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1. Scope

1.1. This Manual describes requirements for all assurance procedures related to compliance assessment and certification under the Fair Trade USA Agriculture program.

1.2. Organization wide requirements for standard setting, assurance and certification systems, and impact assessment are described in the Fair Trade USA Quality Manual. The manner in which each Fair Trade USA program meets the requirements for assurance listed in the Quality Manual is described in individual program assurance manuals, such as this one.

2. Normative Documents Under the Agriculture Program

2.1. The Fair Trade USA Agriculture Program certifies products under one generic standard, the Agricultural Production Standard (APS). The APS sets the requirements for all agricultural producers, or groups of producers and is the central standard in the Agriculture Program, covering agricultural production systems worldwide.

2.2. The APS is enabled and operationalized through other related normative documents, primarily policies, procedures and guidance documents that describe requirements and activities related to compliance with APS criteria. Where these documents are necessary for effective compliance at the producer or trader level, they are made available on the Fair Trade USA website. Some documents are specific to auditor roles or assurance providers and access is limited to those parties.

3. Eligibility Requirements under the Agriculture Program

3.1. Eligibility Criteria for Applicants under the APS

3.1.1. Fair Trade USA determines the requirements for clients and their products, sites, and activities included under the scope of certificate for all entities to be certified against the APS.

3.1.2. Eligibility for certification is based upon applicants meeting the requirements as outlined in Requirements for Certificate Scope Under the APS.

3.2. Eligibility Criteria for Conformity Assessment Bodies under the APS

3.2.1. The following program requirements must be met in addition to the general eligibility requirements, listed under Section 10.2 of the Fair Trade USA Quality Manual.

3.2.2. Any bodies carrying out assessments against the APS must hold current ISO 17065 accreditation for the scope of a relevant standard. Relevant standards include but are not limited to: national organic standards, the production standards of Social Accountability International, Global GAP, the Sustainable Agriculture Network, and UTZ Certified. The Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) may also be directly accredited to ISO 17065 for Fair Trade USA standards, but this is not required.

3.2.3. The CAB must use the accredited ISO 17065 decision-making process when evaluating performance and making certification decisions regarding Fair Trade USA certificates.

3.3. Assurance Personnel Competency Requirements under the APS

3.3.1. There are no additional program-specific assurance personnel requirements beyond those listed under Section 9.2.7 of the Fair Trade USA Quality Manual.
4. Assurance Model Under the Agriculture Program

4.1. Structure and Decision Making

4.1.1. Under the Agriculture Program, Fair Trade USA contracts with 3rd party CABs who review applications, scope audits, conduct audits, write reports, make certification decisions, manage Corrective Action Plans (CAPs), and issue certificates. These activities are conducted on behalf of Fair Trade USA and according to the requirements and process laid out in this Manual.

4.1.2. Fair Trade USA makes decisions in the following instances:

4.1.2.1. When issuing a Temporary Authorization to Trade as outlined in 7.2

4.1.2.2. When suspending or terminating a certificate as outlined in 11.1

4.2. Exceptions

4.2.1. Requests for exceptions to the assurance model, certification system, and standard requirements under the Agriculture Program are considered and granted in accordance with the process described in the Fair Trade USA Exceptions Policy.

4.2.2. The Agriculture Program will consider exceptions of all types listed in section four (4) of the Exceptions Policy.
5. Compliance Assessment Process

5.1. Certification Process

5.1.1. Fair Trade USA enables certification against the APS by requiring CABs to follow a standardized assessment process, consisting of:

   a) Submission of an application for certification and recertification (5.3);

   b) Coordination and agreement on service fees and audit scheduling with the audit body (5.3);

   c) An initial on-site evaluation (5.5);

   d) Preparation of an audit report, detailing Non-Compliances (NCs) against the standard requirements (5.6);

   e) Preparation of a CAP to address the NCs identified during the audit (5.7);

   f) Based on the evidence presented, the CAB makes a certification decision (5.8);

   g) If certification is awarded, the CAB will issue a Certificate, documenting compliance against the APS (7.1);

   h) The Certificate Holder commits to ongoing surveillance audits to ensure continued compliance with subsequent annual compliance criteria in the APS (8.1).

5.1.2. The requirements and details of the steps in the process (5.1.1.) are described in the relevant numbered sections in this manual. Together, these steps comprise the initial evaluation of compliance against the APS, which is described as audit Year 0. The diagram “APS Compliance Assessment Process” provides a visual sequence of the steps of the Year 0 evaluation.
5.2. Certification Cycle

5.2.1. The assessment process (described in 5.1.1. and in Diagram 1) is based on a three-year certification cycle, with the initial certification decision made at audit Year 0 and subsequent certification decisions made in audit Years 3 and 6.

5.2.2. Annual surveillance audits are conducted between evaluation and re-certification audits (Years 1, 2, 4 and 5) to assess ongoing compliance with the APS compliance criteria, along with full implementation of CAPs developed as a result of NCs issued during previous audits. For details on surveillance audits, please see Section 8.

