



# Rainforest Alliance Rules for Planning and Conducting Audits

Farms and producer groups involved in crop and cattle  
production

April, 2018  
Version 1

The Rainforest Alliance works to  
conserve biodiversity and ensure  
sustainable livelihoods by transforming  
land-use practices, business practices,  
and consumer behavior.

### More information?

For more information about the Rainforest Alliance, visit [www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org) or contact [info@ra.org](mailto:info@ra.org)

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## INTRODUCTION

The Rainforest Alliance is a growing network of people who are inspired and committed to working together to achieve its mission of conserving biodiversity and ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Through creative, pragmatic collaboration, Rainforest Alliance aims to rebalance the planet by building strong forests and healthy communities around the world. For more information about the Rainforest Alliance, visit our website:

<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org>.

To expand the reach of the Rainforest Alliance sustainable agriculture certification program and to safeguard the system's integrity, quality, competitiveness, and credibility, the Rainforest Alliance works with independent certification bodies around the world. Authorized certification bodies certify farms, farmer groups and operators against the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture and Chain of Custody standards.

The Rainforest Alliance is committed to ISEAL's Code of Ethics and supports the ten ISEAL Credibility Principles, which capture what is essential for a sustainability standards system to deliver positive impact. The Rainforest Alliance also applies the principles of ISEAL's codes of good practice: the Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards (Standard-Setting Code); the Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards (Impacts Code); and the Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards (the Assurance Code).

## ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The Rainforest Alliance manages and is responsible for a global Assurance System for Certification Bodies (CBs). As Rainforest Alliance certification expands further globally, the goal is to foster a highly credible and rigorous system. The audit and certification services rendered under the Assurance System maintain and ensure the general sense of purpose as well as a commitment to high quality, integrity, and transparency which is also reflected in the commitment to continual improvement of systems, documentation and processes. Access to the system by smallholders is important to Rainforest Alliance, and smallholders should not be at a disadvantage or excluded from accessing certification services.

The assurance system is comprised of a compendium of documents that describe the rules of the system and describe the requirements for CBs to be authorized. These documents include, but are not limited to:

- Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies;
- Rules for Auditor Competence;
- Rules for Planning and Conducting Audits;
- Chain of Custody Audit Protocols (pending);
- Certification Database Guidance;
- Spatial Data Requirements and Guidance.

This document establishes the rules for CBs for conducting audits based on the 2017 Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard for farms and producer groups involved in crop and cattle production operations. Regulations for Chain of Custody auditing are found in the Chain of Custody Audit Protocols (pending).

CBs that have questions about the content or the interpretation of these Rules should contact Rainforest Alliance for any clarification (sas@ra.org).

## TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

To simplify references and minimize redundancy, the system documents employ the following terminology and abbreviations; these terms will not be italicized in the document:

| Term and Abbreviation    | Description  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Assurance System:        | Refers to all the regulations, requirements and processes described in the compendium of Rainforest Alliance Assurance documents.  |
| Certification Body (CB): | By Rainforest Alliance authorized entity to conduct audits and certification for the Rainforest Alliance sustainable agriculture certification program.  |
| Certification Database   | A Rainforest Alliance platform for the monitoring of the certification program which is used by Certification Bodies to store and report detailed information on certification data for farms, groups and chain of custody operations. In addition, Auditor competence monitoring through auditor registration and confirmation of days in the field (via audit records) to ensure auditors are competent for evaluating certified operations. |
| Certificate holder:      | Refers to a farm or producer group that is Rainforest Alliance Certified™.   |
| Chain of Custody (CoC):  | All the steps in the supply chain that are taken from primary production on a certified farm through to final consumption, including all processing, transformation, manufacturing, and storing stages, where progress of the product to the following stage in the supply chain involves a change of ownership.   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Certification processes:                                   | Includes all processes referred to in the assurance system documents.   |
| Inspection Body (IB):                                      | Inspection Body subcontracted by a CB.  |
| Operation:   | Refers to a farm or groups regardless of their certified status.  |
| Rainforest Alliance certification or simply certification: | Depending on the context, when referring to Rainforest Alliance Certification.  |
| 2017 Standard:   | When referring to the 2017 Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard for Farms and Producer Groups involved in crop and cattle production. |

## 1. OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of this document are:

1. Produce consistent and accurate portrayals of farm and group compliance with the 2017 Standard by using established standardized audit procedures and practices.
2. Obtain accurate information about certified farms and groups based on clear instructions for information gathering and verification.
3. Ensure the timely and cost-effective implementation of certification processes.

## 2. SCOPE AND IMPLEMENTATION

The processes described in this document shall be carried out by all currently authorized CBs for all farm, producer group and cattle production audit processes using the 2017 Standard.

CBs and their inspection bodies (IBs) shall meet the requirements and regulations in this document as well as the ISO 19011 requirements and guidelines, *Guidelines for Auditing Management Systems*, particularly sections 4, 5 and 6.

**Publication date of this document: April 1, 2018**

**Effective date of this document: June 1, 2018**

After the publication date and before the effective date, the CB's responsibilities and rights are to:

- Request clarifications or training from Rainforest Alliance;

- Communicate changes to staff and auditors and ensure proper training;
- Inform operations of relevant changes;
- Adjust internal processes in accordance with these rules;
- Review updates in the Certification Database.

All the audit processes from June 1, 2018 onwards must comply with these rules. These rules do not apply to audits started prior to June 1, 2018. Compliance for verification, investigation and scope expansion audits is recommended as of April 1, 2018.

Rainforest Alliance will start carrying out evaluation and monitoring activities based on the Assurance System as of the effective date.

### **3. PARTICIPANTS IN THE AUDIT PROCESS**

#### **3.1 CB participants**

- a) The CB shall be comprised by a team of experts for specific areas to complete the certification process and comply with these Rules in accordance with each team member's role. An individual can play the role of different participants.
- b) All CB staff involved in the Rainforest Alliance certification processes shall be free of any conflict of interest as described in the section on conflict interest and shall have signed a confidentiality agreement as indicated in the applicable sections within the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies.
- c) The CB shall register the contact information of CB staff responsible for the certification process in the Certification database and update it as needed.

##### **3.1.1 Certification manager**

This person is responsible for the administration of the certification program. His/her responsibilities are to:

- a) Ensure and supervise that all CB staff meet the qualifications described in this document and other relevant documentation.
- b) Ensure and supervise that auditors conduct the audits in accordance with this document and the Rules for auditor competence.
- c) Update and communicate with CB staff and certificate holders about changes in the certification program.
- d) Provide documentation and/or reports to Rainforest Alliance when requested.
- e) Ensure follow-up communications with Rainforest Alliance are addressed accordingly.

- f) Inform Rainforest Alliance when there are changes that can affect CB compliance with the requirements in this document, as well as cases where the CB receives a sanction from their accreditation body or any other scheme the CB is approved for.

### **3.1.2 Database administrator**

This CB staff member manages the CB account within the Certification Database and ensures proper data input. His/her responsibilities are to:

- a) Input data on certification processes for certificate holders, ensuring each step follows the certification process timeline rules.
- b) Ensure data quality and update certificate holder information as needed. Data quality includes accurate certificate information, as well as consistency of information across the various fields and attachments in the Certification Database.
- c) Update auditor records in the Certification Database with new training, performance evaluations and general auditor details.
- d) Participate in Certification Database training and webinars.
- e) Follow-up on specific data input needs or record updates in timely manner.

### **3.1.3 Auditor team**

Consisting of qualified and registered auditors, one of whom acts as lead auditor, and any additional technical experts as needed. All must comply with the Rules for Auditor Competence for their respective positions and responsibilities. The teams' responsibilities are to:

- a) Audit according to the system's requirements.
- b) Ensure compliance with the audit report requirements of the certification process timeline (see section 6 – Audit Execution).
- c) Provide accurate information about all aspects of the audit process.
- d) Respond to requests by the database administrator based on requests by the Rainforest Alliance monitoring process.

