



**Farm
Sustainability
Assessment**
BY SAI PLATFORM

USER GUIDE





CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ii
<i>Thank you</i>	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the FSA User Guide	2
Scope of the FSA	3
FSA performance levels and measurement	3
FSA ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	5
FSA IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING FARM-LEVEL SUSTAINABILITY	9
FSA implementation strategy considerations	10
FSA verification and the Letter of Attestation	15
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND FARMER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FSA	16
FSA continuous improvement approach	17
Farmer engagement – a cornerstone of the FSA	18
TRACEABILITY AND FSA VOLUMES	19
Traceability defined in the context of the FSA	19
Traceability models in FSA supply chains	21
Volume accounting in FSA supply chains	23
USING THE FSA TO TELL YOUR STORY	26
Glossary	27
FSA resources	28

PREFACE

Increasingly, we are witnessing the devastating effects that the climate crisis and growing levels of inequality are having on communities. The consequences of which negatively impact every aspect of our existence, from global politics and food and nutrition security, to biodiversity, water resources and soil health. Business is not exempt.

It is untenable for businesses to continue operating according to the same routines which have led to us exceeding the limits of our planet. We must change, and we must do it quickly. A significant challenge faces those of us involved in agricultural supply chains. How do we balance the needs of the planet, with protecting the environment, and ensuring sustained economic livelihoods for farmers? It seems a herculean task.

But it can and must be done. Through meaningful collaboration between all actors in the supply chain, we are seeing that long-term, effective change is possible. SAI Platform's Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) is a robust and empowering vehicle for enabling that collaboration around issues that matter.

In my role as the Chairman of the FSA's Steering Committee, I am encouraged to see the momentum and growth of the FSA across the globe. To date, the FSA is used in over 40 countries, with over 100 crops, and by more than 200 000 farmers. As the FSA continues to foster a common understanding of sustainable agriculture, we are pleased to be welcoming more people from diverse contexts, into our community.

Using the FSA at Nordzucker, we have found a way that affirms what we had been doing well for a long time and challenges us to improve. We have implemented the FSA in seven of the eight countries in which we are active. I would be lying if I said it was an easy task, but we succeeded and learned a lot along the way. These lessons, and lessons from other FSA users, have been integrated by SAI Platform into better manuals and better tools. Tools that are available for you and will help you to avoid the pitfalls we encountered.

I strongly believe that the FSA will enable you drive relevant and demonstrable continuous improvement of on-farm social, environmental and business performance and will empower you to engage with farmers to improve.

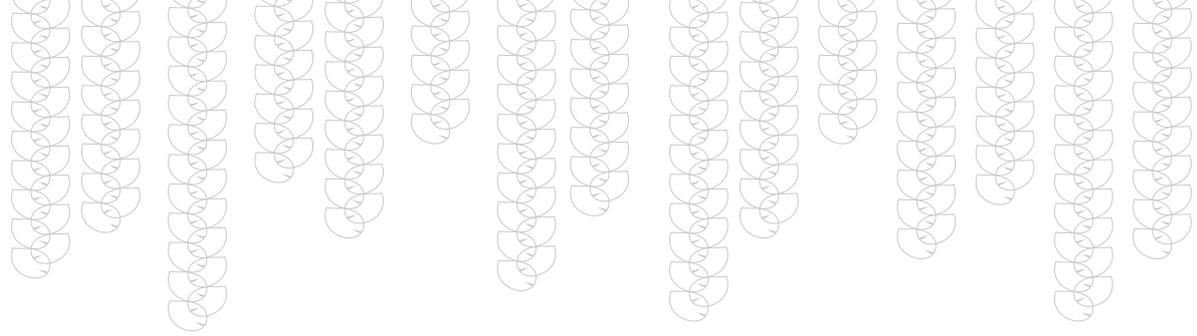
However, every journey starts with a first step, and I hope this guide will help you to make that step. The community of SAI Platform members and FSA Users look forward to welcoming you.

IVER DRABAEK, NORDZUCKER
FSA Steering Committee Chairman
January 2022

THANK YOU

We would like to express our sincere thanks to SAI Platform members, Andrea Granier (Unilever), Emily O'Halloran (Ocean Spray), Emmanuelle Poujad (Bonduelle), Jennifer Shaw (Syngenta), Karolina Sluzek (Döhler), and Paul Watson (McCain Foods), for sharing their time and experience with us for the creation of this User Guide.

Thank you also to Emily O'Halloran (Ocean Spray), Gabriel Sarasin (McCormick), Hamish Taylor, Iver Drabaek (Nordzucker), and Mike Bутtenham (Grain Farmers of Ontario) for taking the time to provide written contributions. And a special thank you to Nathan Smith and Eric Harris from SureHarvest who brought this User Guide to life.



INTRODUCTION



The commitment to ensuring sustainable futures is gaining momentum across the globe, in all sectors and industries. Agricultural supply chains in particular have seen a greater focus on promoting sustainable practices, especially on farm. As awareness grows around the issues which face this sector, it is encouraging to see people in more and more businesses at all levels understanding the importance of integrating sustainability into their daily work.

But this can be an overwhelming task, despite having all the best intentions. It can be a challenge to navigate through so many interpretations of sustainability and a huge amount of choice in terms of approach. This is exactly why the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform (SAI Platform) was created and where the Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) can help.