5.2.3. Re-certification audits are conducted every three years (Years 3 and 6) to assess continuous improvement. Re-certification audits follow the same auditing and reporting process as the initial evaluation audit, including issuance of a new three year certificate. For details on re-certification audits, see Section 9.

5.3. Application for Certification

5.3.1. All parties interested in Fair Trade certification must fully and accurately complete a Fair Trade USA application form in order to be considered for certification. All approved CABs direct applicants to Fair Trade USA for this first step towards certification.

5.3.2. Applicants may receive an application form for certification under the APS from a contact at Fair Trade USA, or may download the application form themselves from the Fair Trade USA website.

5.3.3. A complete application is necessary to:
   a) Confirm correct evaluation scope;
   b) Confirm sites to be included in the scope of the evaluation;
   c) Obtain information on certification readiness.

5.3.4. Applications are reviewed by Fair Trade USA to ensure eligibility and that the applicant can potentially comply with the Fair Trade USA standard. If more information is needed, Fair Trade USA works with the applicant to ensure the application form includes all of the information needed to determine the initial evaluation audit scope.

5.3.5. Fair Trade USA sends completed applications to the CAB to initiate the assessment process. The CAB uses the application to scope and schedule the initial on-site audit. Applicants are updated during this process and work with the CAB to ensure the audit schedule works for all parties.

5.3.6. Applications for initial certification are reviewed by the CAB to ensure:
   a) That the CAB has the capability to perform the assessment services with respect to the scope of certification requested, the location of the operation, and any special requirements such as language used by the applicant;
b) That the CAB has the capacity and technical expertise to conduct the assessment;

c) That the applicant is eligible to receive services of the CAB;

d) That the requirements for certification have been clearly defined, documented, and understood by the applicant;

e) That any difference(s) in understanding between the CAB and the applicant is resolved prior to the scheduling of the initial evaluation.

5.3.7. The CAB may request additional necessary information from the applicant in order to clarify the evaluation scope or logistics for the evaluation.

5.3.8. The CAB then provides the applicant with:

a) A current, detailed description of the evaluation and assessment process;

b) Documents containing the requirements for certification, i.e. the applicable Fair Trade USA standard and compliance criteria;

c) Any relevant policies, procedures, guidance documents, and forms;

d) A quote for evaluation services based on the application information.

5.3.9. The applicant must review and approve the audit quote and agreed upon schedule for the assessment process to move forward.

5.3.10. The CAB shall explain to applicants that the payment of service fees does not guarantee that the certificate will be issued. Each CAB has the right to determine its own detailed fee structure, audit timelines, and payment schedule, which it may explain to its prospective clients when providing an audit quote.

5.3.11. Upon the applicant’s approval of the quoted service fees and schedule and the CAB’s receipt of any necessary signed documents and payments the CAB initiates the audit planning process and sends the applicant an audit plan, which details the scope of the evaluation, contact information for the auditor/audit team assigned to complete the work, the daily agenda for the audit, and any documentation that should be sent in advance of or prepared by the time of the audit. The applicant should confirm agreement with the audit plan in writing.

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

5.3.13. Audit teams are comprised of at least one Lead Auditor. It is common practice for CABs to deploy a single Lead Auditor to conduct audits against the APS, particularly if there are no circumstances or a specific need identified that would require a larger team.

5.3.14. In instances where there is no auditor with fluency in the language of the applicant/Certificate Holder, the services of a translator will be used. Ideally, the translator will have a relevant technical background. The translator shall be independent from the audited partner where possible to avoid any conflict of interest.

5.4. Evaluation

5.4.1. Applicable Compliance Criteria

5.4.1.1. The APS contains six modules, covering the following topics: Empowerment; Fundamental Rights at Work; Wages, Working Conditions & Access to Services; Biodiversity, Ecosystem
5.4.1.2. The six modules of the APS, their respective sub-modules and associated Compliance Criteria make up the minimum set of issues that need to be checked in a full-scope audit. Initial, annual surveillance and recertification audits are always full scope. Follow-up audits (6.2) may be full scope or partial scope as per the need identified by the CAB. Fair Trade USA may also provide input to the CAB regarding the scope for follow-up audits.

5.4.1.3. The CAB is provided with a standardized audit template that includes the full set of criteria that need to be checked during an audit. In the case of a follow-up audit, the scope may be limited to certain issues that are identified by the CAB with input from Fair Trade USA, based on the needs identified.

5.4.1.4. The APS has three types of criteria: Critical, Progress and Best Practice.

5.4.1.5. Critical criteria must be met by a specified timeline, with most required to be met prior to initial certification (Year 0).

5.4.1.6. Progress criteria describe continuous improvement requirements, against which the Certificate Holder must show a minimum level of compliance and progress over time.

