

AIC Sustainable Commodity Scheme Rules

1. AIC Sustainable Commodities Scheme

- 1.1 The AIC Sustainable Commodities Scheme (ASCS) is a voluntary scheme developed, owned and implemented by the Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC). The Scheme certifies that the sourcing of raw materials and products meets the requirements of the module(s) included within a Participant's scope of certification.
- 1.2 The ASCS is a Product Certification Scheme delivered by a Certification Body approved by AIC. A list of Participants is publicly available via the AIC website: www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes.html
- 1.3 **Food/ Feed Safety**
It is a prerequisite of this Scheme that ALL raw materials/ feeds are ALSO certified under a feed safety Scheme recognised by AIC. For Participants in the Feed Sector, this Standard must be applied in addition to any feed safety Scheme recognised by AIC. Applicants must contact the Certification Body to confirm that any feed safety certification that they are considering using to partner this Standard is recognised by AIC.
- 1.4 **Certification**
- 1.4.1 Certification against this Scheme is available to any Participant, who complies with the requirements of the module(s) included within their scope of certification.
- 1.4.2 To achieve certification against this Scheme, Participants must be assessed by the Certification Body and demonstrate compliance with the current version of the module(s) included within their scope of certification.
- 1.4.3 The Certification Body administers the Scheme and, in most cases, performs the on-site audits. However, a Participant may select, if they wish, an alternative organization to carry out the on-site audit activity from a list of approved Inspection Bodies appointed by the Certification Body for this purpose. The list of approved Inspection Bodies is available from the Certification Body.
- 1.4.4 All costs of certification are included in the annual fees charged by the Certification Body, with the exception of auditor travel and subsistence expenses and costs relating to extra/ immediate audits. A schedule of Scheme fees is available on the AIC website. www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes.html
- 1.5 **Scheme Terminology and Format**
The following terms are used throughout this Scheme:
Requirement – Mandatory standards with which Applicants and Participants must comply to achieve and maintain certification.
Interpretation – Specific means for Applicants and Participants to achieve the desired outcome of the associated Requirement. Applicants and Participants are expected to consider Interpretations and apply them as relevant to their business. Failure to follow interpretations, resulting in the desired outcome of the Requirement not being achieved, will lead to a non-conformance being raised against the requirement.
Guidance – Non-mandatory suggestions of useful tools and techniques for achieving and maintaining compliance or continuous improvement.

Further information – External sources of useful information, typically including references/ web links to documents or other sources of information

2. ASCS Scope

The ASCS encompasses all the operations and activities of a Participant that may have a bearing on their compliance with the requirements of the module(s) specified within their scope of certification: from raw material procurement and supplier approval, through to the point at which any products are transferred to a third party. All products placed on the market by a Participant as compliant must be included in the certification scope or, with the agreement of the Certification Body, be clearly excluded.

The presence of products outside of the certification scope (or other materials) on site must not adversely affect the certified products.

Audits will (as appropriate) include:

- The original selection and sourcing of raw materials and/or products by Participants
- All transport to and from the Participants premises or designated stores
- The process by which products are produced
- The storage of both raw materials and products
- Any offsite activities that may affect the compliance of products

3. Communication

The Participant must provide the Certification Body with an up-to-date electronic means of communication. This is preferably an email address. Where this is not possible a mobile telephone number must be provided.

4. Claims Associated with ASCS certification

Participants who achieve successful certification against the ASCS are reminded that this is a product certification scheme. Claims of certification may only be made in relation to those products included within the scope of the ASCS Certificate of Conformity.

5. Confidentiality

All information concerning Applicants and Certified Participants will be treated in confidence. Specific information (such as details of individual audit reports) will not be divulged to any third party without the written agreement of the Applicant/ Participant. The exceptions are:

- 5.1 The Certification Body and/ or AIC will confirm the Scheme ID number, name and address and confirm if the company is a certified Participant, along with the expiry date and scope of certification. These details are also available on the AIC website at: www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes.html
- 5.2 The provision of information to AIC in relation to audit findings and non-conformances as required to maintain the standards and credibility of the Scheme.

- 5.3 In the event of a Participant being involved or implicated in a sustainability incident, (see section H of the module(s)) details may be discussed in confidence between representatives of AIC and The Competent Authority.

5.4 Auditor Confidentiality

Auditors are required to sign and comply with the confidentiality agreement provided by the Certification Body. During any contact with a Participant, Auditors must not share any confidential information regarding other participating businesses.

6. Becoming certified to the ASCS

The ASCS is open to any company involved in the production and placing on the market of relevant products, subject to compliance with these Scheme Rules.