SAI Platform was founded in 2002 by Nestlé, Unilever, and Danone as a precompetitive forum to think about and address big issues facing the sustainability of agricultural supply chains. Since then, the network has grown to over 150 members who recognise that sustainability is a challenge no one company can face alone. Pre-competitive collaboration is required to find practical solutions to shared challenges and SAI Platform has created a unique space for its members to share knowledge, learn from each other, and work together on projects and research, to achieve better results, faster.

One of SAI Platform's industry solutions is the FSA. It was developed by the members, their suppliers, farmers, and external stakeholders. It is a simple-to-use system, that enables users to assess and measure on-farm sustainability in line with global best practice. It is accessible to all at no fee, and can be applied to all crop farms, of any size, in any place. It was created to be adaptive to the needs of its users: farmers can be verified against it, it can be used as a benchmark for other programmes, or simply as a tool to track progress.

The first version of the FSA was released in 2014, and since then the system has undergone a number of revisions. The current version, FSA 3.0, was released in April 2021. The FSA's holistic, farm level sustainability survey is centred around 109 questions which deal with the three pillars of sustainability – people, planet, and profit.



PURPOSE OF THE FSA USER GUIDE

The FSA User Guide covers general information on the FSA for people who might be interested in implementing it in their supply chains. This might include food companies, processors, exporters, agriculture organisations, farm management group coordinators, farmers, and service providers involved with FSA implementation efforts, as well as other key stakeholders.

This FSA User Guide should:

- 1** Help different FSA users understand their role in supporting the implementation of the FSA in their supply chains.
- 2** Provide an entry-level overview of the FSA system, including FSA resources, FSA implementation strategies, FSA-compatible traceability models and FSA claims.

NOTE

This Guide helps FSA users understand FSA implementation and sourcing models; however, more detailed guidance is available in other FSA resources listed in Section Two.

SCOPE OF THE FSA

The FSA can be used for all cultivated crop farming anywhere in the world. The FSA is applicable to all types of farming systems, all sizes of farms and all levels of professional sophistication and sustainability performance. The FSA can be applied at the level of a single farm, a group of farms, or a group of farms with their first-level buyer.

The FSA framework provides a uniquely flexible sustainable sourcing model for users, as it enables buyers to understand the sustainability levels of the crops that they are sourcing, either through farmers directly applying the FSA, or through the benchmarking of pre-existing farm-level sustainable agriculture programmes.

The FSA is available for use free of charge by members and non-members of SAI Platform. Members benefit from enhanced FSA implementation support and preferred access to certain FSA tools, such as the online FSA Web App, in addition to other SAI Platform industry solutions and initiatives. As of 2021, the FSA has been implemented in more than 43 countries with 126 different crops grown by an estimated 200,000 farmers.

FSA PERFORMANCE LEVELS AND MEASUREMENT

Within the FSA it is possible to achieve Bronze, Silver and Gold performance levels. This is determined by how many Essential, Intermediate, and Advanced questions are met in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire. The performance levels apply to both the FSA Self-Assessment verification approach, and to benchmarked programmes.



43 COUNTRIES



104 CROPS



200,000 FARMERS



FSA ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are important roles and responsibilities to consider when implementing the FSA in a supply chain. This is not an exhaustive list; we are sure you will find additional roles which have a meaningful impact on the success of implementing the FSA. For each role some characteristics have been highlighted, which have set the leaders in FSA implementation apart, but it is important to recognise that these roles in the supply chain are fluid; a buyer might also be a supplier to another buyer, and occasionally suppliers take on the role of Farm Management Group Coordinator.

NOTE

Have a look at the FSA Implementation Framework version 3.0 (Section 2.) for additional context on roles those other organisations perform (e.g., the role of SAI Platform or an approved FSA Verification Body). This is available in the FSA Resource Centre.

BUYER

A person from a food and/or beverage company who works with other partners in the supply chain to implement the FSA for a particular crop or agricultural raw material. Buyers are often responsible for initiating FSA implementation strategies with suppliers. In some instances, a buyer may opt to benchmark their sustainable sourcing programme against the FSA using a company-specific FSA strategy.

There is a particular attitude that usually sets buyers apart as leaders in sustainability and in the implementation of the FSA. This attitude is reinforced by commitments and actions. An understanding that change does not happen through assessments, but through people, and a realistic appreciation of their influence on supply chain partners is key. This materialises in the way that buyers interact with their suppliers. They:

- aim to build strong working relationships
- are collaborative, open to dialogue and find solutions that suit all parties
- communicate their vision and strategy well, and view their suppliers as partners in the sustainability journey
- commit resources to achieve their commitments through funding improvements or by supporting their suppliers to access funding
- intentionally procure sustainable product and ensure that sustainability is integral to their procurement strategies.



SUPPLIER

A person from a food and/or beverage company that is the first point of contact in the supply chain for the buyer and who often works with a farmer organisation (or may work directly with farmers) on the implementation of the FSA. Suppliers often fulfil certain roles for farmers, from supplying seed, determining production quantities, and offering extension services, to coordinating logistics, and marketing the product. Examples of suppliers include processors, exporters, and aggregators, or similar intermediaries in the supply chain. In some cases, the supplier may establish a farm management group coordinator (see this role below) for the purposes of supporting FSA implementation with a farm management group.

It is the suppliers with strong market intelligence that become leaders in implementing the FSA. They develop their own narrative by responding to the needs of the market, and with a clear strategy, they know what they want to do as a company and can communicate that well. Excellent suppliers are usually very good at reconciling the needs of the farmers and the requests of their buyers. They translate buyer's requests into options for farmers that are manageable and appropriate to their farmer's circumstances. Great suppliers view farmers as partners and important members of their organisations, and they give the farmers the support they need to improve and achieve their goals.