5.4.1.7. Each Progress criterion is worth a specified number of Progress points. To be compliant the Certificate Holder must earn:
   a) 40% of possible Progress points prior to initial certification and through Year 2 (Years 0 - 2);
   b) 70% of possible Progress points by Years 3 – 5;
   c) Full compliance with all Progress criteria by Year 6.

5.4.1.8. Each of the six modules in the APS contains a different number and percentage of Critical and Progress criteria. For a more complete description of Critical and Progress criteria and how the audit score is calculated, see the Score System Guide for the APS.

5.4.1.9. Best Practice criteria are optional and are not required (immediately or in the future). Only Small Farms and Facilities have criteria which are classified as Best Practice. However, we encourage Small Farms and Facilities to aspire to meet these goals over time.

5.4.2. Assessment Methods

5.4.2.1. CABs must conduct audits based upon ISO 19011 auditing methodologies.

5.4.2.2. The CAB’s auditor or audit team conducts the assessment of the partner’s operations to assess compliance with the applicable Fair Trade USA standard compliance criteria.

5.4.2.3. The audit will begin with an opening meeting to address the audit scope, audit methodology, and any questions.

5.4.2.4. The auditor will then inspect the site/s to collect and verify information by observing the operation(s), interviewing workers, management, and producers, and reviewing applicable documents.

5.4.2.5. After compiling the information and initial findings, the auditor will convene a closing meeting to provide a general explanation of the initial audit findings and address any questions. The partner must be provided sufficient information during the closing meeting in order to gain a clear understanding of the findings and receive a preliminary report of the audit findings. It is
5.4.3. Provision of Information to the Applicant During the Audit

5.4.3.1. During the course of the audit, the auditor may provide information to the applicant about Fair Trade Standards and the Fair Trade assurance program. This may include information about interpretation of standards, approved guidance issued by Fair Trade USA, and any publicly available policies and procedures of Fair Trade USA. The auditor must ensure that all information provided to the client is consistent with the most current and up to date information about the Fair Trade program.

5.4.3.2. Auditors may not provide information to applicants that is of a confidential nature (e.g. complaints and allegations) or that poses a real, perceived, or potential conflict of interest. This includes any consulting or advice on how to achieve the standard beyond what is provided by Fair Trade USA in approved guidance documents, which are available to all producers, as well as strategies to circumvent or undermine the intent of the standard.

5.4.4. Information Collection Methods

5.4.4.1. Evidence is collected during an audit using three primary methods: document review, interviews, and field observation.

5.4.4.2. Document review begins before the onsite audit with the partner application, and where applicable, the agrochemical register and producer list, and the previous Non-Compliance Report (NCR) and Corrective Action Plan Form. The auditor must review both documents (e.g. policies, objectives, plans, procedures, work instructions, licenses/permits) and records (e.g. pay slips, timecards, field logs, employee contracts, training records, purchasing records, employee complaints). It is important to note that where the APS compliance criteria specifically require documentation, the partner must provide sufficient and relevant documentation to be compliant.

5.4.4.3. Interviews should be conducted with a variety of employees and relevant individuals. This should include at a minimum interviews with a sample of Fair Trade Committee members and management, workers’ association representatives (when applicable), members of permanent, temporary, and migrant worker groups, and representatives from different types of job categories. Sampling requirements are described further under Section 6.2.

5.4.4.4. Auditors should ensure they can directly observe a sufficient variety of workers in their daily activities.

5.4.5. Determining Non-Compliance

5.4.5.1. Auditors evaluate applicant/Certificate Holders against the applicable compliance criteria for the scope and size of operations and the audit year. The evidence collected using the
5.4.5.2. Criteria are designated based on farm and facility size, which are defined in the APS as Small, Mid-sized, or Large.

5.4.5.3. The parameters for farm and facility size are as follows:
   a) Small Farm and Small Facility (SF): \( \leq 5 \) permanent workers and no more than 25 total workers on-site at the management unit at any time;
   b) Mid-Sized Farm and Mid-Sized Facility (MF): 6-25 permanent workers and no more than 100 total workers on-site at the management unit at any time;
   c) Large Farm and Large Facility (LF): all others.

5.4.5.4. Permanent workers are workers who are employed on an ongoing, year-round basis. Temporary workers are those employed for limited periods related to fluctuations in demand for labor at different times of the year.

5.4.5.5. The size is assessed at the level of the management unit, which is defined by ownership or management and can encompass more than one farm or facility.

5.4.5.6. A criterion can be weighted differently for farms of different sizes. To achieve compliance with each module of the Standard, all farms and facilities within each size category must achieve the minimum number of Progress points required in the module within the specified timeline.

5.4.5.7. An NC is identified where audit findings indicate that an applicant/Certificate Holder does not meet a requirement related to the applicable compliance criteria.

5.4.5.8. Corrective actions will be required if the applicant/Certificate Holder is found to be in non-compliance with any applicable Critical criteria or does not meet the required score for Progress criteria in a given module.

