



RA Chain of Custody Certification

Service information

What is Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard Chain of Custody Certification (RA CoC)?

As an organisation committed to sourcing from certified sources, you want confidence in the claim you make about your product. That's why Chain of Custody (CoC) is an essential component of any sustainability certification system. CoC is the process of tracking a product from a certified farm through the various stages of trading, manufacturing and warehousing to assure the end consumer that the claim made on the product accurately reflects the certified content or sourcing of that product. This protects the credibility of the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal, which marks the product as one that has been responsibly produced. The Rainforest Alliance has developed an innovative CoC system that establishes risk as the fundamental criterion for the type and frequency of audits for companies sourcing from Rainforest Alliance Certified farms.



What are the key roles and responsibilities within the RA SAS system?

Rainforest Alliance is an international non-profit organisation, who stand for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. Staying true to its mission, they have created a certification system for sustainable farming. This system includes the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard (RA SAS) as well as a Chain of Custody Standard. Certification bodies, consequently, are third party certifiers that perform checks on companies wanting to produce, process, trade or sell RA products follow the rules as set out in this standard. All RA SAS certification bodies need to follow accreditation rules published by Rainforest Alliance and IOAS, the Accreditation Body for Rainforest Alliance.

Which certification standards apply to my organisation?

There are two main documents. The [Rainforest Alliance Chain of Custody Policy](#) (July 2015, version 3) sets out the scope of the Chain of Custody System and describes the risk-based approach, affecting the audit frequency. This approach is a Chain of Custody Risk Assessment, in which the Organisation is asked a number of questions about their activities, location, possible other certifications and the intended volumes. The risk then affects the audit frequency as follows:

Risk category	Certification audit	1 st annual audit	2 nd annual audit
Very low risk	No audit, annual Chain of Custody Risk Assessment (CRA)		
Low risk	On-site audit	No audit	No audit
Medium risk	On-site audit	Desk audit	No audit
High risk	On-site audit	On-site audit	Desk audit

The different types of audits, participating operators and auditing practices are also set out. The [Rainforest Alliance Chain of Custody Standard](#) (July 2015, version 3) applies to all supply chain certified companies and sets out general requirements for material handling. Within this main standard, there are four principles:



1. Chain of Custody – seven criteria
2. Traceability – seven criteria
3. Trademark – three criteria
4. Multi-site operators – three criteria

The individual criteria may or may not apply to every company, depending on the activities performed at each certified site. For example, the Principle 3 requirements deal with Trademark Usage and not all Operators use the trademarks. Companies may maintain physical separation of certified material (Segregated model) or mix certified and non-certified (Mass Balance model, currently for cocoa, coconut oil, palm oil and orange juice).

What does the certification process entail?

Rainforest Alliance Chain of Custody certificates are issued for a three-year period. We conduct an initial assessment as a basis for your certification. Subsequently, you need to undergo annual audits to maintain the certificate, depending on the CRA risk results.



First, you register on Rainforest Alliance [Marketplace](#). After registering in Marketplace, companies that fall within the scope of the Chain of Custody Policy will be in touch with Rainforest Alliance's Claims, Traceability and Trademarks team to complete a Chain of Custody Risk Assessment (CRA). Once you have received your CRA results and signed the certification agreement with Preferred by Nature, you need to prepare for certification by ensuring compliance with all the certification requirements. This includes assigning responsibilities, developing chain of custody procedures and training relevant staff. Preferred by Nature assigns a contact person who will be available to respond to your questions during the entire audit process.

We recommend that you submit your documented procedures to Preferred by Nature for review before the main evaluation.

RA CoC audits are normally conducted onsite and generally last up to one work day per site. Interviews, document review, touring your facilities and review of your volume accounting system are common parts of an onsite audit.

After the audit, we prepare a written report describing the results of the audit. Any identified non-conformities are also described, and all non-conformities need to be corrected before the certificate can be issued. The report is quality reviewed by one of our colleagues and submitted to you for any comments. Upon a positive certification decision, we will send you the certificate.

Which trademarks can we use?

The Rainforest Alliance logo and trademarks can be applied to certified products and used for promotional purposes if you are registered on Marketplace and have signed an RA Trademark License Agreement upon your registration on Marketplace. It is Rainforest Alliance who will be approving your trademark usage and Preferred by Nature will only confirm during the audit whether a license agreement is in place whether a logo approval requesting system is in place and whether the actual content of the product meets the claim.

What is the cost structure?



The total certification cost consists of the costs related to the auditing services and the Preferred by Nature RA SAS CoC Programme Fee. The auditing fee depends on the CRA results and the size and complexity of the company and its Chain of Custody system. This is specified in our proposal. Separately, Rainforest Alliance charges you for the CRA review and there is also a premium on RA products that is paid by only [one link in the chain](#), so this may or may not apply to your company.

What about confidentiality?

To check correct accounting for certified volumes, the RA SAS CoC auditors will need access to some confidential information, such as your suppliers, buyers, recipes and conversion factors. The confidentiality of all data is secured, and our staff is bound by strict confidentiality requirements. However, all RA CoC certificates are listed in the public Rainforest Alliance database (www.rainforest-alliance.org) along with information about the scope of your certificate, such as product types and sites.

How do I maintain my certificate?

You need to comply with the certification requirements to remain certified. This is verified through annual audits as per the policy, so not each year an audit will be required. Please note that the reassessments cannot be delayed, and they must take place prior to the anniversary date of your certificate issuance, otherwise your certificate will be automatically terminated. In between the audits, we help you to stay up to speed on the requirements by providing regular updates on system changes. If we identify non-conformities in your system during audits, you must take appropriate and effective action to address these.

To secure the integrity of the RA CoC system, requirements apply to the follow-up on non-conformities. Major non-conformities identified during the assessment will prevent the issuance of the certificate. Major non-conformities during an annual audit have a timeline of four months. Failure to address non-conformities will lead to suspension of your certificate. A suspended certificate can be re-instated if you ensure system compliance, which is verified through an audit. Minor non-conformities issued during assessment or audit have a timeline of 15 months after the certification decision date.