FARM MANAGEMENT GROUP (FMG) COORDINATOR

The organisation that legally represents a group of farmers who collectively apply the FSA self-assessment. This group of farmers is called the Farm Management Group (FMG). This role may be organised as a farmer support initiative driven by Suppliers or a first-level buyer for crops produced by the FMG. It is also often a cooperative or farmer association which fulfils this role. The important thing is that the role is filled by an organisation which deals with the farmers directly. The FMG Coordinator must appoint a manager who is responsible for identifying and engaging the individual farmers on FSA implementation activities.

The FMG Coordinators that achieve the most long-term success understand the farmers they are working with and appreciate their capacity, needs and priorities. They encourage dialogue around issues that farmers might be facing in complying with the FSA and prioritise continuous improvement. Importantly, FMG Coordinators who internalise the FSA are mindful of the farmers needs and priorities. They celebrate achievements and communicate back to buyers about the farmers' progress. They invest in additional resources and support for farmers and allocate time and budget to training farmers and helping them to understand the process.



FARMER

The person who manages the farming activities on the farm. They have overall responsibility for the farm management and completing the FSA self-assessment. Farmers are ultimately responsible for work on upholding or implementing FSA farming and workforce management practices, and their efforts are the foundation for successful FSA implementation.

Farmers who use the FSA well are open minded and willing to learn. They engage with the ethos of the FSA and believe in continuous improvement.

FSA User Consideration

What role(s) do you and your organisation already perform in the supply chain in relation to FSA Implementation?

Where do you think you and your company's strengths lie in terms of ensuring successful FSA implementation? Any areas you think you might need support?

EXAMPLE

The Sustainable Italian Rice Project (SAIRISI) project is an example of a successful FSA implementation effort involving multiple FSA users. Six SAI Platform members participated in the project involving nine millers and 140 rice farmers. Additional stakeholders were engaged, including several universities and other supporting organisations. This type of pre-competitive collaboration among buyers and coordination among suppliers and farmers is a case study on an ideal FSA implementation scenario. See SAI Platform's [projects webpage](#) for more information.



Figure 1. FSA supply chain roles and responsibilities in a buyer-driven FSA implementation effort. Suppliers or farmers may also initiate FSA activities.

FSA IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING FARM-LEVEL SUSTAINABILITY

The FSA has three possible implementation strategies. Users are encouraged to think carefully about the benefits and considerations for each when making their choice.



1

FSA BENCHMARKED PROGRAMME STRATEGY

The benchmarking of a pre-existing programme and/or standard against the FSA, according to the Benchmarking Protocol. In this scenario, the FSA is then implemented in the supply chain using the benchmarked programme/standard rather than using the FSA implementation framework.



2

FSA SELF-ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The FSA framework, including Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) and methodology for priority screening, continuous improvement, and verification audits is used in its entirety.



3

FSA HYBRID STRATEGY

A combined approach to FSA implementation using aspects of both the FSA framework and FSA benchmarked programme implementation strategies. An FSA hybrid strategy may also leverage equivalency arrangements established with other programmes and/or standards (e.g., GLOBALG.A.P. certification).

TIP

When considering an FSA implementation strategy, it is best to decide based on the needs and capacity of farmers, suppliers, and buyers. However, a guiding principle is to also think about what farm-level sustainability efforts are already underway and to build on those, if possible.

FSA IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS

These tables summarise each FSA implementation strategy, along with the benefits and considerations for applying them. The concept of continuous improvement is vital to all of the strategies (see more details on this in Section 5). Likewise, engagement with farmers on the part of suppliers and buyers is another important aspect of FSA implementation. This creates the dialogue and synergy needed between the people who are responsible for applying the FSA. Whichever strategy you select, communicating the message of “why the FSA” to your farmers and partners is crucial. Doing this helps to build consensus, and as the implementation unfolds, it keeps everyone’s focus on the activities that should be in place for the FSA to succeed.



1 FSA BENCHMARKED PROGRAMME STRATEGY

Summary: The FSA benchmarking strategy is a great way to reduce the duplication of farm-level sustainability efforts. This strategy works well if there is a pre-existing programme in place that aligns with FSA. For the technical aspects to benchmarking, have a look at the FSA Benchmarking Protocol version 3.0. It is important to remember that this strategy will require time and planning if the pre-existing systems need to be benchmarked. An FSA performance level must be awarded to the programme or standard before farmers can be recognised against the FSA.

Value Propositions

Benchmarking of a crop-specific programme helps translate the general FSA questions into concepts and terminology used by a particular industry/sector.

Benchmarking can add credibility to the existing value, engagement, and suitability of localised programmes in the context of relevant and internationally accepted best practices. It means that farmers can leverage assessment approaches they are familiar with and may be best suited to the commodities they produce and the way that they farm.

If a programme has its own set of consumer-facing claims, then benchmarking allows for maintaining this as an option when implementing an FSA benchmarked programme.

Legislation in particular legal jurisdictions (e.g., state, province, national, etc.) defined as low or very low risk may be accounted for in the benchmark to provide some additional coverage and reduce the scope of the farm-level assessment/verification.

It is important to recognise that this strategy requires that an assessment programme or standard is already established. Furthermore, the verification system included in the standard/programme must meet or exceed the FSA minimum requirements to be “FSA equivalent”.