5.4.5.9. The Score System Guide for the APS provides guidance on the requirements for score calculation and compliance.

5.5. Audit Report

5.5.1. Report Requirements

5.5.1.1. Following the audit, the lead auditor is responsible for preparing a timely, complete, and accurate audit report detailing the findings and any non-compliances identified. All information provided in the audit report is based on evidence collected through the audit.

5.5.1.2. Audit findings are recorded in the current version of the audit report template provided by Fair Trade USA for all applicable compliance criteria and performance indicators.

5.5.1.3. Confidential audit notes, a component of the audit report template, are shared between the auditor and CAB, and Fair Trade USA; not with the applicant/Certificate Holder. These notes
may include, but are not limited to, general observations, systemic issues, high risk areas, and rationale for sample selections.

5.5.1.4. Evidence for both compliant and non-compliant results are documented for all applicable compliance criteria evaluated.

5.5.1.5. Auditors submit complete audit reports to the CAB for technical review prior to reports going to the applicant/Certificate Holder.

5.5.2. Technical Report Review

5.5.2.1. Only qualified personnel are authorized to conduct reviews of audit reports and assess the efficacy of any corrective actions taken to address NCs. Qualification must include training in program specific technical requirements, the relevant standard compliance criteria, and review of program specific reporting and documentation requirements.

5.5.2.2. During the technical review the CAB may contact Fair Trade USA for guidance or input if needed on any issues such as standards interpretation.

5.5.2.3. After technical review the audit report is forwarded to the applicant/Certificate Holder with a Non-Conformity Report (NCR) and Corrective Action Plan (CAP) form if any NCs were identified, within 28 calendar days from the date of the closing meeting. The NCR and CAP are templates created by Fair Trade USA and used by the CAB.

5.5.2.4. If due to unforeseen circumstances or factors outside the control of the CAB the report cannot be provided to the applicant/Certificate Holder within 28 calendar days, the client is informed of a revised timeline along with an explanation of the reasons.

5.5.2.5. At this time the CAB also provides the partner with the opportunity to comment on the audit process and the auditor’s performance.

5.5.2.6. The CAB transfers all applicable documents relating to the audit to Fair Trade USA in accordance with the timelines specified in the Guidance on Conformity Assessment Bodies Sharing Audit Documentation.

5.6. Corrective Action Plan

5.6.1. Preparing the CAP

5.6.1.1. The CAP form provides a template that the applicant/Certificate Holder uses to describe the preventive and corrective actions to be taken within an expected timeline to address the NCs identified during the audit.

5.6.1.2. The applicant/Certificate Holder must complete the CAP form and provide supporting objective evidence that sufficiently addresses the NCs identified in the audit report and
submit to the CAB within 30 calendar days of receiving the audit report. Depending on the nature of NCs, the CAB may request the CAP be submitted within a shorter timeframe.

5.6.1.3. The completed CAP form must at minimum address all identified Critical criteria and selected Progress criteria that reach sufficient Progress Points required in the applicable certification year for each module.

5.6.2. Corrective Action Plan Review

5.6.2.1. When the completed CAP form is received by the CAB, it is reviewed by a CAB staff member qualified for Technical Report Review. As standard practice, this review should be completed within 15 calendar days of receiving the CAP form. However, if there is a specific reason requiring additional time to complete the review (e.g. complex or large number of NCs), then the CAB must inform the applicant/Certificate Holder of the date by which the review will be completed.

5.6.2.2. If a CAP is sufficient to bring the applicant/Certificate Holder into compliance with the specific requirement that triggered the NC, and sufficient evidence is submitted to verify implementation of the CAP, then the NC will be closed.

5.6.2.3. If a CAP is sufficient to bring the applicant/Certificate Holder into compliance with the specific requirement that triggered the NC, but an on-site assessment is needed to verify implementation of the CAP, then the NC will be closed with contingencies.

5.6.2.4. If the CAP is not sufficient, then the CAB will send the applicant/Certificate Holder a new CAP form with indication of new information requested.

5.6.2.5. Responses to the revised CAP form must be received within 15 calendar days or within the timeframe specified by the CAB. If the deadline to submit a response passes without the applicant/Certificate Holder notifying or receiving an extension from the CAB, then the CAB has the right to start a new round of review.

5.6.2.6. The process described above may be repeated for up to 5 rounds of CAPs. If the response provided by the applicant or Certificate Holder is still not sufficient to close the NCs after 5
rounds, then in the case of an applicant the certification is denied (see 5.8.2) and in the case of an existing Certificate Holder the certification is suspended (see 11.1.2).

5.6.2.7. Once all NCs have been closed, the technical reviewer records the CAP review and NC closure.

5.7. Certification Decision

5.7.1. Issuing Certification

5.7.1.1. When any and all NCs have been closed, the completed CAP will be presented to a qualified technical staff member of the CAB who is responsible for final review and issuance of a certification decision.

5.7.1.2. All audit reports are reviewed to confirm the adequate collection of compliance evidence to make a certification decision.