6.1 Application for Certification

In order to become a certified Participant, Applicants must:

- 6.1.1 Apply for certification by completing an application form and returning it to the Certification Body.
- 6.1.2 Identify their activities on the scheme application form. Any subsequent amendments to the activities of the Participant's business must be communicated to the Scheme Certification Body.
- 6.1.3 Confirm that they agree to comply with the Scheme Rules, the current AIC Sustainable Commodities Scheme module(s) included in their scope of certification, and Certification Body Terms and Conditions, by signing the Certification Agreement contained in the quotation and returning it to the Certification Body. The quotation will indicate the fees payable.
- The duration of the audit is dictated by the time required to audit the activities as specified in the application form. Examples of audit durations and associated fees can be found on the AIC website: www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes.html
- 6.1.4 Pay all relevant fees as per the quotation.
- 6.1.5 Initial audits must be conducted within 6 months of the application date. Re-application will only be permitted at the discretion of the Certification Body.
- 6.1.6 When the Applicant has been audited, has rectified any non-conformances that may have been identified and the corrective actions have been reviewed and approved by the Certification Body, the Certification Body will undertake a certification decision and issue a Certificate. The Participant's details will be supplied to AIC for publication in the AIC Assurance Checker: www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes/trade-assurance-checker.html
- 6.1.7 The initial Certificate of Conformity will be valid for three years from the date on which the Applicant demonstrated conformance with the Scheme module(s) included in their scope of certification.

- 6.1.8 By applying for certification, the Applicant agrees that, if accepted, they will maintain compliance with the requirements of the AIC Sustainable Commodities Scheme module(s) included in their scope of certification and any relevant associated documents.
- 6.1.9 The Applicant or Participant will have no claim against any officers, members or employees of AIC in the event of Expulsion, Suspension or a lesser sanction and/or the publication thereof as appropriate, nor have any claim against any of the above for any damages and/ or compensation or costs for any financial loss occasioned thereby.

7. Maintaining certified status

- 7.1 Certificates will be valid for three years.
- 7.2 Certification is maintained subject to:
- payment of all relevant fees to the Certification Body
 - ongoing compliance with Scheme requirements, including demonstration of compliance at surveillance audits
- 7.3 Participants will be contacted by a representative of the Certification Body prior to the anniversary of their Initial Audit to request that a renewal form is completed. The renewal form requests updated information on the Participant, scope of operation and management team and confirmation of the continued agreement to comply with the ASCS Rules and Certification Body Terms and Conditions.
- 7.4 Participants will be contacted prior to their audit due date to arrange a Surveillance Audit, which must take place within +/- 6 weeks of this date.
- 7.5 Participants shall comply with the Scheme Requirements at all times as defined in the Scheme module(s) included in the Participant's scope of certification.
- 7.6 Participants and Applicants must inform and obtain approval from the Certification Body in writing for any changes to the operation that may materially affect compliance with this Scheme and/ or the scope of certification.
- 7.7 Participants shall advise the Certification Body of any significant changes to the business, typically but not limited to:
- Company ownership
 - Key management, including contact details
- 7.8 Participants and Applicants shall advise the Certification Body in the event of:
- any sustainability investigation by a Competent Authority resulting in Formal Action
 - significant incidents on site (not limited to sustainability) that may:
 - adversely affect the ability to supply products compliant with the ASCS
 - restrict the ability of the Certification Body to carry out an audit (including unannounced or short notice audits)
 - damage the reputation of the ASCS

8. Verifying compliance with the Scheme module(s)

- 8.1 The Certification Body will assess a Participant's conformance with the Scheme module(s) included in scope of their certification. The Certification Body shall be given access to all relevant information needed to confirm conformance with those Scheme module(s) and the right to inspect third parties subcontracted to perform work covered by the Scheme module(s) at the Participant's cost. ASCS audits are not of fixed duration but are determined on a case-by-case basis.

There are a number of types of audit within the ASCS:

