



Preferred by Nature
Certification Procedures

This document describes conditions for trademark use and for granting, extending, suspending and withdrawing of certification under each of the schemes that we work with.

Visit the relevant [service page](#) to learn more about the conditions applying to a specific scheme or service.

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1 Systems ownership and accreditation

Below is concise information about the schemes behind our certification services. Ownership and accreditation vary across these services.

For example, we own and develop two of the schemes that we work with, whilst the remaining schemes are owned by multi-stakeholder organisations.

Table 1: System Ownership & Accreditation

Scheme	Owner	Accreditation
FSC™	Forest Stewardship Council™	<p>We hold accreditation for FSC Forest Management and FSC Chain of Custody certification.</p> <p>The following subcontracted organisations provide outsourced services for our FSC accredited certification programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> China Standard Conformity Assessment Co., Ltd (CSCA) – FSC Chain of Custody and FSC Forest Management services
PEFC	Programme for Endorsement of Certification Schemes	We hold accreditation for PEFC Chain of Custody certification worldwide. We're also accredited for PEFC Forest Management certification in Denmark and Russia.
LegalSource™	Preferred by Nature	We deliver certification services under our own scheme.
SBP	Sustainable Biomass Program	We are accredited to provide SBP certification to biomass producers and supply chain worldwide.
UTZ Core Code of Conduct	UTZ	We are accredited to provide UTZ Code of Conduct Certification for Cocoa, Coffee and Tea
Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture and Chain of Custody	Rainforest Alliance	<p>We are accredited to provide Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture (RA SAS Farm) and Chain of Custody (CoC) certification.</p> <p>The following subcontracted organisations provide outsourced services for our Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture</p>

		Standard (RA SAS) accredited certification programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSI Group Japan K.K. – RA SAS Chain of Custody only • China Standard Conformity Assessment Co., Ltd (CSCA)
CFM	Preferred by Nature	We deliver Carbon Footprint Management (CFM) certification services under our own scheme.
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil	We hold accreditation for RSPO Supply Chain certification in all countries, excluding China.
Sustainable Tourism Certification	Preferred by Nature	We deliver sustainable tourism certification for hotels and accommodation services, and for tour operators under our Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) - recognised scheme.

2 Earning certification

For all schemes, a thorough assessment of the operation's compliance with the certification requirements forms the basis for granting certification. In most cases, this entails an on-site visit.

The certification process

The certification process typically follows the steps outlined below. To find a more detailed description of the certification process for each type of service, go to the relevant [service pages](#).

1

Scope clarification and Certification agreement: During our initial dialogue, we clarify which product lines, facilities and processes that need to be covered by your certification. This forms the basis for our service proposal and the Certification Agreement that you enter with us. Click here to see the Certification Agreement template.

2

Pre-assessment: This is optional in most cases, but mandatory for certain types of FSC forest operations. For some types of certification, pre-assessment is rarely used.

3

Public stakeholder consultation: This step only applies to forest certification assessments and SBP certification of biomass producers. Public consultation must be announced to relevant stakeholders 6 weeks ahead of the on-site evaluation for FSC certification (Forest management or Chain of Custody/Controlled Wood), one month ahead of the on-site visit for the SBP certification of biomass producers and may be required 30 days ahead of the on-site visit for PEFC forest certification, depending on the national PEFC scheme.

4

Client preparation: You prepare for certification by ensuring compliance with all relevant certification requirements. Please note that we do not provide consultancy or help you prepare for your certification.

5

Assessment: Your conformance with all relevant requirements is assessed. In most cases, this is done as an on-site visit to verify your conformance with the relevant standard (s). This normally includes a tour of your facilities, including farm or forestry operations, document reviews and interviews to staff and other relevant parties. Desk audits are acceptable in certain cases.

6

Report: We prepare an evaluation report including all findings, outlining any non-conformities.

7

Certification: You receive a certificate based on a positive evaluation result.

Conditions for granting certification

Each scheme has its own rules regarding the level of conformance required for certification. Below is a concise overview of the conditions applying to assessments and re-assessments.

Table 2: Conditions for granting certification

Requirement	FSC FM	FSC CoC	FSC CW	PEFC FM	PEFC CoC	UTZ	RA SAS CoC	RA SAS Farm	LS	CFM	SBP	RSPO SCC	RSPO P&C	Tourism
Public stakeholder consultation prior to the on-site visit	X		X	X							X ³		X	

Requirement	FSC FM	FSC CoC	FSC CW	PEFC FM	PEFC CoC	UTZ	RA SAS CoC	RA SAS Farm	LS	CFM	SBP	RSPO SCC	RSPO P&C	Tourism
Pre-assessment mandatory under certain conditions	X			X ¹										
On-site assessment	X	X ²	X	X	X	X ²	X ²	X ²	X ²	X	X ²	X	X	X
No open major/critical non-conformities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X ⁴	X	X
No open minor non-conformities				X ¹	X	X						N/A		
You have signed all agreements and paid all costs/fees.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

1. This may apply, depending on the rules of the individual national PEFC scheme.
2. On-site assessment is often required, however desk-based evaluations may be acceptable in some cases.
3. Only for biomass producers.
4. There is no official grading for non-conformities under RSPO. Any non-conformities raised during the assessments needs to be addressed within 3 months otherwise a new assessment is required. Therefore, within this table which classifies minor and major non-conformities, non-conformities in RSPO are considered as major non-conformities.