5.7.1.3. Certification decisions include the decision to grant, renew, expand the scope of, reduce the scope of, suspend, reinstate, or withdraw certification.

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

5.7.1.5. In certain instances, depending on the nature of the NCs and the proposed CAPs, the CAB may need to conduct a follow-up audit to confirm implementation and efficacy of the CAPs prior to making a certification decision. The auditor reserves the right to expand the scope of the audit to include additional compliance criteria as deemed necessary based upon audit findings.

5.7.1.6. If the audit report review confirms that all certification requirements have been met, the certification decision is recorded and a certificate may be issued by the CAB.

5.7.2. Certification Denial

5.7.2.1. The CAB may deny certification if any NCs identified during the audit have not been adequately addressed. The following circumstances may lead to a denial of certification:

   a) Failure to present CAPs and supporting evidence sufficient to close the NC(s) within the time frame specified in the NCR or within 5 rounds of CAPs.

   b) Identification of NCs against one or more Critical criteria, depending on the nature of the NC(s) and the CAP(s) submitted. Examples include, but are not limited to, requirements related to the Core Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), corruption or fraud.

5.7.2.2. If certification is denied, the CAB will send a formal notification letter to the applicant explaining the reasons for the decision to deny certification.

5.7.2.3. An applicant or Certificate Holder may voluntarily elect to reapply to the program and begin the assessment process anew. In such cases the CAB may require that the client submit a new application for certification, along with evidence of CAP implementation to address the
relevant NC(s). Accordingly, a new evaluation audit would then be conducted to confirm effectiveness of corrective actions.

5.7.3. Certification Decision on Complaints and Appeals

5.7.3.1. Applicants or Certificate Holders that are not satisfied with the performance of their CAB shall issue a complaint directly to the CAB, which must have procedures to deal with complaints.

5.7.3.2. Applicants or Certificate Holders that disagree with a certification decision may appeal that decision to the CAB, which shall have an appeal procedure. Appeals may only be made on the grounds of either the CAB not following the process established by the Fair Trade USA assurance program and/or the CAB making an error in fact.

5.8. Audit Cadence

5.8.1. Audit Duration

5.8.1.1. On-site Audit duration and sampling requirements are determined by the CAB based upon the size (see 5.5.4.3) and scope of operations, following the Requirements for Calculating Sample Size and Audit Duration. The audit duration is calculated to account for sufficient time for meetings, document review, field observations, interviews, and preparation of findings. The exact amount of time required for interviews and site visits may be adjusted according to factors such as the distance between sites, reviewing sites with worker housing, or the context of the audit (e.g. high risk situations).

5.8.2. Audit Frequency and Intensity

5.8.2.1. Certificate Holders under the APS receive an onsite audit every year as part of regular compliance surveillance. For details on the surveillance schedule, see Section 8 of this manual.

5.8.2.2. Audit intensity (the range of compliance criteria assessed and the number of sites visited) is dictated by the year in the six year audit cycle and the sampling method used if auditing a group or Certificate Holder with multiple sites. The compliance criteria associated with each audit year in the cycle is described under Section 5.5.1 of this manual.

6. Assessment of Groups

6.1. Defining Groups Under the APS

6.1.1. The APS covers diverse groups of farms, facilities, and labor arrangements. The scope of a Certificate can thus cover a single entity (for instance a farm), or a group of entities which could be of different sizes and/or owned and controlled by multiple parties, such as a cooperative collectively owned by multiple small producers, or an exporter buying from independent farms.

6.1.2. Groups encompass all farming and harvesting activities and any sites managed by the Certificate Holder, or intermediate buying and selling operations between the farmer(s) and the Certificate Holder, where Fair Trade Certified product is being processed, packed, sorted for quality, or transformed.

6.1.3. Sites under the scope of the Certificate are categorized as Small, Mid-sized or Large Farms and Facilities.

6.1.4. The compliance assessment process, as described in Section 5, applies to both single entities and groups of entities.
6.2. Sampling Requirements for Groups
6.2.1. Fair Trade USA defines the sampling procedure by which the auditor can determine the total number of sites to visit and interviews of registered producers or workers to conduct during the course of the audit in the Requirements for Calculating Sample Size and Audit Duration.