Volume accounting is still required for supporting FSA claims for agricultural raw materials sourced via FSA farms.





FSA User Considerations

Completing a benchmark involves a commitment of time and money so return on investment must be considered.

It is important to recognise that this strategy requires that an assessment programme or standard is already established. Furthermore, the verification system included in the standard/programme must meet or exceed the FSA minimum requirements to be “FSA equivalent”.

Volume accounting is still required for supporting FSA claims for agricultural raw materials sourced via FSA farms.

EXAMPLE

McCormick & Company, Incorporated is a global leader in flavour. As a Fortune 500 company with over \$6 billion in annual sales across 170 countries and territories, we manufacture, market, and distribute spices, seasoning mixes, condiments and other flavourful products to the entire food industry including e-commerce channels, grocery, food manufacturers and foodservice businesses.

Through its Purpose-Led Performance agenda, McCormick is working to source all herbs and spices sustainably, beginning with its top five branded iconic ingredients by 2025. The Company also aims to increase the resilience of 90% of the smallholder farmers who grow their iconic herbs and spices, in addition to advance Grown for Good, the Company’s third-party verified sustainability standard which goes beyond the industry standard to drive metrics including community resilience, gender equality, and women’s economic empowerment in farming communities.

In 2019, McCormick launched its sustainability framework “Grown for Good” to deliver against this agenda, which is operationalized through the Grown for Good sustainability standard. Grown for Good was benchmarked at “Silver level” against the 2.1 version of the Farmer Sustainability Assessment (FSA) of the SAI Platform. This benchmarking provides a recognition of the standard in the Food & Beverage Industry and increases its credibility. The benchmarking also provides flexibility for suppliers to use other sustainability certification schemes benchmarked as FSA Silver or above, that are accepted by McCormick as equivalent to Grown for Good. Since launch, suppliers are increasingly adopting Grown for Good given its adaptability to smallholder farmers typically growing herbs and spices. Grown for Good is also the first company scheme focused on Herbs and Spices to reach the FSA silver equivalency level.

Gabriel Sarasin of McCormick & Company



2 FSA SELF-ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Summary: The FSA self-assessment strategy is the most straightforward approach since it relies on the FSA and the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) for farm-level sustainability assessment. This strategy supports the implementation process with a well-defined set of steps to execute the strategy based on the FSA resources and tools available. It can also be considered in situations where a buyer or supplier are not sure about the status of farm-level practices related to the FSA themes and would like to use the self-assessments to understand more. Equally, it can be used by buyers or suppliers as a risk assessment.

Value Propositions

FSA SAQ is broadly applicable to many different cropping systems and geographic contexts and is available in 11 different languages.

The system is designed to be approachable for farmers. It is free to use, relatively straight forward and it encourages collaboration and continuous improvement between farmers and other supply chain actors.

Buyers implementing a global farm-level sustainable sourcing strategy can use the FSA for different agricultural raw materials. Additionally, multiple crops can be assessed in the same verification and included on the same Letter of Attestation.

This implementation strategy can be a starting point for some buyers who have not previously worked on addressing farm-level sustainability in their supply chains.

FSA User Considerations

Starting with one or two supply chains may be advisable to pilot the FSA approach. Shorter supply chains where farmers, suppliers and buyers can engage on continuous improvement are recommended.

Custom-tailored guidance may be needed to support farmer understanding of the FSA and completion of SAQs if FSA concepts are not understood and adaptation to the local context is important.

Record keeping systems for the FSA are important in terms of verification audits. Work and resources may be needed to establish these types of systems. Furthermore, the approach does not include a chain of custody, so users need to design and keep precise and accurate volume accounting systems.





EXAMPLE

Symrise is a producer of flavours and fragrances. We source about 10 000 raw materials which are used to create more than 30 000 products. Our operations cover over 100 countries. We work with our farmers to achieve FSA Silver level performance for our main crop raw materials.

In the process of using the FSA, we have found that transparency is key, as is managing expectations. When introducing the process to farmers, the biggest initial fears we encountered were concerns around a bureaucratic burden, a release of sensitive information, high costs of verification, and non-compliance and what that might mean. Consequently, it was important to communicate the benefits of successfully implementing the FSA from the perspective of the farmer to provide reassurance about these fears and concerns and show respect for the farmer's time and participation. For example, explaining that the initial FSA assessment is free at the point of use, and gives the farmer an instant overview of what they are currently doing correctly and where they have room for improvement in terms of sustainability.

We run pilot studies to better understand the level of our farmers in new regions and we make sure to communicate to the farmers the outcomes of our pilot studies. Through this pilot process we better understand what is needed in terms of capacity building. We have learnt to be prepared from the outset with tools to accelerate the journey. These include water management action plans, biodiversity maps, and draft record-keeping templates that can be adopted by farmers. We encourage our farmers by explaining that this is a journey and assist them in establishing "Pathways to Progress" that make sense to them.

It seems simple, but it's important to remember to keep the farmer in mind. When you spend time on a farm, be considerate to the time and feelings of the farmer; I always like to bring a small gift..