### **3.1.4 Quality Reviewer**

CB staff that review audit reports to ensure proper interpretation of the 2017 Standard and certification rules. His/her responsibilities are to:

- a) Conduct the quality review of the audit reports and ensure that accurate and consistent information is recorded in the Certification Database. For example, the quality reviewer should ensure that farm size is recorded accurately in the audit report and in the engagement record.
- b) Notify the auditor team of any inaccuracies in the non-conformities evaluated in the audit report.
- c) Propose improvements to the Certification Manager in the certification process for the audit quality review and auditor competence.

### **3.1.5 Certification decision committee**

This committee shall be comprised of staff with experience in Rainforest Alliance certification processes, and at least one person involved in the decision process shall be a qualified lead auditor. The committee can consist of one person. The certification committee responsibilities are to:

- a) Make the final certification decision.
- b) Have the authority to modify the recommendation of the audit team, due to inconsistencies identified in the audit report.
- c) Request that the lead auditor clarify or expand any section from the audit report.
- d) Dismiss a nonconformity.
- e) Issue a new nonconformity.
- f) Review an appeal based on a certification decision.

## **3.2 Other participants**

### **3.2.1 Operations**

Farms and groups seeking certification, as well as current certificate holders, which are subject to audit and certification processes and responsible for complying with Certification Rules.

### **3.2.2 Stakeholders**

Workers', labor organizations and their representatives, members of neighboring communities, government officials, and others can be asked by the CB to participate in the auditing and certification processes through interviews, observations of their work, assessment of their knowledge and abilities, and through other contributions to audit processes.

## 4. TYPES OF AUDITS

The 2017 Certification Rules establishes five types of audits for evaluating operation compliance with the 2017 Standard. See the 2017 Certification Rules for the characteristics of these audits and the rules governing their use.

- a) The CB shall record each audit process for the different type of audits in the Certification Database at the time the operation confirms the audit date, as this will be part of CB Monitoring & Evaluation (See section 4.4 of the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies). Additional instructions or operational guidance for the processes associated with these audits will be included in this document.

### 4.1 Certification audit

A certification audit is carried out when the organization applies for Rainforest Alliance certification for the first time, and then every three years.

- a) The CB shall complete the next certification audit process before the certificate expires.
- b) If the CB does not have a new certification audit process activated when the certificate expires, the certificate will be cancelled automatically in the Certification Database.

### 4.2 Verification audit

The CB shall conduct a verification audit when the organization does not meet the performance criteria and certification rules of the 2017 Standard at the level to which it is applying (sections 7.1, 7.2 or 7.3), corresponding to its year in the Rainforest Alliance certification system for the 2017 Standard. When a verification audit is necessary, the CBs shall adhere to the following additional timeline:

- a) The verification audit shall be completed and a final certification decision made within 120 calendar days after having received the previous certification decision.
- b) The original checklist and audit report shall be modified to reflect the new information from the verification audit, specifically in the criteria that did not allow the certification of the organization. The CB must include all necessary evidence indicating compliance or non-compliance.
- c) CBs shall upload the final certification report to the Certification Database in the time required in Section 7 - Audit Report and Review of this document.
- d) To register the checklist in the Certification Database, the CB must follow the instructions indicated in Annex 1, at the end of this document.

### 4.3 Surveillance audit

- a) The CB must conduct two surveillance audits every three years, after a certification audit or a previous surveillance audit.
- b) The CB must comply with the timeline established in the Certification Rules to schedule surveillance audits with their operation organizations.
- c) The CB must record in the Certification Database the surveillance audits that have taken place during the harvest season for the farms or groups that produce seasonal crops.
- d) The CB must assign 10% of all programmed surveillance audits to be short-notice or unannounced for quality assurance purposes. The CB may inform the certified organization about these audits no more than two business days in advance, with the exception of group administrators of smallholder members, for which up to five business days in advance apply.

### 4.4 Investigation audit

- a) If the complaint only pertains to the performance of the group administrator regarding the group standard, the Investigation audit shall apply only to it.
- b) If the complaint pertains to the performance of one or more member farms regarding applicable standard documents, the sample shall only consist of the farm(s) included in the complaint. If the complaint pertains to both the administrator and the member farms, both shall be audited.
- c) In the checklist, the CB must only record the criteria on which the investigation audit was focused.

### 4.5 Scope expansion audit

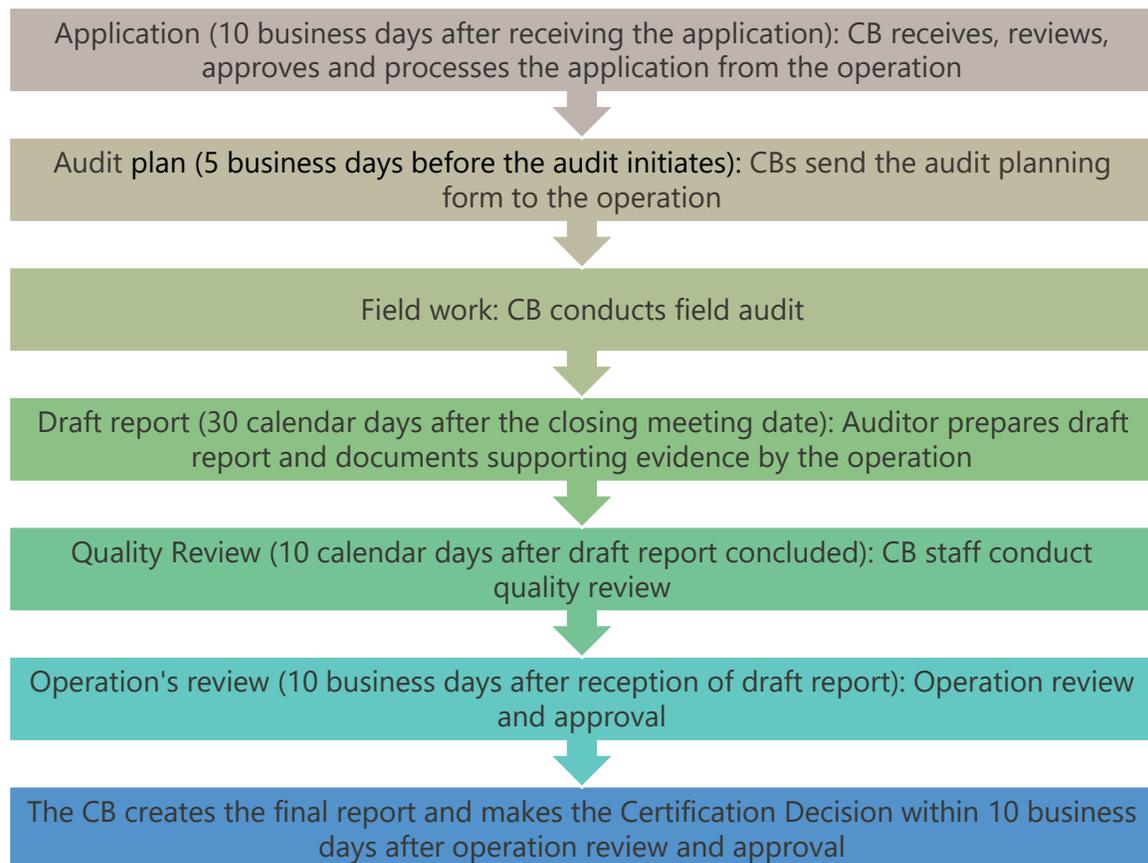
This audit applies when an organization decides to increase the number of member farms or the certified area as per the 2017 Certification Rules. The CB shall create a new Engagement process with the corresponding checklist.

