



GROW CONFIDENTLY

Leading Harvest Group Certification Module

Requirements for the Management of Producer Groups



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION

01

General

SECTION

02

Responsibilities of the Producer Group and Group Manager,
and Functions of the Internal Control System (ICS)

SECTION

03

Responsibilities of the Group Members

SECTION

04

Responsibilities of the Certification Body



SECTION 1

GENERAL



Scope

a. Purpose of the Leading Harvest Group Certification Module

The Leading Harvest Group Certification Module offers a mechanism for certification of a group of individual producers to the Leading Harvest *Farmland Management Standard*. Group certification removes barriers to certification for producers and allows individual operations, who may be otherwise unaffiliated, to aggregate together under one certification managed through an internal control system (ICS) overseen by the certificate holder. By participating in group certification, *Group Members* can gain access to markets requiring conformance to Leading Harvest's *Farmland Management Standard* without the financial or administrative burden of achieving and maintaining individual certification.

b. Elements of the Leading Harvest Group Certification Module

- i. Conformance of all *Group Members* with the requirements of the Leading Harvest *Farmland Management Standard 2020*, including adherence to the thirteen principles that are essential to farmland sustainability. These principles reflect major stakeholder concerns and address major risk and materiality issues.
- ii. Conformance with additional requirements for the management of the *Producer Group* through the internal control system.

c. Geographic application of the Leading Harvest Group Certification Module

The Group Certification Module applies to any organization that seeks to establish a *Producer Group* and achieve certification to the Leading Harvest *Farmland Management Standard* in the United States.

d. Review Process and Implementation of Revisions

The Leading Harvest *Farmland Management Standard* forms the foundation of Leading Harvest's certification program, and is indispensable to the application of the Leading Harvest Group Certification Module as a mechanism for certification. Revision to the Standard will trigger a collaborative review and potential revision to the Leading Harvest Group Certification Module to ensure consistency and continual improvement. Draft revisions of this module will be opened for a public comment period per Leading Harvest's revision procedures. Once finalized, *Producer Groups* will be notified of any changes to the requirements for group certification and the implementation deadline for such changes.

References

This Leading Harvest Group Certification Module incorporates, by dated or undated reference, provisions from other publications. For dated and undated references, the latest edition of the publication applies.

a. Normative References

- i. Leading Harvest Farmland Management Program 2020
 1. Section 1 – Leading Harvest *Farmland Management Standard 2020*
 2. Section 2 – Certification Body Procedures, Competence and Accreditation
 3. Section 5 – Communications and Reporting

b. Informative References

- i. A Primer for Understanding the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2020
- ii. Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard Est. 2020 Guidebook

Definitions

The following defined terms are provided as a supplement to the LH *Farmland Management Standard* glossary.

a. Farmland Management Standard

The Leading Harvest (“LH”) *Farmland Management Standard 2020* is a third-party audited certification standard that serves to provide assurance for the sustainability of farmland management. Farmland managers and owners can use the Standard to become certified, enroll farmland under their management, and then make verifiable sustainability claims to the market regarding their management activities.

b. Group Member

Any farmer or farmland manager that seeks to participate in the Leading Harvest Group Certification Module as part of a recognized *Producer Group*.

c. Group Manager

An individual or team of individuals who manages the *Internal Control System* of the *Producer Group* and oversees the *Group Members*.

d. Internal Control System (ICS)

A documented quality assurance and monitoring system used by a *Producer Group* to ensure the compliance of *Group Members* with the requirements of the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and Group Certification Module.

e. Producer Group

Any entity or organization that elects to aggregate a group of willing *Group Members* for the purposes of certification to the LH *Farmland Management Standards* and satisfies the obligations described in this document.



SECTION 2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE
PRODUCER GROUP AND
GROUP MANAGER, AND
FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERNAL
CONTROL SYSTEM (ICS)



SECTION 2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRODUCER GROUP AND GROUP MANAGER, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM (ICS)

Responsibilities of the Producer Group

- a. To enroll in the LH *Farmland Management Standard* as a *Program User*.
- b. To provide the authority and resources to the *Group Manager* and the ICS to manage the Producer Group and ensure conformance with the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and the requirements of this module.