Hamish Taylor, Strategic Advisor on Sustainability to Symrise



3 FSA HYBRID STRATEGY

Summary: The FSA hybrid strategy combines aspects of both the FSA self-assessment and FSA benchmark programme strategies to offer maximum flexibility. The reasons for pursuing a hybrid approach vary but a common one involves situations where farmers already comply with a standard (e.g., a benchmarked food safety standard), but this standard does not cover all sustainability aspects that buyers require. Another scenario for using a hybrid approach is when an FMG wants to improve their performance level and uses the benchmark to reduce the number of questions that need to be answered on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

Other hybrid implementation scenarios may involve farmers using a digital agriculture sustainability metrics platform that is partially aligned with FSA but not fully, either on a content level (e.g., gaps with key FSA topics) or on process level (e.g., benchmarked self-assessment sustainability programme without third-party verification). In those cases, a hybrid strategy may work very well.

Value Propositions

If some needs are addressed by existing FSA benchmarked certification standards (e.g., Organic, Fairtrade, etc.), but these do not provide a solution for all supply chains and crops, using a combination of the FSA strategies may work well in a hybrid approach. In this way, FSA users can avoid duplicating efforts, and farmers are recognised for the work they are already doing.

Programmes that focus on self-assessment or education on farm-level best management practices may not want to fully adopt a third-party verification. The FSA can offer a solution in the form of a scalable third-party verification aspect that can support FSA sourcing claims buyers may request or require.

Legislation can be benchmarked against the FSA and used for countries and legal jurisdictions deemed to be 'low risk' or 'very low risk' to leverage situations in which farmers must comply with various laws and regulations that overlap with the FSA questions.

FSA User Considerations

A targeted outreach to farmers may be needed to communicate how the benchmarked programme compares and contrasts with the FSA and to support understanding of focus areas (i.e., FSA topics to address during assessment).

At the level of the buyer, it can help to create an overarching model for the sustainability implementation effort. This can unify the hybrid implementation approach under one umbrella.

FSA verification audits are required to confirm that the claimed performance level has been met unless the standard includes a third-party audit or verification process that meets or exceeds the FSA requirement.

Volume accounting systems will need to be established for FSA claims related to performance levels, which are determined based on a verification process. Tracking volumes for supply chains with identity preservation should be relatively easy in terms of the administrative tasks when compared with supply chains where mixing of agricultural raw materials is common.





EXAMPLE

Ocean Spray is a vibrant agricultural cooperative owned by more than 700 cranberry farmers in the United States, Canada and Chile. Ocean Spray uses the FSA Hybrid strategy while serving as the coordinator for two Ocean Spray FMGs: one in North America and one in Chile. The Hybrid strategy provides Ocean Spray the flexibility to use an established Cranberry Farm Sustainability Survey to measure farmer sustainability practices while offering the opportunity for external, third-party verification of these practices.

Cranberries are a long-lived perennial vine, which through unique horticulture practices can produce berries for decades. Sustainability is an inherent part of cranberry farming. For example, regenerative agriculture has been practiced for generations on Ocean Spray cranberry farms. These practices are not only good for the environment, our farmers and their communities, they are also expected by many of our customers and consumers. And now with the FSA hybrid option, Ocean Spray has further improved farmer collaboration and engagement on critical sustainability issues, identified and acted on cooperative-wide impact opportunities, and is celebrating farm sustainability success stories across the cooperative. We are proud to share that our cranberries are FSA verified.

Emily O'Halloran of Ocean Spray Cranberries

FSA VERIFICATION AND THE LETTER OF ATTESTATION

Third-party verification is a key part of an FSA implementation effort since this process allows for performance level claims to be assigned to volumes produced by participating farmers. SAI Platform approved verification bodies are the organisations that conduct FSA verification audits and issue your FSA Letters of Attestation (LoA) if the audit is successful. The LoA is a record that confirms the FSA performance level of a Stand-Alone Farm or an FMG.

Verification bodies are an important partner in FSA implementation and it is important to consider the experience the auditors have with particular farms and commodities in the geographic region(s) in which you operate. In some cases, language skills and experience with specific crops are important considerations.

For buyers and suppliers interested in confirming the FSA verification status for Stand-Alone Farms and FMGs in a given supply chain, FSA LoAs can be accessed via the [GLOBALG.A.P. Database](#), using the unique GGN code on the LoA.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND FARMER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FSA

“Real change occurs from the bottom up; it occurs person to person, and it almost always occurs in small groups and locales and then bubbles up and aggregates to larger vectors of change.”

Paul Hawken

A fundamental principle of the FSA is continuous improvement, which recognises that everyone, regardless of their role in the supply chain, starts at a different point on their sustainability journey. To embed this concept among FSA users, all FSA Farm Management Groups must develop a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). This is audited during the FSA verification process, as part of the Farm Management System audit for FMGs. However, it is an optional part of the verification process for Stand-Alone farms.

Similarly, FSA benchmarked programmes are expected to include an approach that helps farmers prioritise areas for improvement. In the case of the FSA Self-Assessment, the process for developing a CIP is designed to be flexible. This empowers users to innovate and apply multiple pathways for addressing continuous improvement priorities and targets.

NOTE

The Continuous Improvement Module includes guidance materials and templates to support the efforts of an FMG Coordinator to establish and monitor a CIP for the FMG and can also be used by Stand-Alone Farms participating in the FSA. You can find this guidance in the [FSA Resource Centre](#).

FSA CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT APPROACH

The CIP can apply to both Stand-Alone Farms and FMGs, but the focus of the Continuous Improvement Module guidance is on multiple farms that are part of an FMG. It requires a lot of effort to organise and coordinate multiple farms, so the FMG Coordinator must develop a process to address different farmers' needs and starting points. The CIP process involves setting time-bound measurable targets that relate to FSA topics. It is important to acknowledge that objectives and targets may not always be met. This is where farmer engagement and follow up activities are important. To promote meaningful supply chain engagement, buyers and suppliers should participate and support farmers in achieving these objectives.