3 Maintaining certification

Your certificate is normally valid for a period of 5 years; however, PEFC FM, Sustainable Tourism and Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture and CoC certificates have a validity period of 3 years. UTZ Certificates are valid for 365 days.

During the validity period, you need to undergo annual audits where we verify your continued compliance. The annual audits will focus on any weaknesses identified during previous evaluations and on your fulfilment of the certification requirements. For Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture certification, the risk related to the organisation affects the frequency of the annual RA SAS CoC audits; and additional annual audits may be unannounced or on short-notice for both RA SAS Farm and CoC. For UTZ Certificate Holders are subject to Surprise audits to ensure continued compliance.

Preferred by Nature and/or the scheme owner may conduct additional audits without announcements, for example if we have reason to suspect a major breach of the certification rules. We may also carry out random spot audits.

In between audits, you need to notify us about any important changes in your organisation. The certification scope - i.e. the products, processes and company facilities covered by your certificate - can only be changed by formal agreement.

Addressing non-conformities

In the certification report, any lack of compliance is listed as a non-conformity (NC). NCs are classified as minor or major. You must address each NC by the specified deadline.

- **Minor NCs:** You will normally need to ensure compliance by the next annual audit. If you have not addressed the issue adequately, minor NCs are by default upgraded to major NCs in the FSC, PEFC, LegalSource, SBP, RSPO P&C and CFM certification systems. For Rainforest Alliance CoC certification, the auditor may decide to upgrade NCs which have not been properly addressed by the specified deadline, and for Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture certification you will need to ensure compliance with Rules for Continuous Improvement Criteria. For Sustainable Tourism certification minor NCs will generally remain minor (but lead to score penalty). However, in specific cases the auditor may decide to upgrade NCs if they represent a credibility risk.
- **Major NCs (or critical NCs for RA SAS Farm):** The typical deadline for addressing a major NC is three months for FSC, PEFC, LegalSource, SBP, RSPO P&C, CFM and Sustainable Tourism certification and four months for Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture certification¹ and one month for RSPO. In some cases, deadlines may be shorter. To verify your timely compliance we will conduct an additional audit, which implies extra cost. Non-compliance with major NCs by the specified timeline will lead to immediate suspension of the certificate (FSC and SBP certification) or directly to termination of your certification (Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture and CoC, and Sustainable Tourism certification).
- For UTZ, Certificate Holders must identify root-cause, implement corrections and corrective actions to fully address all non-conformities issued and must be closed within 12 weeks after the closing meeting and depending on its severity, can be verified through a desk audit or additional on-site audit

Note: Many of our clients report that the process of addressing NCs ultimately helps them to improve their overall management performance and efficiency and to reach their own objectives.

¹ For Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture certification, a verification audit and its certification decision must be conducted within 120 days from the suspension notice. Other requirements apply when nonconformities in zero tolerance critical criteria are identified.

Re-certification

After completing a full certificate validity period, you need to undergo re-assessment - a new full assessment - in order to stay certified.

If the result of the re-assessment is positive, a new certificate issued including the same certificate registration code as in your previous certificate.

Certificate suspension

Your FSC, PEFC, LegalSource, SBP and CFM, UTZ, RSPO, RA SAS Farm, or Sustainable Tourism certificate may be suspended for reasons listed in the table below.

You are always notified in written about the suspension decision. After your certificate has been suspended, you may not make any claims regarding your conformance with the certification standard(s) and may not sell previously labelled products until certification trademarks are removed.

A suspended certificate may be reinstated when you have addressed the issues that led to the suspension, and we have conducted an audit verifying your compliance within the required timeline.

Note: In the situations No.2 and 3 under FSC, SBP and RSPO P&C certification schemes, we are obliged to suspend the certificate immediately, i.e. within 10 calendar days after the decision is taken, but not later than 30 days after the audit closing meeting (situation 2) or 10 calendar days after the deadline of the non-addressed non-conformity (situation 3). Immediate suspension is also applicable to LegalSource and RSPO SCC in other situations:

- LegalSource certification will be suspended immediately if there is evidence of illegal timber being placed on the market.
- Where objective evidence indicates that there has been a demonstrable breakdown in the supply chain caused by the certified client's actions or inactions, and that oil palm products have been or are about to be shipped which are falsely identified as RSPO certified product, the RSPO Supply Chain Certification will be suspended immediately until such time that the situation has been addressed.
- RSPO P&C certificate will be suspended immediately if a major NCR repeats within certification cycle.
- Suspension of UTZ Code of Conduct Certificate is for a period not exceeding 3 months