Responsibilities of the Group Manager

- a. To ensure a commitment on behalf of the whole *Producer Group* to establish and maintain practices and procedures in conformance with the requirements of the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and Group Certification Module.
- b. To represent the whole *Producer Group* in the certification process, including communications and contractual relationship with the *Certification Body*, submission of an application for certification under this module and conformance with annual update and reporting requirements.
- c. To manage an *ICS* that is commensurate with the size and scale of the *Producer Group* and that provides appropriate oversight of the group's activities and verification of *Group Members'* conformance with all applicable requirements,
- d. To ensure that staff responsible for ICS activities have appropriate education, background and/or training to successfully perform their duties in managing the *ICS* for the *Producer Group*¹.

Functions of the Internal Control System (ICS)

- a. Oversight of the *Producer Group's* conformance to all applicable requirements of the *Farmland Management Standard* and the Group Certification Module.
- b. Document the procedures for the management of the *Producer Group* to clearly define and assign responsibilities for sustainable farm management and compliance with the certification requirements of this module.
- c. Document a formal relationship with all *Group Members* based on a written agreement established directly between the *Producer Group* and each *Group Member*. The written agreement shall include:
 1. The *Producer Group* requirements for *Group Member* participation in the group certification to Leading Harvest's *Farmland Management Standard*;
 2. The *Producer Group's* right and responsibility to require implementation of any corrective or preventive measures, and/or to initiate the suspension of any *Group Member* from the scope of certification, in the event of nonconformity with the requirements of the *Farmland Management Standard* or the Group Certification Module;
 3. The *Group Member's* agreement to participate and commitment to comply with the conditions of membership in the *Producer Group*, including conformance to the requirements of the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and the Group Certification Module;
 4. The *Group Member's* agreement to be included under the scope of the *Producer Group's* LH certificate, and acknowledgement that participation in the *Producer Group* does not prohibit the *Group Member* from participating in another LH *Producer Group*, achieving individual certification to the LH *Farmland Management Standard*, or prevent their participation in other LH programs.

¹ Any training requirements for group managers/ICS personnel will initially be absent from this module.

SECTION 2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRODUCER GROUP AND GROUP MANAGER, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM (ICS)

- d. Document procedures for inclusion of new *Group Members* within the *Producer Group*, including an initial assessment of conformity with the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and Group Certification Module, and implementation of necessary corrective and preventive measures to ensure full conformity prior to granting membership.
- e. Document procedures for removal of *Group Members* from the Leading Harvest certificate, in cases of unresolved nonconformity, ownership transition or other circumstances, as appropriate, including documentation and timely reporting of decertification to the *Group Member* and the *Certification Body*.
- f. Provide all *Group Members* with education, information and guidance needed for effective implementation and maintenance of practices and procedures in accordance with the requirements of the Group Certification Module.
- g. Document and maintain the following records:
 1. The *Producer Group's* and the *Group Members'* conformity with the applicable LH certification requirements as defined by this module;
 2. All current *Group Members*, including their contact details, locations and acreage of enrolled land, and crops produced on enrolled land;
 3. An annual report of activities and practices carried out on the enrolled land owned/managed by the *Group Members* to demonstrate alignment with the applicable parts of the *Farmland Management Standard*.
 4. The implementation of an annual *Group Member* auditing/monitoring program and any preventive and/or corrective measures required of the *Group Members* (see section h for more detail);
 5. The implementation of an annual internal audit and management review of the *Producer Group* and the *ICS*, including any actions taken as a result of the review (see section j and k for more detail).
- h. Implement and maintain an annual *Group Member* audit and monitoring program, sufficient to verify conformance with the requirements of the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and Group Certification Module.
 1. The selection process for annual *Group Member* audits must be in accordance with the following:
 - i. The sample size should be calculated based on the number of *Group Members*.
 - ii. The size of the sample should generally be the square root of the number of *Group Members*, rounded up to the next whole number.
 - iii. Twenty-five percent of the sample should be selected at random.
 - iv. The remaining seventy-five percent of the sample should be selected taking into account:
 - a) Any conformance concerns or risks identified by the *ICS* in the *Group Members'* annual report
 - b) Previous nonconformities which required corrective or preventive action; and
 - c) Other risk factors identified by the *ICS* as applicable to the *Producer Group*.
 - v. The size of the sample may be adapted up or down taking into account the following:
 - a) Results of a risk assessment
 - b) Results of internal monitoring or independent audits (i.e., conformance history).
 - c) Quality/level of confidence of internal annual monitoring
 - d) Use of technologies allowing gathering of information for specific requirements
 - e) Based on other means of gathering information about activities on the ground
 - vi. The *ICS* must document the selection process for annual *Group Member* audits, including the justification and reasoning for selection of each *Group Member* and any adjustment to the sample size.
 2. The *ICS* must document the *Group Member* audits, share the findings of each audit with the audited *Group Member*, and define what (if any) corrective and preventive measures must be taken by each audited *Group Member* to address any nonconformities identified.