Each FMG that implements the FSA must come up with priority areas and objectives for continuous improvement. These should have their own targets attached to them. Common objectives include:

- Identifying and supporting the achievement of FSA farm-level performance targets (e.g., Gold, Silver, Bronze).
- Addressing the challenging FSA practices or risk points established using the Priority Screening Tool.
- Reducing environmental impacts associated with farming activities that relate to FSA topics, such as water use and greenhouse gas emissions.

In some cases, a farm or FMG may already have plans or pre-existing activities that are aligned with the FSA's continuous improvement approach. In those cases, users are encouraged to use existing projects and if needed, adapt them to what is described in the [Continuous Improvement Module](#).



FARMER ENGAGEMENT - A CORNERSTONE OF THE FSA

“There is a lot of value in getting all of the farmers together and talking about experience implementing the FSA. This creates dialogue amongst farmers and provides a basis for sharing experience with the FSA.”

Mike Bутtenham, Grain Farmers of Ontario

Effective engagement with farmers or farm managers in developing the CIP is crucial, as it will build trust and create a safe space for innovation and improvement. Initially this may feel like an attempt to convince other actors in the supply chain about why sustainability matters and why the FSA is the right tool for the job. As the engagement process progresses, it will help confirm which farms should be included and which implementation option will be most appropriate. This is a critical step as it determines the outcomes all stakeholders are hoping to achieve and ensures buy-in towards a shared vision.

For these discussions, it is important to ensure that the group of farmers is representative of the overall FMG. Factors like the location and size of farms, gender of farmers, and crops produced, can have different impacts on the way that farmers are able to implement the FSA, as well as the aspects they prioritise for continuous improvement. Eventually, as the FMG Coordinator uses techniques to engage farmers, the priorities and targets that can generate the most value for all members of the FMG are identified.

Ongoing engagement with farmers is vital to ensuring the success of a continuous improvement plan. Where we have seen this type of engagement veer off course is when engagement becomes too task focused. At the heart of the FSA is the belief that people, and relationships drive change, not tools. By keeping people at the centre of the implementation plan, FMG Coordinators will be able to involve farmers in a way that resonates with more purpose and establishes greater trust.



TRACEABILITY AND FSA VOLUMES

The FSA is a business-to-business tool, that does not allow on pack claims or the use of the FSA name or logo on products. Because of this, it does not include a chain of custody assessment and a verification audit. However, establishing a traceable supply chain is a requirement for FSA implementation and for users that seek to make off-product claims related to FSA performance. For the FSA, this links crops and agricultural raw materials produced by farms to different FSA performance levels (e.g., Gold, Silver, Bronze) based on self-assessment and verification activities.

TRACEABILITY DEFINED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FSA

Tracking information such as crop yields, farm size, farmer self-assessment results, and volumes of raw and finished product is a good basis for establishing a traceable FSA supply chain. For the FSA, traceability is the ability to track and verify the history, origin, and quantity of agricultural raw materials, food products and ingredients via documented identification or physical segregation (adapted from the ISEAL Chain of custody models and definitions Version 1.0, 2016).

FSA volume claims are not possible without a traceability system. A traceability system provides the farmers, FMG Coordinators (if applicable), suppliers, and buyers with the ability to track the movement of volumes of crops grown by farms participating in the FSA. This system relies on an effective document management and record keeping approach and, in some cases, may include a system of physical segregation. The more processing and handling steps in the supply chain, the more documentation and records will be required.

Many countries now require supply chain traceability because of food safety concerns. Users of the FSA can benefit from leveraging established systems that are based on regulations requiring traceability. Additionally, it is critical to ensure that buyers and suppliers are all aligned on sourcing targets for FSA volumes that feed into broader sustainability goals that buyers establish. Part of the process of alignment on sourcing targets involves suppliers also confirming farms have the capacity to supply sufficient FSA volumes.



“FOR THE FSA

TRACEABILITY IS THE ABILITY TO TRACK AND VERIFY THE HISTORY, ORIGIN, AND QUANTITY OF AGRICULTURAL RAW MATERIALS, FOOD PRODUCTS AND INGREDIENTS VIA DOCUMENTED IDENTIFICATION OR PHYSICAL SEGREGATION.”



Figure 2. Confirmation of FSA Sourcing Targets

TRACEABILITY MODELS IN FSA SUPPLY CHAINS

Here, three traceability models relevant to the FSA have been explained. Keeping in mind that the FSA is flexible in terms of approach, it is important to recognise that the traceability system selected needs to be appropriate and manageable based on individual circumstances. This is because the approach needs to be executed correctly and thoroughly for your suppliers and customers to have certainty about the claims attached to the product.

1 Mass Balance:

In the mass balance system, agricultural raw materials produced by farmers participating in the FSA may be aggregated in the supply chain, and potentially mixed with other agricultural raw materials from unknown sources. In these cases, there needs to be a management system in place to record the volumes produced by each farmer and an accounting system to ensure FSA volumes are recorded.