## 5. AUDIT PREPARATION

The sections below describe the audit preparation process that CBs shall follow.

### 5.1 Certification process timeline rules

- a) The CB is responsible for complying with the maximum timelines defined and recording the process in the Certification Database within the applicable milestone dates (for details of the timelines, see the next section).



**Figure 1: Illustration of the general certification process when the certification decision is approved and corresponding timing for each step. These basic elements apply to all types of farm, group and cattle operation audits as described in the Certification Rules.**

- b) This timeline can be extended if the certification is not granted:
- 1) From the certification decision date, the certification body has 120 calendar days to perform a verification audit and have a new certification decision within this period.

- 2) From the certification decision date, the operation appeals and the CB has 30 calendar days to review the appeal. For more information, refer to the appeal section 8.3 within this document.

## 5.2 Application receipt and review

- a) The start of a new certification process begins when an operation contacts a CB and requests information. The CB shall send a welcome package that includes the 2017 Standards, Certification Rules, Application form, and group member list template with the applicable procedures. CBs shall assist the operation in resolving questions or problems regarding completion of the application. The operation will send the completed application form, including location data, and group member list (in case of groups).
- b) CBs shall have procedures for finalizing administrative and technical reviews of the applications within 10 business days of receiving the application. During administrative reviews, CBs shall examine the applications and verify that all the information has been completed.
- c) The CB shall send operations the approval for the application and the group member list to proceed with the certification process. If the information is incomplete or clarification is needed, the CB communicates this to the operation, which must then send an updated application form and group member list.<sup>1</sup>
- d) Once the CB approves the application form and group member list, the CB shall upload these documents into the Certification Database, which will automatically create an Organization, Contact, Engagement and pending Certificate Record.
- e) For existing operations, a report of the application form is generated by the CB from the Certification Database and updated by the operation annually. Then the CB uploads and submits the updated application form in the Certification Database, where the existing record is updated automatically. In the case of unannounced certification audits, the previous application form will be updated during the audit.

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<sup>1</sup> They shall also determine whether any of the data appear to be untrue or outside a realistic range, or if operations cancelled less than one year prior to application are trying to re-enter the certification process under a new or alternative legal entity

- f) The group member list must be updated annually by the CB, based on the previous approved member list. The CB shall request that the group update the status of each member (as certified, retired, or new) and submit the updated list to the CB (see Annex 2).

### 5.3 Audit plan development

- a) Within the Certification Database, CBs shall generate the official Rainforest Alliance format for the audit plan to be submitted to the operation.
- b) CBs shall share the completed audit plan at least 5 business days before the audit initiates.
- c) This timing is not applicable to unannounced and investigation audits. If a CB did not send any audit plan to the certificate holders in advance of any of these audits, the CB shall review the plan with the operation during the initial audit meetings on-site. If investigation audits take place off-site (desk audits, for example) but need to be charged to the certified operation, CBs can send the operations an audit plan with the minimum advance notice as stipulated in the 2017 Certification Rules.

#### 5.3.1 Factors to consider in an Audit plan

- a) To prepare the audit plan, the CB considers the technical review and the following factors to be evaluated and recorded, including but not limited to:
  - i. Geographic location of the operation – region and country, proximity to protected areas;
  - ii. Size of the operation;
  - iii. Type of operation, crops and production systems;
  - iv. Other land uses within the operation’s property, the presence or proximity of high conservation value areas;
  - v. Production quantities, yields, and sales of products for which the organization is requesting certification;
  - vi. Presence and types of processing operations;
  - vii. Receipt, purchase or processing of products from non-certified farms or groups;
  - viii. Valid certifications under other schemes;
  - ix. Languages and cultural factors;
  - x. Number and characteristics of workers, such as origin, employment status (permanent, temporary, subcontracted);
  - xi. Presence of labor unions or other types of worker organizations;
  - xii. Types of infrastructure on the farm (housing, sanitary facilities, product processing facilities, roads, etc.);

- xiii. Compliance risks according to the risk assessment for the geographic scope or any risks specified in standards and interpretation policies; and
  - xiv. For operations that are already certified, the performance history of the operation regarding compliance with the 2017 Standard and other requirements.
- b) For investigation audits, CBs shall base their technical review on existing information about the operation to be investigated, which should include the above mentioned factors. In addition, CBs shall consider:
- i. The nature and seriousness of the complaint or incident reported or detected;
  - ii. The evidence presented and compiled to date; and
  - iii. Potential impacts on workers, neighbors and the environment.

### 5.3.2 Audit plan objectives

The objective of the audit plan is to describe all activities for the audit process which includes the following aspects:

The thematic, geographic and documentary focus of the audit, as well as the individuals to be interviewed. It also indicates the applicable standards, or the 2017 Standard criteria in the case of verification, scope expansion, or investigation audits, and the required preliminary or preparatory investigations. For scope expansion audits, the audit scope can be restricted to new member farms, new production areas, or to any new crops added to the scope. The CB shall review location details based on the geographic information provided by the operation, which should be prepared following the Rainforest Alliance Guidelines for Certificate Mapping. For group certificates, the CB shall consider this information when selecting the member sample.

- a) The composition of the audit team, indicating names and roles of the auditors and experts who will participate in the audit. All members of the audit team shall meet the respective requirements of the Rules for Auditor Competence and Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies and be qualified to participate in audits within the indicated geographic scope. The CB shall require that when translators are used in audits, they are independent of the operation. For the team composition, the CB shall include a free of conflict of interest declaration. See the section 5.6 audit team selection in this document for more information.
- b) The time required to perform the audit, including preparation, prior research, the audit and the subsequent certification processes. The plan can indicate the audit date when possible.
- c) The number and distribution of interviews, particularly for plantations with contracted labor; see section 5.5 on interview planning in this document for more information.

## 5.4 Group sample planning

The CB shall ensure that the audit sample selection is reviewed by the lead auditor responsible for conducting the audit and must meet the following requirements:

- a) The CB shall audit a representative sample of the group administrator's member farms to evaluate the effectiveness of the Internal Management System.
- b) Criteria of the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard, according to the audit scope, will be evaluated at the individual farm level for those farms that are members of a group administrator and that are part of the audit sample.
- c) The CB shall always audit at least two-member farms in any type of audit.
- d) An auditor cannot audit more than 6-member farms per audit day.
- e) The composition of member farms to be audited shall be determined in a manner that is representative of all member farms, using stratified random sampling. The following sampling parameters should be considered:
  - i. Farm size and complexity;
  - ii. Differences in production systems and activities;
  - iii. Geographic areas with significant differences in climate, soil conditions or ecosystems;
  - iv. Cultural differences;
  - v. Seasonality: type of work being carried out in the farm at the time of the audit;
  - vi. Length of time a farm has been in the group, or the date it was added;
  - vii. Member farms that have not been audited previously or recently;
  - viii. Member farms with low scores in previous audits or non-conformities with critical criteria during previous audits;
  - ix. Member farms with permanently hired labor should form part of the sample, especially in groups that consist of both plantations and smallholders;
  - x. Member farms with multiple certificates (from similar certification schemes).
- f) In case the CB considers it necessary to increase the sample size, it shall not be more than 1.4 times the square root of the total number of farms. It shall justify and document its decision, based on criteria such as size of the group, lack of continuous improvement, estimated risk or the historical performance of the group administrator and its member farms.