SECTION 2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRODUCER GROUP AND GROUP MANAGER, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM (ICS)

3. The *ICS* must ensure corrective and preventive measures are taken by *Group Members* in a timely manner and are sufficient to correct the nonconformities identified. If sufficient corrective actions are not taken by a *Group Member*, the *ICS* must take action to remove them from the *Producer Group*.
- i. Report to the *Certification Body* when the *Producer Group* removes *Group Members* with serious and continuing nonconformities that have not been resolved based on the results of *Group Member* audits and/or the *ICS*' monitoring program.
 - j. Conduct an annual management review of the *Producer Group* as a whole as per Objective 12 of the *Farmland Management Standard*, with the addition of an internal audit of the functions of the *ICS* and its ability to meet the requirements of the Group Certification Module.
 - k. Based on the management review findings, identify and implement corrective and preventive measures, and identify and act upon opportunities for continuous improvement, for the *Producer Group* and the *ICS* functions/management.
 - l. As part of the annual re-enrollment process, provide a report to Leading Harvest that includes the list of current *Group Members* and associated data outlined in point g.2 above



SECTION 3

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GROUP MEMBERS



Responsibilities of the Group Members

- a. To commit through a written agreement with the *Producer Group* to implement and maintain conformance with the relevant requirements of the LH *Farmland Management Standard* and Group Certification Module.
- b. To provide all requested data, documentation, and other information to the *ICS, Group Manager* and/or *Certification Body* necessary for meeting the requirements of the group certification in a timely manner, whether in connection with formal audits or reviews or to address other requirements.
- c. To provide full cooperation, assistance and access to enrolled land to the extent necessary to enable the satisfactory completion of audits, reviews, monitoring, relevant routine inquiries, or corrective actions.
- d. To implement and provide evidence of necessary corrective and preventive actions required by the *Group Manager* and the *ICS*.



SECTION 4

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CERTIFICATION BODY



Responsibilities of the Certification Body

- a. To assess and determine the conformance of the *Producer Group* as the *Program User*.
 - i. On an annual basis, the *Certification Body* evaluates whether the activities and functions of the ICS are sufficient to ensure individual *Group Member* conformance with the *Farmland Management Standard*, and that the *Producer Group* meets the requirements outlined in section 2 of the Group Certification Module.
 - ii. As part of the annual audit process for a *Producer Group*, the *Certification Body* conducts site visits to a representative sample of individual *Group Members*, in accordance with the multi-site audit requirements in the *Farmland Management Standard*.
- b. To provide an annual audit summary report to the *Producer Group*, as required in section 2 of the LH Farmland Management Program manual, that also includes an assessment of conformance to the Group Certification Module.



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