- 8.1.1 **Pre-Assessment** – (voluntary for new Participants). Pre-Assessments will evaluate a new Applicant's ability to meet the requirements of the ASCS module(s) included in their application. At the Certification Body's discretion, pre-audits will involve either an on-site or desk-top audit to confirm that appropriate controls are in place.
- 8.1.2 **Initial Audit** – A formal, in-depth, on-site audit to confirm that Applicants comply with the requirements of the relevant ASCS module(s). The duration of Initial Audits is dictated by the time required to fully assess the systems and procedures of the Applicant. The number of days required will be indicated prior to audit but may be extended if circumstances require this. Certificates are only issued on satisfactory correction of all non-conformances identified at Initial Audit. The details and scope of certification for certified sites will be added to the AIC Assurance Checker. Businesses may be required to submit additional documentation after certification.
- 8.1.3 **Surveillance Audit** – annual audit for certified Participants to assess compliance with the requirements of the Scheme
- 8.1.4 **Short Notice Audit** – an audit carried out at least once during the three-year certificate period. The Participant will be informed the working day before the audit is to take place.
- 8.1.5 **Unannounced Audit** – A random selection of unannounced audits will be conducted to demonstrate the integrity of the Scheme
- 8.1.6 **Extra/ Immediate Audit** – The Certification Body will carry out extra/ immediate audits at their discretion; these audits may incur a cost and may be unannounced. Circumstances where they may be required include, but are not limited to:
- 8.1.6.1 In response to reports or intelligence suggesting a significant sustainability issue or breach of Scheme Rules and requirements.
- 8.1.6.2 Current or emerging risks in the supply sector.
- 8.1.6.3 Signing off action points following an audit, particularly if the action points relate to Major or Critical non-conformances.
- 8.1.7 **Supplier Audit** – an audit of a non-certified supplier of services, raw materials or products to the Participant carried out at the discretion of the Certification Body.
- 8.2 Account is taken by the auditor during Unannounced and Short Notice Audits of the fact that key personnel may not be available, however, the continued operation in compliance with the AIC Sustainable Commodities Scheme is required.
- 8.3 **Cancellation of Audits**
Where a Participant finds it necessary to cancel an audit, they must contact the Certification Body as soon as possible. A cancellation fee will be charged to cover irrecoverable costs as per the Certification Body terms and conditions.

8.4 Refusal of Audits

Refusal to book an audit will result in suspension/ withdrawal of certification.
Refusal to allow a booked audit to be conducted will incur charges.
Refusal to accept a Short Notice or Unannounced Audit will result in the client being charged for the rescheduling of the Short Notice/ Unannounced Audit. Refusal to allow access for the rescheduled audit may result in suspension/ withdrawal of certification

8.5 Classification of Non-conformances

Classification Cause

Critical	A gross or deliberate regulatory violation, or; A failure in compliance resulting in the sustainability status of products being compromised, or; A loss of traceability such that recall of non-compliant goods would be impossible, or; A recurrence of a Major Non-conformance raised at the preceding audit, or; A complete unwillingness to cooperate during an audit.
Major	A complete failure to implement a requirement of the Scheme or a failure that may result in the loss of sustainability status, or; A recurrence of a Minor Non-conformance raised at the preceding audit.
Minor	A partial failure to implement a requirement of the Scheme or poor evidence to demonstrate implementation.

8.6 Response to Non-conformances

Classification	At Initial Audit	At Surveillance, Short Notice, Unannounced or Extra/ Immediate Audit
Critical	Certification refused. Full re-application and audit required.	Certification suspended with immediate effect. Extra audit required prior to reinstatement of certification.
Major	Certificate not granted until non-conformances rectified. Plan of corrective actions to be submitted within 15 calendar days of audit, and timescales for completion and submission of evidence to be agreed with the Certification Body. Verification of effectiveness of corrective action to be undertaken by Certification Body before certification is granted.	Certification continues subject to plan of corrective actions being submitted within 15 calendar days of audit, and timescales for completion and submission of evidence to be agreed with the Certification Body, typically no more than 60 calendar days from audit. Verification of effectiveness of corrective action to be undertaken by Certification Body before certification is maintained/ renewed. Failure to implement corrective actions and provide evidence to the Certification Body within agreed timescales will lead to suspension.

Minor	Certificate not granted until non-conformances rectified. Plan/evidence of corrective actions to be submitted within 30 calendar days of audit, and timescales for completion and submission of evidence to be agreed with the Certification Body. Verification of effectiveness of corrective action to be undertaken by Certification Body before certification is granted.	Certification continues subject to plan/evidence of corrective actions being submitted within 30 calendar days of audit, and timescales for completion and submission of evidence to be agreed with the Certification Body, typically no more than 60 calendar days from audit. Verification of effectiveness of corrective action to be undertaken by Certification Body before certification is maintained/renewed. Failure to implement corrective actions and provide evidence to the Certification Body within agreed timescales will lead to suspension.
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Observations

Observations may be raised during audits. These are points noted by an auditor that:

- Are not technical breaches of the Standard but could assist the Certification Body, Scheme Owner or Participant
- May constitute a non-conformance, but the auditor is unable to confirm this during the audit

Observations do not require a formal response to the Certification Body unless upgraded to a non-conformance during the report review.