- g) The CB shall use the following guidance to determine the sample size for each audit type. If the value of the sample size is not an integer number, the CB shall round it up to the next higher number.

| <b>Type of audit</b>            | <b>Sample size</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>i. Certification audit</b>   | The sample size shall be at least two farms or the square root of the total number of member farms included in the Farm Member List.  |
| <b>ii. Surveillance audit</b>   | The sample shall be the square root of the member farms included in the Farm Member List, of which 30% should be members evaluated in the previous audit.   |
| <b>iii. Verification audit</b>  | <p>The verification audit checks whether the audited organization has satisfactorily addressed the non-conformities detected during a previous audit that prevented certification.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If during the previous audit only the group administrator did not meet the certification requirements, the verification audit shall only apply to the group administrator.</li> <li>2. If during the previous audit non-conformities were only found among the member farms, the size of the sample shall be twice the number of farms that did not meet the certification requirements, up to a maximum equal to the square root of the total number of farms. The farms that did not comply shall be part of the sample.</li> <li>3. If during a previous audit both the administrator and the member farms had non-conformities with the certification requirements, both shall be audited. To determine farm sample size, the rules established in this section shall be followed.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>iv. Investigation audit</b>  | <p>An investigation audit occurs in response to a claim or complaint about the performance of a certified organization.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If the complaint pertains only to the performance of the group administrator regarding the group standard, the Investigation audit shall apply only to it.</li> <li>2. If the complaint pertains to the performance of one or more member farms regarding applicable standard documents, the sample shall only consist of the farm(s) included in the complaint.</li> <li>3. If the CB deems it appropriate, the size of the sample may be expanded up to a maximum equivalent to twice the number of farms included in the complaint.</li> <li>4. If the complaint pertains to both the administrator and the member farms, both shall be audited.</li> <li>5. CBs can also increase the size of the sample by up to 40% to audit member farms based on compliance issues detected during the audit that merit further investigation. The expanded sample can be to audit the entire the 2017 Standard or those criteria linked to compliance issues. CBs shall develop guidelines to determine when increased sample size is necessary, and procedures for informing operations about sample size increases.</li> </ol> |
| <b>v. Scope expansion audit</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The sample size shall be at least two farms or the square root of the number of member farms added to the group, rounded up to the next whole number, whichever is greater. So, if a 450-member group adds 50 new</li> </ol>  |

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|  | <p>members, and the CB decides that it merits a scope expansion audit, then the sample size would be eight farms (square root of 50 rounded up to the nearest whole number).</p> <p>2. The CB must evaluate the fulfillment of all critical criteria and the criteria of the group's current Level.</p> |
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## 5.5 Interview Planning

The objective of the interviews shall always be to obtain information in the most objective and open way possible.

- a) CBs shall determine the total number of interviews and their distribution among the operation's workforce and administration in order to be able to calculate time and costs for the audit plans. The CB shall allocate sufficient time for the audit team to conduct the necessary interviews without having to rush or reduce the number of interviews due to time and cost pressures. The audit team can refine the number and distribution of interviews during the preliminary meeting according to factors such as the activities on the farm during the audit; the types of workers available and their characteristics, responsibilities and distribution on the property; and other factors related to information not available during the audit planning process. This process is described further in the subsection 6.7 on interviews in this document. Audit teams should make every effort to carry out at least the number of interviews in the audit plan. Any variations from this number will need to be justified in the audit report.
- b) The CBs shall calculate the number of interviews for certification audits according to the number of permanent, temporary and subcontracted workers, as follows<sup>2</sup>:
  - i. Fewer than 100 total workers: 10% of the non-administrative workforce or managerial workforce or a minimum of 5 workers, whichever figure is higher;

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<sup>2</sup> "Subcontracted" refers to labor provided by a subcontractor, which carries out tasks that are part of the day-to-day operations of an operation during the audit period. Examples include workers for harvesting, planting, gathering seeds and preparing soils, among other activities.

- ii. 101 to 500 workers: 7% of the non-administrative or managerial workforce, or a minimum of 10 workers, whichever figure is higher;
- iii. 501 to 1000 workers: 5% of the non-administrative or managerial workforce or a minimum of 35 workers, whichever figure is higher;
- iv. More than 1000 workers: 3% of the non-administrative or managerial workforce or a minimum of 50 workers, whichever figure is higher;
- v. Up to 33% of the interviews can be in groups of no more than five persons. Group interviews shall be used to explore issues important to the scope of the audit;
- vi. When there are workers who are members of unions or similar labor representation entities in an operation, the number of interviews with permanent workers shall be divided proportionally between union member and non-member workers. One of the interviews with union member workers shall be with their representative or liaison (secretary, president, etc.) with management in the operation.

#### Interview calculation example

On a farm with 500 permanent employees, of which 100 are in a trade union; plus 70 temporary workers and 100 subcontracted workers at the time of the audit, the distribution of the interviews would be:

- 35 permanent workers (7% of 500 permanent workers) with 7 of these enrolled in the union (100 unionized workers out of a total of 500 workers = 20% of the 35 workers for interviews) and 28 non-member workers;
- 7 temporary workers (10% of 70 temporary workers); and
- 10 subcontracted workers (10% of 100 subcontracted workers).

The total is 52 interviews for a workforce of 670 workers.

- c) For farm audits, female auditors ideally should conduct interviews with female workers. In the case a female auditor is not available, the lead auditor may receive assistance from a local female community member. For sensitive issues – such as sexual harassment, discrimination or psychological violence - it is important that the interviews take place in confidential settings.
- d) Local language should be used for interviews. In the case of the participation of translators, the independence and confidentiality of translators shall be guaranteed.
- e) CBs shall plan off-site interviews when freedom of association or sexual harassment are identified as high compliance risks in a risk assessment for a geographic scope. In these cases, any off-site worker interviews will count towards the required number of interviews. Any interviews with other stakeholders—government authorities, advocacy groups, and union representatives that do not work on the audited operations—are in addition to the required numbers and do not count as worker

interviews. Rainforest Alliance, as part of the scope for investigation audits, can designate the numbers and types of interviews to carry out.

## 5.6 Audit team selection

- a) Only auditors and lead auditors that are registered in the Rainforest Alliance Auditor Database and meet the respective requirements in the Rules for Auditor Competence shall participate in audits. Lead auditors for cattle production shall also meet cattle scope requirements in the Rules for Auditor Competence.
- b) For audit teams, CBs shall select the auditors that can best carry out the audits specified in the audit plans. Many of the factors that CBs shall evaluate in the technical review of operation information (Section 5.3) will also influence the composition of audit teams. The CB shall consider additional auditor characteristics that shall be taken into account when selecting auditors, including:
  - i. Experience in a particular geographic scope or with a particular crop, production system or type of operation;
  - ii. Language skills and experience with different cultures;
  - iii. In the case of verification or investigation audits, the audit scope or the particular 2017 Standard criteria that will be evaluated;
  - iv. The existence of potential conflicts of interest;
  - v. Particular expertise of an auditor, such as occupational health and safety, biodiversity, interviewing techniques, or chain of custody;
  - vi. For complex operations or cases, overall experience or communications, team leadership, and operation management skills;
  - vii. Based on the risk level, CB should consider female auditors for conducting the interviews of women on gender matters, especially sexual harassment. CBs shall record the reasons for not using female auditors and any compensatory or mitigation measures taken.
- c) By selecting auditors for a particular audit team, the CBs acknowledge that the auditors meet the requirements of the *Rules for Auditor Competence*, are registered in the Rainforest Alliance Auditor Database, and are qualified to audit that particular operation. Any audit report that includes auditors that do not meet these requirements will be rejected by Rainforest Alliance, and the CB will need to repeat that audit with a qualified audit team.
- d) CBs will need to include experts with knowledge in specific areas of the 2017 Standard, particularly for investigation audits and audits of operations or in geographic regions with certain compliance risks. All experts involved in audits

shall comply with the applicable requirements in the Rules for Auditor Competence.