7. Fair Trade USA Certificates

7.1. Issuance of Certificates
7.1.1. CABs take sole responsibility for their decisions related to the granting, maintaining, extending, limiting, suspending, and withdrawing of certification status under their assessment programs.
7.1.2. Fair Trade USA will create a unique Fair Trade USA identification number and provide this to the CAB. The CAB will then issue the applicant a certificate with that identification number as well as the applicable certification seal (generally an artwork file).
7.1.3. The Fair Trade USA certificate identifies the name and address of the entity whose processes are the subject of certification and the scope of certification granted, including, as appropriate:
   a) The product(s) covered under the scope;
   b) The standards to which the Certificate Holder’s operation is certified;
   c) The effective date of certification and the term of the certification; and
   d) Optionally if specificity is desired, the names of the sites under the scope.
7.1.4. Certificates are valid for a period of three years from the date of the certification decision.
7.1.5. Audits conducted, and certifications granted to any Fair Trade USA standard during a pilot-testing phase will be considered valid for the duration of the three-year certificate even if the standard and compliance criteria therein are modified based on stakeholder review, unless otherwise specified by Fair Trade USA.
7.1.6. Only licensed partners of Fair Trade USA may use the Fair Trade Certified™ seal on approved finished products and they must follow the Fair Trade USA Seal and Language Use Guide.
7.1.7. Certificate Holders may share or display their certificate as evidence of certification.
7.1.8. Certificate Holders are publicly listed on the website of the CAB.
7.1.9. Should the CAB withdraw certification status, as described under Section 11.2, the Fair Trade USA certificate is rendered null and void.

7.2. Temporary Authorization to Trade
7.2.1. Upon completion of an initial audit, an applicant may request Temporary Authorization to Trade (TAT) from Fair Trade USA. The applicant must submit a request following the TAT Policy and if eligible and approved, Fair Trade USA will issue a TAT Certificate to the applicant.

8. Ongoing Surveillance

8.1. Annual Audits
8.1.1. Annual surveillance audits are conducted in the years between evaluation and re-certification audits (Years 1, 2, 4, and 5) to assess ongoing compliance with the applicable compliance criteria, along with full implementation of CAPs developed as a result of NCs issued from previous audits.
8.1.2. The target timeframe for scheduling surveillance audits is generally between the date of the evaluation audit and the certification anniversary date. In some cases, depending on the timing of and nature of activities at the certified site(s) (i.e. harvest, presence of workforce), the target timeframe for a surveillance audit may fall outside of this window (earlier or later). In all cases, there will be a final date identified by which the surveillance audit should occur.

8.1.3. Surveillance audits follow the auditing, reporting and review process described in Section 5.

8.1.4. Surveillance audits are generally conducted as announced audits. However, in accordance with the Fair Trade USA Policy for Unannounced Audits, if the CAB in consultation with Fair Trade USA determines there is a need to conduct an unannounced audit, which would take place within a similar time frame as the annual surveillance audit, then the CAB may conduct the surveillance audit as an unannounced audit.

8.1.5. All NCs identified during surveillance audits must be closed according to timelines specified by the CAB during the CAP process in order to maintain their certificate.

8.2. Follow-up Audits

8.2.1. In certain instances, the CAB may conduct follow-up audits outside of the regular certification cycle of evaluation, surveillance, and recertification audits.

8.2.2. Follow-up audits may occur for reasons that include, but are not limited to:

a) Confirmation of the implementation and efficacy of CAPs prior to making a certification decision or prior to closing NCs following a surveillance audit;

b) Changes to operations that impact the certification scope;

c) Response to allegations of NC; and

d) Ongoing risk management.

8.2.3. The auditor may expand the scope of the audit to include additional compliance criteria as deemed necessary based on findings on-site.

8.2.4. Additional guidance for auditors and CABs on requirements for conducting and sampling within follow-up audits is found in the Follow-up Audit Guidance document.

8.2.5. These audits may be announced or unannounced. Facilitation of audits in any instance is a requirement under the APS.

8.2.6. The Fair Trade USA Policy for Unannounced Audits outlines selection criteria, scope, and audit process.

9. Re-certification

9.1. Application for Recertification

9.1.1. The APS is based upon a certification cycle that requires an evaluation for recertification every three years.

9.1.2. Applications for recertification are reviewed by the CAB as described in Section 5.3.

9.1.3. The application may also reflect changes to the existing certificate scope or geographical area, if relevant, as described in Section 10.3.

9.1.4. An auditor or audit team is assigned as in Section 5.4.

9.2. Recertification Audit

9.2.1. Recertification audits are conducted every three years (Years 3 and 6) to assess continuous improvement against the applicable Fair Trade USA requirements.
9.2.2. Additional compliance criteria apply in re-certification years as described in Section 5.5.1.

9.2.3. Recertification audits are scheduled to allow enough time to complete the audit process (i.e., any NCs must be closed) prior to the certificate expiration.

9.2.4. Recertification audits follow the auditing, reporting, and review process described in Section 5.

9.2.5. The decision making process for certification is repeated (Section 5.8), culminating in the issuance of a new three year certificate, provided that all NCs have been satisfactorily addressed.

10. Changes Affecting Certification

10.1. Changes to Normative Documents

10.1.1. CABs must make relevant resources available to Certificate Holders, in accordance with Fair Trade USA procedures, including:

a) Fair Trade USA normative documents: standards, compliance criteria, policies, procedures, etc.

b) Publications, forms, templates and guidance documents.

c) Official communications and Certificate Holder notifications.

10.1.2. In the event of changes to any normative documents, guidance documents or Certificate Holder-facing forms or templates, the CAB ensures that partners and individuals involved in or affected by the assurance system are promptly notified of the changes and provided with the new or updated materials.