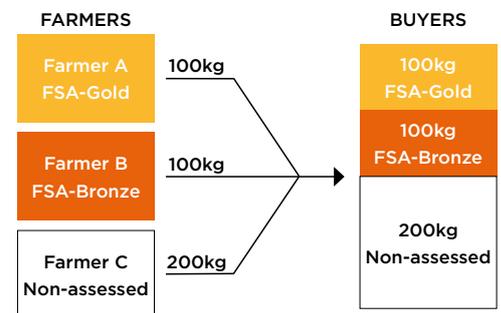


Figure 3. Mass Balance System

NOTE: FSA requires a mass balance volume accounting system as a minimum level of traceability to support FSA claims.

NOTE: For FSA supply chains that use mass balance accounting, volume conversion factors must be used when agricultural raw materials are processed. This is because it results in a reduction of volume from input to output (e.g., milling of wheat grain to flour; removing almond hulls and shells to produce almond kernels). It is up to the FMG Coordinator to determine which conversion factors are required and correctly calculate the pre-processed and post-processed volumes. These must be defined and justified in the system procedures and must apply for the full three-year duration of the Letter of Attestation.

2 Identity Preservation:

In the identity preservation model, FSA materials are segregated from non-FSA materials, and it is possible to trace back FSA volumes to specific farms participating in the FSA. This model supports claims that certain raw materials are produced by specific farms.

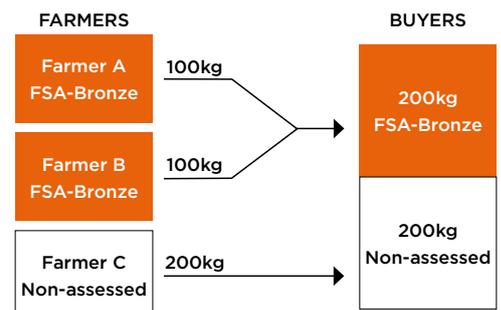


Figure 4. Segregated Chain of Custody



3 Bulk Segregation:

In the case of bulk segregation, only agricultural raw materials from an aggregated FSA supply base can be mixed, which should then be segregated from non-FSA materials.

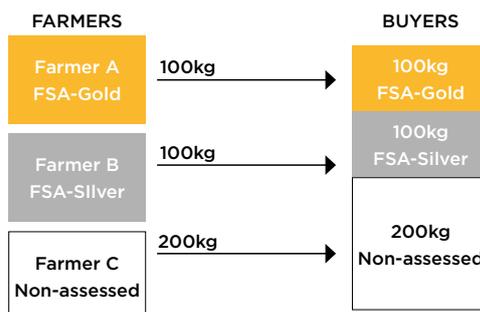


Figure 5. Identity Preservation Model

Traceability Model		Description
Mass Balance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume accounting of FSA product with conversion factors (if applicable) • Mixing of FSA and non-FSA product allowed
Physical Segregation	Bulk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA and non-FSA product kept physically separate • FSA product from different farms mixed
	Identity Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA and non-FSA product kept physically separate • Ability to trace back to specific farm of origin

Table 1. Overview of FSA Traceability Models

VOLUME ACCOUNTING IN FSA SUPPLY CHAINS

The Volume Accounting System supports the generation of accurate and reliable verified FSA claims and ensures that there is no double counting of FSA verified volumes. For bulk agricultural commodity supply chains, a mass balance accounting system may be necessary to track FSA volumes, and a similar consideration may apply to supply chains where product size or quality specifications require mixing of FSA and non-FSA volumes.

Mass Balance Accounting:

The FSA requires a mass balance accounting system as a minimum level of traceability for supporting FSA performance-level and FSA sourcing claims. This system should account for FSA-verified and non-verified material physical mixing, but also track these volumes separately via the management system to ensure there is no overselling of FSA verified volumes. FMGs may choose to physically segregate verified from non-verified volumes either in bulk or through identity preservation, but segregation is not a requirement for FSA claims or the FSA Management System Audit.

TIP

The FSA uses a 12-month inventory balancing period for mass balance accounting. The accounts must be balanced and filed at the end of each inventory period.

Quantity Credit Method:

The FSA requires the use of the quantity credit method for mass balance accounting. A 'credit' is a unit of agricultural raw material at a specific verified FSA performance level (Bronze, Silver, or Gold). The FMG Coordinator must develop and maintain an internal credit accounting system for making claims. This must cover each crop at each FSA performance level. The credit output (volume of material sold at that performance level) must be deducted from the credit account for that material/performance level, up to the limit in, but not exceeding, the credit account. This must consider any volume conversion factors for the mass balance systems. While in some limited circumstances the credit account balance may be negative (thus creating an 'overdraft') within a balancing period, the credit account must ultimately be balanced out and should not be negative following the inventory balancing period.

For the same crop, credits can be reassigned from a higher performance level to a lower one if there are sufficient credits within the higher performance level. This cannot be reversed later.





USING THE FSA TO TELL YOUR STORY

SAI Platform encourages FSA users to talk about their work with the FSA through their own communication and sustainability pledges. By doing this, companies take ownership of their sustainability journeys and commitments. With this in mind, SAI Platform provides FSA users a practical set of considerations and guidance in the Guide to Making FSA Statements and Claims available in the [FSA Resource Centre](#). This document provides users with guidance for the correct use of language and the FSA logo when making FSA claims. It also clearly explains where claims can be made to ensure consistency between claims and to make sure that claims are aligned with the level of assurance that the FSA provides.

Understanding what types of claims are possible when using the FSA is important, as many buyers and suppliers choose to use the FSA to assess farm-level sustainability in their supply chains. Moreover, sustainability goals established by buyers may depend on sourcing particular quantities of agricultural raw materials or ingredients based on verified FSA performance levels (e.g., Gold, Silver, etc.).