### 5.7 Preliminary review of documentation

- a) CBs shall provide the audit teams with access to all the necessary information to conduct the audit for their thorough review before initiating the audit, which can include information from other sources or stakeholders. This information shall include, where applicable:
  - i. Local legislation that applies to the management of the audited organization and that could have an influence on the audit;
  - ii. The risk assessment for the geographic scope where the audit will take place;
  - iii. The 2017 Standard and requirements, including the relevant sections of this document;
  - iv. All of the information contained in the operation's application and the audit plan sent to the operation;
  - v. Relevant maps and plans, and member farm lists in the case of group administrator audits;
  - vi. Information on crop productivity and yields and previously or currently reported production volumes and volumes sold as certified;
  - vii. Possible charges or complaints previously filed against the organization to be audited;
  - viii. Previous audit reports going back to at least the last certification audit; and
  - ix. Any other material or document related to the organization to be audited.
- b) In addition, CBs shall provide the team with copies of the report templates, formats for recording non-conformities, the closing meeting logbook and the list of documents to review based on the applicable criteria of the 2017 Standard.
- c) The audit team and its leader shall conduct a general review of the documents related to the operation. The audit team should request any additional document or clarifications from the CB before starting the audit.

## 6. AUDIT EXECUTION

The following points indicate general types of support that Rainforest Alliance will permit during audit processes as long as: a) the conflicts of interest described in the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies are avoided and b) there are no conflicts with requirements established by the ISO accreditation body for the RA-accepted scope. Certification Bodies shall consider the following clauses to include in the policy of the provision of information to clients by auditors and made publicly available for clients.

### 6.1 Permitted support during audits

- a) Describe examples of compliance with standard criteria that auditors have seen on other farms.
- b) Show the operation photographs of examples of how other operations, with the permission of those operations, have complied with the 2017 Standard.
- c) Mention to the operation the names of consultants or organizations that can help the farmer with an improvement plan or with the implementation of best practices as long as they are not commercially linked to the CB or the auditors conducting the audit.
- d) Provide guidance manuals or other supporting materials to the operation that explain how to implement best practices for the 2017 Standard.
- e) Describe a nonconformity during the closing meeting and in the audit report in such a way that the non-compliance and its cause are very clear, so that the operation knows exactly what it needs to correct. The lead auditor shows photos of the non-conformities found during the audit with an explanation of the reasons for the lack of compliance. Provide the operation with the names of other operations to see how they have complied with different criteria of the applicable standards, always with the permission of the reference operations.
- f) Providing general training about the 2017 Standard and the requirements applicable to different types of operations, including how the standards are interpreted by auditors for these types of operations. This training must be open to several operations.

#### 6.1.2 Support not permitted during audits

- a) Recommend specific actions or products for complying with the applicable the 2017 Standard, including providing corrective actions, designs for operations-specific infrastructure, or write or participate in writing required plans, policies or procedures;
- b) Give advice or directions, prescribe practices, or provide instructions to close nonconformities. They may, however, explain in detail the reasons that led to opening the nonconformities.

- c) Provide support or consulting services that could affect their impartiality in assigning non-conformities, evaluating corrective actions and making certification decisions;
- d) Combine or package offers or quotes for technical support with certification services; and
- e) Mix support and certification activities in any way that violates any of the requirements stipulated in the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies.

The actions described in this section are permitted by Rainforest Alliance, but are not required. CBs shall consult Rainforest Alliance if they have any questions or need more information about technical support during or related to certification processes. CBs shall also consult their respective accreditation bodies if they have any questions or need more information about potential conflicts with ISO requirements.

## 6.2 Preliminary Investigations

- a) CBs can carry out preliminary investigations on specific issues before starting the on-site audit. The need to carry out these investigations is based specifically on the 2017 Standard interpretation policies, auditing techniques or evidence gathering dictated by the risk assessments or the nature of a complaint or incident, if these are considered to be an issue for the audited operation. Some examples of preliminary investigations include interviews with workers and members of the community outside the properties of the audited organization, meetings with interested stakeholders, obtaining information from local authorities, public consultations and other external sources.
- b) CBs shall clearly indicate in preliminary and final audit plans that preliminary investigations will be carried out. Their costs shall be included in the price quotes for the audits. CBs shall use their judgment on how much detail to reveal to the operations when there is a risk that the operations could influence the preliminary investigation process. This is important when interviewing workers outside of the operations' properties, as in cases of investigating freedom of association and other working conditions.
- c) CBs shall not be obligated to carry out any portion of pre-audit planning or research that will risk the health and safety of auditors or those involved in the preliminary investigations, such as interviewees. In these cases, the CB should notify the Rainforest Alliance and explain why the preliminary investigations will not be included in the audit process.

### 6.3 Opening Meeting

- a) The audit team shall initiate each on-site audit with an opening meeting conducted by the lead auditor in the presence of the audit team and representatives of the audited operation. It is not necessary to conduct an opening meeting before preliminary investigations. The main topics to be addressed are:
  - i. Confirm the audit plan explaining the objectives and the extent of the audit program as well as the audit scope;
  - ii. Presentation of the audit team;
  - iii. Indicate the versions of the standards to be evaluated;
  - iv. Provide a brief summary of how the audit activities will be carried out and the time required;
  - v. Explain the concepts of confidentiality and conflict of interest within the audit process, including the need not to reveal the names of interviewed workers unless they grant permission;
  - vi. Indicate that auditors can take photographs as evidence, but under the framework of the confidentiality policies of the CB;
  - vii. Describe and if necessary select the sample of the group administrator's member farms to evaluate;
  - viii. Indicate the number of and types of workers to be interviewed and their protection during the interviews, and confirm their availability;
  - ix. Establish communication channels; and
  - x. Provide the audited organization with an opportunity to ask questions and present preliminary information.
- b) The audit team shall record the names of the meeting's attendees, and agreements made and any objections or concerns of the operation's representatives.

### 6.4 Compiling and documenting Evidence

CBs shall provide clear and concise evidence to document compliance and non-compliance during the audit. Relying on the best practices described in ISO 19011 and in Rainforest Alliance's *Best Auditing Practices* guides, documentation of evidence is required in the audit checklist, for each critical criterion and each continuous improvement criteria of non-compliance.

The best auditing practices recognize three ways of compiling evidence: document reviews, interviews, and observations of operations.

- a) The audit teams shall verify findings between different types of evidence—“triangulating” the evidence—whenever possible. Conclusions based on three types of evidence are better than conclusions based on two types of evidence. Evidence from a single source is in many cases less conclusive; however, the audit teams shall record it and use it as a basis to expand the audit scope or the collection of evidence.
- b) The audit teams shall record the evidence in sufficient detail so that the management of the operations can identify the site and the nature of the non-conformities, and deduce possible causes and solutions. Details that could negatively affect workers shall be kept confidential except when workers are in a situation that could be a threat to their health or safety. An example would be if a particular worker has not been trained in the safe use of particular equipment.
- c) Individual auditors shall keep notes of evidence for the 2017 Standard criteria that they audit. Auditors are encouraged to use the official Audit Checklist for their individual note keeping. The audit team is required to complete an *Audit Checklist* with a summary of the consolidated evidence from the team members for each 2017 Standard criterion. The summary should clearly describe the reasons why the operation has complied or not complied with the 2017 Standard criteria, and the extent or magnitude of any non-compliance. CBs shall keep the completed checklists on file for at least three years.