10.2. Changes in Certification Requirements

10.2.1. Fair Trade USA maintains defined protocols for implementation of changes in certification requirements, including timelines by which changes come into effect.

10.2.2. Fair Trade USA ensures that partners and individuals involved in or affected by the assurance system are promptly notified of changes in requirements.

10.2.3. Fair Trade USA ensures that CABs have all the necessary, up-to-date documents to ensure professional auditing and certification procedures.

10.2.4. In the event of new or revised Fair Trade USA certification requirements, CABs are responsible for conducting certification work according to any transition policies applicable during the transition period as defined by Fair Trade USA.

10.2.5. In the event of new or revised Fair Trade USA certification requirements, the CAB communicates these changes to all affected Certificate Holders.

10.2.6. The CAB verifies the implementation of the changes through the normal audit process, or otherwise if necessary.

10.3. Changes Affecting Scope

10.3.1. CABs require that Certificate Holders report to them any changes in operations that impact the certification scope.

10.3.2. In the case that such a change in operations is reported to the CAB, or in response to an application for amendment to the scope of a certificate already granted, the CAB reviews the reported change or request for amendment to determine whether an additional on-site surveillance audit is required.

10.3.3. The expansion or reduction of an APS certificate, which may include adding or removing sites, members or products covered under a certificate follows the Changes to Certificate Scope Procedure.
10.3.4. The Certificate Holder must report any changes in ownership or management of a Certificate Holder to the CAB, who will then determine if the consequences of the change require an audit outside of the typical audit cycle.

10.4. Change of CAB

10.4.1. In the event that a Certificate Holder chooses to transfer a current certificate to another Fair Trade USA approved CAB the Certificate Holder must follow the Change of Conformity Assessment Body Policy. The policy includes the conditions, steps to request a change of CAB and terms that must be met by the Certificate Holder.

10.4.2. The audit and certification cycle will be based on the Certificate Holder’s standing within the Fair Trade USA system, e.g. if the Certificate Holder is at Year 2 with the current CAB, they are expected to have an audit against Year 3 criteria.

11. Certification Suspension and Decertification

11.1. Fair Trade USA retains the right to suspend or terminate a certificate, and to update the terms of trade during suspension and/or the conditions of reinstatement, upon finding grievous non-compliances with the Fair Trade USA assurance program and/or any of their standard requirements that represent a serious risk to workers, traders, consumers, and/or the goodwill of Fair Trade USA or the CAB as determined by those parties.

11.2. Fair Trade USA immediately informs the CAB and the Certificate Holder of the certification decision and the nonconforming product in the market and steps taken to reduce, eliminate, or recall nonconforming product bearing the Fair Trade Certified label.

11.3. Suspension

11.3.1. A CAB has the right to suspend or withdraw certificates.

11.3.2. A certificate may be suspended at any time, generally for a maximum period of 6 months, due to circumstances including the following:
   a) A substantiated lapse in compliance with one or more compliance criteria during the interim period between annual audits, which is not closed (with or without contingencies) through the regular CAP process.
   b) Failure to fully address NCs through CAPs within the timeframe specified by the CAB during the surveillance audit cycle.
   c) Identification of NCs during a surveillance or follow-up audit, depending on the nature of the NC(s) and/or the Certificate Holder’s response to the NC(s) through the CAP process. Examples include, but are not limited to, requirements related to the Core Conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO), corruption or fraud.
   d) Failure to implement CAPs from a previous audit effectively.
   e) Allegation by a third party (e.g., a worker, worker organization, producer organization, or union) of NC with one or more compliance criteria (including NC which were not identified during an audit) which is substantiated through an investigation process.
   f) NCs identified during an unannounced audit against compliance criteria to which the Certificate Holder had previously been found in compliance.
   g) Failure on the part of the Certificate Holder to facilitate an unannounced or announced audit, or obstruction of the audit process by the Certificate Holder or the Certificate Holder’s representatives.
   h) Failure to schedule a required surveillance, follow up, or re-certification audit within the timeframe specified by the CAB.
i) Failure to meet contractual obligations (e.g. non-payment of fees).

11.3.3. If a suspension is issued within a timeframe when a certificate is due to expire, the certificate will be extended in line with the duration of the suspension period.

11.3.4. Suspension notifications including conditions of suspension are sent to the Certificate Holder, and copied to Fair Trade USA, by CAB staff who are trained in handling suspended certifications. The notification is sent by email with an attached letter, and may or may not include conditions for certification reinstatement.

11.3.5. Conditions for reinstatement will typically be provided to allow the Certificate Holder recourse and an opportunity to respond with CAPs to the NCs identified.

11.3.6. The CAB may require a follow-up audit to confirm the implementation and effectiveness of CAPs, after which certification may be reinstated if all NCs are closed.

11.3.7. The follow-up audit should take place during the peak production period, where timing permits, and ideally within two months of the date of the suspension notice and no more than four months after the date of the suspension notice. Time periods of suspension may be extended, in rare instances, if necessary to accommodate the audit process.