Table 3: Situations leading to suspension of certificate

No.	Situations leading to suspension of the certificate	FSC FM	FSC CoC	FSC CW	PEFC FM	PEFC CoC	UTZ	RA SAS CoC	RA SAS Farm	LS	CFM	SBP	RSPO SCC	RSPO P&C	Tourism
1	One or more NCs ¹ against Critical Criteria are found during an audit							X	X						
2	Five or more major NCs are found during an annual audit	X	X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	X		X		
3	Failure to address one or more major/critical NCs by the specified timeline	X	X	X	N/A	N/A	X	N/A	X	N/A	X	X	X	X	
4	Serious breaches of the certification requirements	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
5	Lack of payment of applicable fees and invoices	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
6	Lack of willingness to plan and undergo scheduled audits	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
7	Force Majeure situation ²							X						X	

1. NCs: non-conformities.

2. E.g. natural disasters that affect the destination, political unrest that forces to operation shut down, etc.

4 Certificate termination

You are always notified in written about the termination decision. After your certificate has been terminated, you may not make any claims regarding your conformance with the certification standard(s) and may not sell previously labelled products until certification trademarks are removed.

If your certificate has been terminated, you are required to undergo renewed assessment in order to have a new certificate issued. It is not possible to reinstate the previous certificate. For RA SAS, certificate holders have the rights to appeal and during this period the certificate is reactivated (reinstated) until final decision on appeal is made. Your certificate may be withdrawn for the reasons indicated in the table below.

Table 4: Situations leading to termination of the certificate

Situations leading to termination of the certificate	FSC FM	FSC CoC	FSC CW	PEFC FM	PEFC CoC	UTZ	RA SAS	LS	CFM	SBP	RSPO	Tourism
Failure to sufficiently address the issues leading to suspension within the suspension period	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Failure to undergo renewed assessment within the suspension period after addressing the issues leading to suspension	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Failure to address one or more major NCs by the specified timeline							X				X	
Failure to comply with one or more zero-tolerance critical criteria							X					
Deliberate fraud or very serious breaches of the certification requirements	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Failure to undergo renewed assessment prior to certificate expiration	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Failure to undergo reassessment once the suspension period has reached its deadline							X					X

Changing the scope of the certificate

As a certificate holder, you may expand or change the scope of your certification in conjunction with your annual audit or in between audits. For all schemes and services, the following conditions apply:

You need to notify Preferred by Nature in any of the following situations which may require formal changes in the scope of your certificate:

- Additional product lines which you wish to sell as certified.
- Use of new types of inputs not covered by your current scope of certification.
- Changes in the system used for controlling claims. (Not applicable to UTZ Code of Conduct Certification)
- Expansion or removal of sites or production area covered by the certificate.

An additional audit is normally required for scope changes outside the scheduled annual/Certification audits. Depending on the nature of the change, the audit may be conducted as an on-site or desk audit.

5 Labels, claims and trademarks

Each of the schemes we work with offer certificate holders the opportunity to use the systems' trademarks, labels and certification claims.

As a certificate holder, you need to observe the rules of logo and trademark use. It is part of our auditing procedures to verify that you are in compliance with these rules, unless you are not using trademarks at all. Not applicable to UTZ Code of Conduct Certification.

Below is a concise overview of the trademark usage conditions applying to each scheme:

Table 5: Requirements for using the system's trademarks

Requirements for using the system's trademarks	FSC FM	FSC CoC	FSC CW	PEFC FM	PEFC CoC	RA SAS	LS	CFM	SBP	RSPO	Tourism
Formal approval by Preferred by Nature	X	X				X	X			X	X
Formal approval by the Rainforest Alliance						X					
Off-product and on-product use possible	X	X	X	X	X	X	X ¹		X		
Only off-product use allowed							X ¹	X		X	X
Only business-to-business claims allowed											

Requirements for using the system's trademarks	FSC FM	FSC CoC	FSC CW	PEFC FM	PEFC CoC	RA SAS	LS	CFM	SBP	RSPO	Tourism
A trademark license agreement is signed with FSC	X	X									
A trademark license agreement is signed with SBP								X			
A trademark license agreement is signed with PEFC National Governing Body			X	X							
A trademark license is signed with the Rainforest Alliance					X	X				X	X
A trademark licence is signed with RSPO									X		
No license agreement required							X				

1. CFM on-product labelling is only permitted for CFM product certification.

RAC Seal for agriculture products are approved by RA. RAC Seal for forestry products are approved by Preferred by Nature.

About us

Preferred by Nature (formerly NEPCo) is an international non-profit organisation working to support better land management and business practices that benefit people, nature and the climate. We do this through a unique combination of sustainability certification services, projects supporting awareness raising, and capacity building.

For more than 25 years, we have worked to develop practical solutions to drive positive impacts in production landscapes and supply chains in 100+ countries. We focus on land use, primarily through forest, agriculture and climate impact commodities, and related sectors such as tourism and conservation. Learn more at www.preferredbynature.org

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