## 6.5 Document Review

- a) The audit teams shall review and evaluate all documents related to the criteria of the applicable 2017 Standard for the indicated audit scopes. In addition, the audit teams shall verify that the following supplied by the operation is accurate or, if not, they shall obtain the correct information:
  - i. The information provided by the operations in the application form;
  - ii. The information provided in the group member list to crosscheck with the group administrator and verify the status for all members;
  - iii. Total farm area, the production area of cattle or crops that are to be sold as certified, as well as other crops, and the area designated for conservation;
  - iv. Total production of the crop in the certification scope: last harvest and to date in the current harvest, or during the last year for those crops with continuous production and harvest (bananas, for example);
  - v. The size of the cattle herd (number of head) for cattle scopes;

- vi. If applicable, the amount of certified product sales from last year for the certified product, and compliance with Rainforest Alliance certified product declarations (transaction certificates) for products with Rainforest Alliance traceability; and
  - vii. For operations that use the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal, documentary evidence that the uses have been approved.
- b) The audit teams shall provide the correct information in the checklist, group member list, and audit report, along with any justification for the differences.
- c) The CB is responsible for updating these revisions in the Certification Database and report any anomaly or difference in sales volumes of approved products or use of the seal within the audit report.

## 6.6 Observations

Field observations are important for crosschecking worker interviews and operation documentation. Observations can be made of activities, such as harvesting and processing conditions, such as the state of the equipment or infrastructure, or to verify the existence of a particular feature, such as confirming the presence of protection zones and conservation areas. Often observations are combined, such as checking the state of protective equipment and how it is used during pesticide applications.

- a) Auditors shall record details of observations in ways that allow the operations to understand the nature of the deficiencies and where they are occurring. Examples of the details include:
- i. Location in the operation, preferably linked to a production lot or plot or infrastructure area;
  - ii. Extent or magnitude of the observation, such as measures of area or distance, number of workers, percentage affected or any other quantitative measure or parameter;
  - iii. Equipment information, such as the number or model of a tractor, the location of a particular conveyor belt, a pesticide backpack sprayer number, or similar;
  - iv. Worker description or positions when this information will not have a negative impact on workers; for example, a specific number of pesticide workers or pickers, equipment operators, and similar; and
  - v. Quantitative and qualitative impact descriptions of the evidence on conformity with the standard, particularly related to environmental and working condition impacts; for example, "severe erosion in 25% of plot 29

with runoff going directly to the river” or “6 out of 20 workers interviewed claimed that they are not paid for working extra hours.”

## 6.7 Interviews

- a) Specific workers or work crews can be chosen by the audit team during the opening meeting. The audit team can choose the workers to interview directly from the payrolls, work rolls or assignment lists, lists from training events or other similar lists or records. The audit team can also choose workers to interview based on the tasks they perform in order to confirm information about pay, training, and related topics in subsequent document reviews. In both cases, the workers would be located in the field or at their work stations for interviews. Conversely, workers can be chosen in the field for interviews. In both cases, the results of interviews can be cross-verified with documentation or later observations.
- b) Under special circumstances, it may be necessary to interview workers or community members off-site during audits, preliminary investigations, or as part of investigation audits. This is particularly true for interviewing union members and representatives or members of local communities. The audit team shall make the effort to arrange these interviews in advance to make the best use of auditor time during the audit. Off-site interviews are best conducted where interviews feel safe and secure, with limited possibilities of being seen by co-workers or operation management.
- c) As mentioned in the section on interview planning, the Rainforest Alliance has the right to set the parameters for interviewing through the 2017 Standard interpretation policies. One example is the requirement for interviewing women in geographic scopes identified as high risk for sexual harassment.

### 6.7.1 Parameters for selecting persons to interview

- a) The audit team shall consider, but not be limited to, the following:
  - i. The number of permanent, temporary and subcontracted workers present during the audit as well as their distribution in different areas and tasks;
  - ii. The number of interviews in the audit plan as described in the section 5.5 - interview planning;
  - iii. Production and processing activities in the operation during the audit;

- iv. The distribution of ages, ethnicity including origin and ethnic group (workers of different origin within the same country, foreigners, indigenous people from different tribes), gender (women and men – by work function), years of experience in the operation, employee status (permanent, temporary, part time workers, workers paid by piece rate), hierarchy level (operations, supervision, management) and the various positions of the available workers;
  - v. The open non-conformities for surveillance and verification audits, or the types of complaints or incidents for investigation audits;
  - vi. The existence of land or resource use concessions, operations with high influxes of seasonal workers, or other conditions that have impacts on the surrounding communities;
  - vii. Criteria or topics of the 2017 Standard identified to be at high risk of non-compliance;
  - viii. Presence or absence of unions or other labor representation or negotiating entities;
  - ix. Existence of committees for matters such as occupational health and safety, working conditions, or empowerment of women; and
  - x. Special factors, such as workers recently returned from sick leave, new employees, migrant or temporary workers, young workers (between 15 and 17 years of age), and pregnant women.
- b) In the audit report, the audit team shall record their justifications for deviating more than 10% from the original number of interviews planned. They shall also note the number of interviews per type of worker (permanent, temporary or subcontracted), gender, and other relevant categories, such as union membership. These data are included in the audit report.
- c) Interview techniques and best practices are explained in the Rainforest Alliance Best Auditing Practices guides. The audit teams shall also observe the following minimum guidelines for interviews:
- i. The auditors shall present themselves to the persons they will interview and explain the purpose and nature of the interview as well as the confidentiality of interviewee identity and responses;
  - ii. The interviews shall be done in the language of the interviewees. If translators are involved, they should be selected to guarantee their independence and the confidentiality of information obtained;
  - iii. The interviewees shall be respected, and condescending, abusive, insulting or otherwise offensive language or tones shall not be used;

- iv. The perspectives of the interviewees shall be respected; the perspectives of all people are valid from their point of view;
  - v. Women auditors shall conduct the interviews of women on gender matters, especially sexual harassment. CBs shall record the reasons for not using female auditors and any compensatory or mitigation measures taken;
  - vi. For formal interviews in groups, the group shall be removed from their work areas and audit teams shall use techniques that promote contributions from all members of the group;
  - vii. Off-site interviews shall take place in places or conditions that ensure the confidentiality and comfort of the interviewees;
  - viii. Information about the interviews and the information obtained shall be recorded, but the details shall not be disclosed to the representatives of the administration in a way that would reveal the identity of the interviewees; and
  - ix. Interviewees shall be thanked for their information and time, and reminded that their names and the information contributed will not be disclosed to operation management.
- d) The audit teams shall remember that workers are not obligated to participate in interviews or provide information beyond answers to the team's questions. It is important that the interviewees feel respected, safe, and that their perspectives and contributions are valid and important.

## 6.8 Analysis of audit findings

- a) When the lead auditor is confident that all of the 2017 Standard criteria and other requirements have been covered, the audit team shall meet and compile evidence and any other relevant information collected during the audit. The audit team shall evaluate the information and make decisions together regarding non-conformities related to the scope of the audit based on the compliance framework described in the 2017 Certification Rules and in the 2017 Standard. The lead auditor shall ensure the quality of the evidence contributed by the audit team and the correct assignment of non-conformities as specified in the 2017 Certification Rules.
- b) The lead auditor shall make decisions regarding non-conformities when the team cannot reach agreement. Non-conformities can be eliminated before the final audit meeting if the audited organization submits evidence of corrective actions implemented.

- c) Audit teams shall record all non-conformities and consolidated evidence in the Audit Checklist to ensure that no 2017 Standard criteria were not audited and to facilitate the recounting of evidence during the closing meeting. CBs can maintain handwritten lists as part of their system documentation, but must make physical or digital copies available to Rainforest Alliance as stipulated in the section on system documentation in the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies.