11.3.8. Conditions for reinstatement will generally not be provided in the following situations:
   a) An intentional lapse in compliance with the compliance criteria is observed;
   b) Falsified or misleading information is presented to auditors or to other compliance assessment personnel; and/or
   c) An auditor is treated in a hostile manner.

11.3.9. Both the CAB and Fair Trade USA update their records and publicly available lists of Certificate Holders to ensure they reflect current certification status of certification.

11.3.10. If a decision to reduce the scope of certification is made as a condition of reinstatement, the reduced scope of certification is clearly communicated to Fair Trade USA, to the Certificate Holder, and specified in certification documentation and public information.

11.4. Decertification

11.4.1. Certificate Holder’s may opt to voluntarily withdraw from certification at any time in the certification cycle.

11.4.2. A Certificate Holder’s certification may be rescinded in situations where the outstanding issues leading to a suspension have not been addressed satisfactorily within the specified time period.

11.4.3. When a suspension process has not resulted in the reinstatement of the certification, decertification is the final step to render the Fair Trade USA certificate null and void.

11.4.4. A lack of responsiveness by the partner to repeat communications related to scheduling audits or closing NCs will also be considered a voluntary withdrawal from the program.

11.4.5. Decertification notifications, including conditions of decertification, are sent to the Certificate Holder by the CAB, in the form of an email with an attached letter, copying Fair Trade USA.

11.4.6. The CAB and Fair Trade USA update all records and public lists of Certificate Holders to reflect the decertified status.

11.4.7. A decertified Certificate Holder may voluntarily elect to reapply to a CAB and begin the certification process anew.

11.4.8. Certificate Holders that disagree with a certification decision may appeal that decision to the CAB as established in Section 5.8.3 of this document.
12. Record Keeping

12.1. CABs must retain records to demonstrate that all certification process requirements have been effectively fulfilled.

12.2. Records are kept confidential.

12.3. The following electronic records are kept for at least seven years by the CAB and are readily available for evaluation by Fair Trade USA:

   a) Compliance assessment personnel (staff and auditors) records including contracts, CVs, qualifications, confidentiality agreements, training records, declarations of potential conflicts of interest, and performance reviews;
   b) Certification applications;
   c) Assessment services agreements;
   d) Audit reports and associated records;
   e) Records of certification decisions and notification of such decisions;
   f) Certification complaints, appeals or disputes, including records of review and follow-up on such complaints, appeals or disputes.

13. Oversight of Conformity Assessment Bodies under the Agriculture Program

13.1. Oversight Program Structure

13.1.1. Oversight in the Agriculture Program includes regular assessments of all components described in the CAB Oversight Program.

13.1.2. Oversight activities are carried out by Fair Trade USA Certification Team staff. The annual oversight schedule is determined by the team and implemented according to the cycle described in the CAB Oversight Program.

13.1.3. As part of the Oversight Program planning process, the following criteria are identified:

   a) Annual review period to account for the audit season;
   b) Timelines for submission of inputs for the oversight program, the activities and outputs; and
   c) Identification of the specific steps in the audit process that will be included in the assessment and the sampling methods.

13.2. Oversight of CAB Audit Processes

13.2.1. The Agriculture Program assesses CAB compliance with the audit process as described in section 7.1 of the Oversight Procedure. The audit process requirements for which compliance is assessed are described in this Manual and its related policies, procedures, and guidance materials, and summarized in the following table.
13.2.2. For each CAB, fifteen percent (15%) of the audits conducted since the last review period are sampled for process compliance. This sample includes any audits for which a witness audit was conducted.

13.2.3. The sample is stratified by operation size, and includes all audits conducted of operations with complex business structures, with the remainder of the sample divided between audits of mixed size and large operations, and medium and small operations.

13.3. Sanctions for CABs

13.3.1. While suspended, CABs are not permitted to take on new work, but may continue to service existing clients. New work is defined for the agriculture program as any new applications that have not yet signed a service agreement, and any upcoming audits that have not yet been scheduled. Audits that have already been scheduled (including initial, surveillance, re-certification, follow-up and announced / unannounced audits) by the CAB with the client are not considered new business and may proceed as planned. Issuance of audit reports, CAP processes and certificates are considered part of existing business that the CAB is responsible to continue through to completion.
ABOUT FAIR TRADE USA

Fair Trade USA is a nonprofit organization that promotes sustainable livelihoods for farmers and workers, protects fragile ecosystems, and builds strong, transparent supply chains through independent, third-party certification. Its trusted Fair Trade Certified™ seal signifies that rigorous standards have been met in the production, trade and promotion of Fair Trade products from around the world. Recognized as a leading social venture by the Clinton Global Initiative, the Skoll Foundation and Ashoka, Fair Trade USA also provides critical capacity-building programs at origin, and educates consumers about the power of their purchase. Visit www.FairTradeCertified.org for more information.

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