD 5, IAF MD 11, etc.).