## 6.9 Closing meeting

- a) The lead auditor conducts the closing meeting of the audit. The audit team participates according to the instructions of the lead auditor. The audit team shall ensure that the following functions and activities are completed during the closing meeting:
  - i. Explain the rest of the certification process and its timeline, and emphasize that the audit team does not make the certification decision;
  - ii. Describe the main findings and the conclusions of the audit so that they are clearly understood by the operation, especially the nature and extent of non-conformities;
  - iii. Auditors shall clearly explain the audited organization each opened nonconformity. They are not allowed to give advice or directions, prescribe practices, or provide instructions to close nonconformities. They may, however, explain in detail the reasons that led to opening the nonconformities;
  - iv. According to the 2017 Certification Rules, operations can demonstrate compliance with open non-conformities by submitting compliance evidence in the 30 days following the closing meeting. This only applies to non-conformities that can be closed through documentation. CBs can charge the operations for additional review. CBs should allow the representatives of the operation to question findings and submit evidence that could lead to modifications of conformity decisions within the time limits established by the audit plan and the CB;
  - v. Allow questions from the operation regarding potential improvements and corrective actions;
  - vi. Complete the closing meeting log, which shall be signed by the participants and the principal representative of the audited operation present during the audit;
  - vii. Obtain and verify any remaining information about the operation;
  - viii. Reiterate the commitment to confidentiality and limitations on the use of the information obtained;

- ix. Indicate that the CB will send the report to the operation for review and approval and that the operation has the right to appeal the certification decision, or to comment on or lodge a complaint about the quality of the audit or the service of the auditors; and thank the operation for its support and collaboration during the audit.
  
- b) Lead auditors shall submit the signed closing meeting log to the CBs, as well as completed checklists, verified information, and all other materials describing or containing compliance evidence. CBs shall maintain copies of this evidence in their files as indicated in the section on system documentation in the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies.

## **7. AUDIT REPORT AND REVIEW**

### **7.1 Reporting timelines**

- a) CBs shall adhere to the following deadlines for the audit and reporting process, and record the dates that each activity began and finished, and to confirm the receipt of documents.
- b) The draft audit report shall be sent to the audited operations as per the table in section 5.1 Certification process timeline rules.
- c) After the operation has reviewed the final audit report, and accept or appeal once they have received the final decision. Once this period has ended, the CB takes the certification decision and completes the process in the Certification Database. The CB generates the public summary report with the corresponding certification status (valid, suspended or cancelled).
- d) Rainforest Alliance can require shorter deadlines in cases of investigation audits for high risk cases. Rainforest Alliance shall communicate shorter deadlines to the CBs carrying out the investigations during the audit planning process.

### **7.2 Checklist for the Draft report**

- a) The lead auditors are responsible for compiling the information from the audit teams, writing the findings and evidence in checklists and drafting the audit reports. This checklist will then be used to automatically create the draft audit report. The lead auditor can request the participation of audit team members, including technical experts, with the approval of CBs. Report authors shall use the current checklist and the audit report template for that type of audit as specified by Rainforest Alliance.

- b) For group certificates, the lead auditor is responsible for completing information in the checklist with verified sample details describing corresponding findings and evidence for each member sample and at the group administrator level, and calculating overall compliance scores.
- c) For verification audits, the authors should update the original checklist and indicate the additional information and the date of the verification audit. For new audit samples, the lead auditor should complete evidence and findings for all criteria. Alteration of templates or the absence of required information will result in rejection of the report. Contributions by technical experts can be appended to the audit report template or uploaded separately if the content does not fit into the normal audit report template.
- d) The checklist and audit report shall include a description of the evidence obtained during the audit so that the reader understands the nature and magnitude of compliance issues. The descriptions of non-conformities shall not disclose costs, competitive or intellectual property information, names of farm employees or any information that could put the health or safety of the employees or operation owners at risk. Photos and copies of documents that support or demonstrate the evidence provided can be annexed to the report, but shall not be made public.
- e) The lead auditors shall ensure that the checklist and audit reports are complete. The mandatory information for all certification and surveillance audit reports are:
  - i. The checklist with the necessary information for the level of the 2017 Standard evaluated;
  - ii. The audit report shall include:
    - o Evidence of compliance and non-compliance for all critical criteria for group administrators and recurring non-conformities for member farms;
    - o The list of open non-conformities, which were closed with the evidence on compliance sent by the operation within the additional 30 days; and
    - o Evidence of open non-conformities for other criteria.
- f) The lead auditor shall send the CB the check list, audit report, list of updated member farms and any evidence obtained during the audit.

### 7.3 Quality review

- a) As indicated in the Rules for the Authorization of Certification Bodies, CBs shall implement a documented review of the quality of all audit reports. CB assigns a

- quality reviewer and sends the draft audit report, checklist and additional evidence provided by the audit team.
- b) The quality reviewer shall consider the following elements according to the requirements of the Rainforest Alliance assurance system:
- i. Correct interpretation of the 2017 Standard criteria for the applicable audit scope;
  - ii. Assignment of non-conformities to the correct 2017 Standard criteria;
  - iii. Review of technical concepts relevant to the production system in the evaluation of the 2017 Standard criteria;
  - iv. Verify that the report does not include the names of the persons interviewed;
  - v. Verify that the evidence for all critical criteria and all non-conformities is described in a manner that is clear, concise, objective and expresses the nature, magnitude and correct technical basis of the non-conformities in relation to the standard;
  - vi. Verify that the conclusions of the report are consistent with the non-conformities reported;
  - vii. Ensure that the auditor verified the information about the operation indicated in the section 6.5 Document review in this document;
  - viii. Verify that the production volumes reported are congruent and realistic in relation to the crop and the number of production hectares;
  - ix. Verify that the sample sizes were correct for group administrator and multi-site audits;
  - x. Verify the correct number and distribution of interviews conducted;
  - xi. Verify that the list of member farms is complete and includes the location coordinates for each farm.
  - xii. Correct spelling and grammar without excessive use of jargon or colloquialisms; and
  - xiii. Compliance with submission deadlines established in this document.
- c) The quality reviewer shall document recommended changes and any comments, observations and suggestions for improvement and send them to the lead auditors.
- d) The reviewer shall evaluate the quality of the report and keep a record for each audit report including aspects to be improved, which will be used for the auditor performance evaluated by the CB and Rainforest Alliance.

- e) CBs shall maintain copies of the original draft audit report and the quality review teams' reports, and incorporate them into quality assurance reviews as indicated in the CBs' quality management systems.
- f) The lead auditor shall modify audit reports based on the comments, observations and suggestions indicated in the quality review. Any conflicts between the audit teams or lead auditors' findings and the recommended changes must be documented and incorporated in the CB's quality management system for eventual reviews.

### 7.3.1 Report review by audited operations

- a) PDF versions of audit reports shall be generated after the quality review process and sent to audited operations for their review and comment. The following responsibilities and rights govern these processes:
  - i. CBs shall have a documented process that documents and responds to operations' comments about or conflicts with audit reports submitted for their review.
  - ii. Audited operations shall review the information about their operations and notify CBs of any discrepancies or inaccuracies.
  - iii. Audited operations shall report to CBs any discrepancies or conflicts with respect to the non-conformities reported in the closing meetings and those described in the audit report. Operations have the right to challenge any new or modified compliance issues recommended by report reviewers or review committees, and to provide evidence to support their claims.
  - iv. Audited operations shall provide a corrective action plan describing root causes and proposed solutions. These do not have to be sent to the CB, but the CB shall have a mechanism to check compliance with the corrective action plan in the next audit.
  - v. CBs shall receive and process any comment, complaint or conflict related to audit reports according to their documented processes.
- b) Audited operations have up to 30 calendar days after the audit closing meeting to provide additional documentation as compliance evidence. The CB shall not accept additional evidence after this date (this shall only be considered as part of a verification audit process).
- c) CBs can consider the audit reports accepted when the operation does not communicate any comments or concerns within the 10-calendar day review period stipulated by CBs. In this case, and when the operation rejects the decisions

regarding the content of the reports despite clear technical justifications by CBs, CBs shall proceed with the certification decision, send the final report to the audited operation, and upload it into the Certification Database.