8.8

Reporting

The Certification Body will produce a findings report at the end of the audit, identifying any non-conformances to the Participant. Any non-conformances will be classified as shown in paragraph 8.5 above and acted upon as stated in paragraph 8.6. When the Certification Body has accepted the report and reviewed and approved any corrective actions, the Certification Body will notify the client of their continuing certification or issue a Certificate, whichever is appropriate.

8.9

Report Review

Upon completion of an audit report, it will be submitted to the Certification Body for review. As part of this review process the Certification Body may, based on the evidence collected for the report:

- Seek additional information
- Remove non-conformance(s)
- Add additional non-conformance(s)
- Change the classification of non-conformance(s)
- Change the clause allocation of non-conformance(s)
- Change observation(s) to non-conformance(s) or vice versa

9. Suspension, withdrawal and reinstatement

- 9.1 The Certification Body, following discussions with AIC, may suspend/ withdraw a Participant's Certificate when the Participant has:
- Critical non-conformance(s).
 - Non-conformances against the ASCS Scheme that are not resolved within the required time limits.
 - Failed to supply the signed renewal agreement to the Certification Body by the audit date.
 - Refused to undertake an audit as required by the Scheme.
 - Refused or failed to supply information requested by the Certification Body as part of a sustainability investigation.
 - Failed to pay relevant fees.
 - Failed to comply with Scheme Rules or Certification Body Terms & Conditions.
 - Been found to have brought the Scheme into disrepute.
- 9.2 Reinstatement of Certification following suspension
- 9.2.1 Participants suspended for non-conformance reasons must correct any non-conformances and have an extra audit by the Certification Body to confirm that all non-conformances have been fully resolved within 30 calendar days of suspension, in order to have their certification re-instated.
- 9.2.2 Participants suspended for non-payment of fees or non-sustainability issues will be reinstated provided all matters are resolved within 30 calendar days of the suspension date.
- 9.3 Withdrawal of Certification
- 9.3.1 Participants that do not meet the requirements of the Certification Body to have their suspension lifted within 30 calendar days of suspension will have their certificate(s) withdrawn.
- 9.3.2 Companies that have their certificate withdrawn will be required to undergo the complete audit process and will be considered as new Applicants, subject to satisfactory evidence that any issue(s) which led to the certificate being withdrawn have been rectified.
- 9.3.3 Participants that no longer require certification must inform the Certification Body in writing.
- 9.4 Communication Regarding Certification Status
- 9.4.1 Suspended and Withdrawn Participants may not claim to be certified. No new contracts may be agreed with purchasers that require certification until the suspension has been lifted or recertification has been successfully completed.

9.4.2 Suspended and withdrawn Participants must notify any purchasers with whom they have existing contracts for both goods and services immediately on their change of status. The Certification Body will write to the Participant confirming the reason for suspension or withdrawal from the scheme and a copy of this letter must be provided to purchasers when notifying them of the change in status. Evidence of the notifications will be examined during the re-audit following suspension and compliance with this requirement will be a condition of reinstatement.

9.5 The AIC Assurance Checker

Those companies that achieve ASCS certification are listed on the AIC Assurance Checker. The Checker includes details of the scope (including relevant modules) against which certificates have been granted. The Assurance Checker is publicly available via the AIC website at: www.agindustries.org.uk/sectors/trade-assurance-schemes.html

The Certification Body will pass all necessary information to AIC to allow the AIC Assurance Checker to be updated with details of a Participant's changing certification status. The names of suspended and withdrawn Participants will also be published in the form of AIC Assurance Alerts.

10. Complaints

Complaints about either an ASCS Participant or the Certification Body should be directed to the Certification Body where they will be acknowledged, reviewed and actions taken to resolve the cause of any problems.

The Certification Body is approved by AIC and works to strict codes of conduct. If Participants are not satisfied with the way in which the Certification Body handles the complaint, they should refer the matter to AIC.

11. Appeals

- 11.1 A Participant has the right of appeal against decisions made by the Certification Body.
- 11.2 Appeals shall be made in writing to the Certification Body within 14 days of being advised of the decision that is the subject of the appeal.
- 11.3 The Certification Body will acknowledge the appeal and nominate a manager independent of the decision to carry out an investigation to check the merits of the appeal and feedback to the Participant(s).

12. Comments and updates to this standard

Updates to this Standard may be made from time to time. Any amendments will be notified to Participants and the latest version of the Standard will be available on the AIC website.

Comments regarding this Standard should be sent to AIC:

The AIC Sustainable Commodities Scheme Manager First Floor, Unit 4 The Forum Minerva Business Park Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6FT United Kingdom