NOTE

The FSA does not allow on-pack claims and it cannot be used in consumer facing marketing.

The following requirements apply when making FSA Claims:

- While it is not possible to use the FSA logo or other claims on packaging, it is possible for companies to make self-declared on-pack sustainability claims that are supported by off-pack FSA claims, for example on a website.
- Companies are permitted to make FSA performance level claims and FSA participation claims on their websites, product websites and on social media.
- FSA performance-level and volume claims must be supported by an FSA Letter of Attestation that can be demonstrated through a Mass Balance accounting system as specified in the Implementation Framework.
- Reference must always be given to the Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA), not to SAI Platform and the perception that SAI Platform indicates whether a product is sustainable must always be avoided.
- It must be clear what type of claim is being made.

Please direct any questions on FSA claims to fsatool@saiplatform.org or have a look at our [website](#).



GLOSSARY

- **Benchmarked Programme:** A sustainability programme which has been benchmarked against the FSA as a point of reference to compare and evaluate the content, performance requirements, and level of quality of that sustainability programme against the FSA.
- **Benchmarking:** Comparison of a system against the FSA 3.0 content, assurance, and governance requirements.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Activities and approach to promote improvement and address the aspects called for in the FSA Continuous Improvement Module.
- **Farm:** All land and facilities used for agricultural production activities, including non-productive areas under the management of an identified responsible person(s). A farm may be composed of several physical separate farm buildings and fields, producing the same crop(s)/product(s) in scope of the assessment.
- **Farm Management Group:** A group of farms who together apply the self-assessment, on their own initiative (e.g., as a cooperative) or as part of the supply base of a trader, processor or company.
- **Farm Management Group Coordinator:** Organisation legally representing the Farm Management Group.
- **Farmer:** Representative of the farm with overall responsibility for the farm management.
- **Farm Sustainability Assessment:** Name of the SAI Platform tool to assess, improve and communicate social, environmental, economic agricultural practices. The FSA is a list of Essential, Intermediate, and Advanced questions. Depending on the coverage of these questions, the farmer can see at which sustainability Performance Level they perform.
- **FSA Performance-Level Claim:** Declaration of the FSA Performance Level (Bronze, Silver, Gold) by a Stand-Alone Farm, a farm in the FMG or the FMG.
- **FSA Volume Claim:** Declaration that a volume of product from a Farm Management Group or Stand-Alone Farm is verified coming from farms that are at one or more FSA Performance Levels (i.e., Bronze/Silver/Gold).
- **Letter of Attestation:** Formal letter issued by a Verification Body to confirm the FSA Performance Level(s) of a Farm Management Group or Stand-Alone Farm.
- **Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ):** Farm level questionnaire to assess sustainability performance resulting in a Farm Sustainability Assessment Performance Level Claim.
- **Stand-Alone Farm:** Farm that applies the Self-Assessment Questionnaire directly and only to itself, without being part of a Farm Management Group.
- **Verification Audit:** Act of reviewing, inspecting, or testing to establish and document that a farm or Farm Management Group meets the claimed FSA performance level, and the requirements of the FSA Implementation Framework.
- **Verification Body:** Organisation approved by SAI Platform for performing FSA Verification Audits.

FSA RESOURCES

In addition to this guide, several FSA resources are available at the [FSA Resource Centre](#). Each resource is developed to address a particular aspect of the FSA. This list of resources should guide you towards the information you need on specific FSA topics:

- **FSA Implementation Framework:** Describes the minimum requirements for implementing the FSA based on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) and provides practical implementation guidance to FMG Coordinators and Stand-Alone Farmers.
- **FSA 3.0 Self-Assessment Questionnaire:** Farm-level questionnaire to determine FSA performance through self-assessment. Farmers must answer 'yes' or 'no' to 109 questions to determine their FSA performance level.
- **FSA Benchmarking Results:** Provides an overview of sustainability schemes that are FSA Benchmark Aligned and FSA Benchmark Equivalent.
- **FSA Continuous Improvement Plan Guidance and Templates:** Provides guidance to FMG Managers and Stand-Alone Farm Managers on how to develop, implement and monitor a Continuous Improvement Plan in line with FSA requirements.
- **FSA Benchmarking Protocol:** Describes how third-party sustainability schemes are benchmarked against the FSA and how to interpret the results.
- **Guide to Making FSA Statements and Claims:** Provides guidance on how to make statements and claims about the use of FSA and different FSA performance levels.
- **FSA Audit Guide for Stand-Alone Farms:** Provides guidance and requirements for Verification Bodies to perform FSA verification audits for Stand-Alone Farms.
- **FSA Audit Guide for Farm Management Groups:** Provides guidance and requirements for Verification Bodies to perform FSA verification audits for Farm Management Groups.
- **FSA Audit Control Points:** Provides detailed guidance to auditors in assessing if the FSA Management System requirements have been met.
- **FSA VB and Auditor Requirements:** Sets out the organisational requirements for becoming an FSA Verification Body and the competency requirements for FSA auditors.
- **FSA Topic Guides:** Goes through the topics of the FSA SAQ and helps users understand the background to each question and what is required to answer 'yes'.
- **FSA Training Toolkit:** A comprehensive set of highly practical instruction materials for implementers of the FSA.





**Farm
Sustainability
Assessment**
BY SAI PLATFORM