## 8. CERTIFICATION DECISION

### 8.1 Decision process

- a) CBs shall ensure that all the audited operations comply with all other requirements before issuing a certification decision. The decision shall be made within 10 business days after receiving the acknowledgement of the audit report from the operation (this can be approval or rejection of findings by the operation). This includes the decision made by the committee and the certificate issuance and license. This process could be implemented simultaneously with the preparation and review of the report.
- b) The certification committee that makes the certification decision has the authority to:
  - i. Make the final certification decision;
  - ii. Have the authority to modify the recommendation of the audit team, due to inconsistencies identified in the audit report;
  - iii. Request that the lead auditor clarify or expand any section of the audit report;
  - iv. Dismiss a nonconformity with documented justification, or
  - v. Issue a new nonconformity with documented justification;
  - vi. Review an appeal based on a certification decision.
- c) Certification decision makers shall justify their decisions based on the technical framework of the 2017 Standard, the 2017 Certification Rules and related requirements. If these decisions result in modification of the audit team's findings or decisions, then CBs shall document the certification decision maker's justification for these modifications for review within CB's quality management systems.
- d) CBs shall use mechanisms to communicate certification decisions to audited operations that record the trail and acknowledgement of communications, such as electronic mail (with acknowledgement of receipt) and registered post. All digital letters and reports sent to audited operations shall be in PDF format.
- e) Once the operation is notified of the certification decision, the CB shall complete the milestones in the Engagement record in the Certification Database. CBs shall

upload all audit reports regardless of the certification decision. Registering the report and the decision in the Certification Database allows Rainforest Alliance to include data for the analysis of non-conformities and reasons for certification and for not passing certification. It is also important to record the results to track operations that seek certification with other CBs in the future.

## 8.2 Public Information

- a) After the final decision has been made, CB shall upload the public summary in the Certification Database. Regardless of the certification decision, the public summary is automatically linked to the Rainforest Alliance website, with the exception of operations that failed their first certification audit.
- b) The list of certified farms, groups and Chain of Custody operations along with newly issued and cancelled certificates are published in the Rainforest Alliance website monthly.

## 8.3 Appeals

Audited operations can appeal the certification decisions of CBs according to the Rainforest Alliance Certification Rules, and the procedures established by CBs. CBs must adhere to the following requirements and timeframe in their appeals procedures:

- a) The appeal shall be analyzed by at least two individuals who did not participate in the audit or in the decision-making process related to the certification, who do not have any conflicts of interest related to the operation, and who shall have a level of lead auditor for the specific certification scope.
- b) The CB shall not resolve appeals by changing the certificate scope in order to eliminate a problem in the scope of the certification granted.
- c) The status of an operation that has appealed a certification decision shall be as indicated in the Certification Rules.
- d) CBs shall resolve and communicate the result of any appeal within 30 calendar days. The CB shall record the appeal date in the Certificate Database and update the sub-status to an appeal process.
- e) CBs shall indicate in their appeal procedure any associated fees.
- f) CBs shall maintain records of appeal processes that include the dates that appeals are received, decided, and communicated to audited operations, as well as the nature of the appeal and the decision made. These records shall be made available to Rainforest Alliance upon request.

- g) Only in the case where the audited operation is not satisfied with the result of the appeal process with the CB, the CBs shall communicate that they may appeal to Rainforest Alliance within five business days of the original appeal decision. The Rainforest Alliance appeal process will adhere to the same scope and requirements as described in this section. All decisions by Rainforest Alliance are final.
- h) The CB shall inform the operation the result of its appeal process. If an operation's appeal is accepted, the CB shall modify the original audit report to reflect the new certification decision and upload the new report into the Certification Database. If the appeal is not accepted, the certificate status is cancelled.

#### 8.4 Issuing the Certificate

- a) CBs shall issue certificates only after operations have successfully passed certification audits, or have successfully passed verification audits after failing certification audits. CBs shall also reissue certificates for:
  - i. Operations that have undergone scope expansion audits that necessitate changes in the certificate;
  - ii. Operations that have changed their legal or commercial name; or
  - iii. Operations that have transferred to the CB, but only after the next programmed audit and a positive certification decision.
- b) In these cases, the certification decision date and certificate expiry date will not change.
- c) All certificates have a validity of 36 months from the date of the certification decision. When operations undergo verification audits after their first certification audit, the certification decision date corresponds to the decision date for the verification audit
- d) The status of the certification is subject to the results of subsequent audits and operation compliance with the 2017 Certification Rules and related requirements.
- e) The certificates issued by CBs shall include the following:
  - i. The Rainforest Alliance Certified™ trademark in accordance with the *Requirements and Guidelines for Use of the Rainforest Alliance Trademarks*.
  - ii. The registered trademark of the CB and its contact information;
  - iii. The legal name and, if necessary, the trade name of the certified organization;
  - iv. The location of the certified operation;

- v. A statement of conformity and the names of the Rainforest Alliance standards that were used as a reference;
- vi. The effective date of the certification and its expiration date;
- vii. The Level of Compliance achieved (Level C, Level B or Level A).
- viii. The unique certificate code number is generated by the Certification Database, corresponding to each successful certification audit.

## 8.5 Exceptions

- a) The CB will evaluate each application for exceptions received from a certified operation and validate whether to accept the exception. The CB can analyze if the exception is applicable for the following:
  - i. Compliance with a criterion
  - ii. Certificate or audit date extension
  - iii. Volume change
  - iv. First measure conditions: Extraordinary event or circumstance that is beyond the organization's control, and that prevents it from complying with these rules and Rainforest Alliance Certification Rules. This includes risks beyond the control of the organization, incurred not as a product or result of negligence or malfeasance. Rainforest Alliance will approve the exception if applicable. These exceptions are valid until the next revision process for these rules.

## 8.6 Volume Statement

- a) The CB shall issue a statement every 12-month period from the certification decision date that includes:
  - i. The type(s) of product(s) included in the scope of the certificate and the corresponding volume approved for the certified harvest;
  - ii. Operations can share the information in this statement with their buyers to have a confirmation of the volume approved for each corresponding harvest.

## Annex 1: Registration of Verification Audits

The procedure that CBs must follow to register the checklist from a verification audit in the Certification Database is as follows:

- a) CBs do not generate a new checklist for a verification process; the previous audit report with the no pass results shall be used with follow-up on the non-conformities detected in that audit.
- b) The certification or surveillance checklist needs to be modified to a Verification Audit type and the relevant non-conformities closed.
- c) CBs that have had the checklist subjected to the quality review and the checklist is ready to be uploaded to the audit report, shall submit it via the helpdesk or in an email to [sas@ra.org](mailto:sas@ra.org).
- d) The Rainforest Alliance will fix the coding for the updated verification audit and the CB will receive a modified file to upload into the audit report and submit results in the Engagement Record for the verification process.
- e) A new Engagement type: A verification audit must be created and the Audit Report needs to be generated from that record to upload the fixed checklist that CBs will receive back from the Rainforest Alliance.

## **Annex 2: Requirements to evaluate the Member Farm List**

The CB is responsible for verifying that the information included in the list of group members complies with the following:

- a) All fields are completed and the organization is contacted when there is missing information to be completed.
- b) The active, suspended or cancelled status of each member farm is updated annually.
- c) The CB must upload the list of member farms in the Certification Database.
- d) The CB must update the list of member farms in the Certification Database when the Group Administrator informs that they have decided to withdraw or suspend a member.