Sustainability Framework Verification
Verification of sustainable land management

Sustainability has become increasingly critical for organisations to remain relevant and competitive in today's world. Embedding it in land use management is unavoidable and essential to meet evolving investor pressure, consumer demand and regulatory requirements. However, businesses today need a solid basis for their claims about their green aspirations to gain the market's trust and build their reputation.

Despite the availability of numerous instruments to enhance production procedures, the market lacked a universal framework with clear indicators any organisation can use, regardless of their position in the supply chain. To address this gap, we have developed a **universal set of principles and criteria** that represent the core aspects of sustainability across all commodities and supply chains.

Sustainability Framework and related standards & services can be used by **land managers** and **manufacturers** of **forest or agricultural commodities** and products seeking to achieve sustainability in

their production or sourcing and demonstrate their green impacts to the demanding markets. It is a **comprehensive verification solution** for sustainable land use management, but also adding the ability to **link producers with consumer markets** and pass on verification claims.

The Framework is supported by **standards** with requirements for quality management, traceability and carbon footprint compensation. Companies that meet all relevant requirements of the Sustainability Framework Programme may use the **Preferred by Nature seal** and make on- and off-product claims.

"Our experienced team has spent nearly a decade developing the Sustainability Framework, an innovative universal solution suitable for both large and small companies seriously committed to sustainable land management practices. It can be tailored to each commodity, enabling relevant and focused applications."

Christian Sloth
Sustainability Framework Programme Expert

Verification process in brief

Submit documents

First, you need to submit information about your organisation and the scope applied for certification. A proposal will be sent to you based on the information shared. Once the proposal is approved, the Certification Agreement with Preferred by Nature will need to be signed.

Prepare for the audit

The next step is your preparation. You need to get ready for the audit process by ensuring compliance with the Sustainability Framework and associated requirements.

On-site audit

The verification of land-use practices is normally done onsite. Document review, interviews with key staff and workers, traceability analysis and a visit to the organisation's field and facilities are common activities carried out within an on-site evaluation process.

Reporting and certification

Subsequent to the on-site work, the auditor will prepare an audit report, which will be shared with the organisation under evaluation, prior to a final decision. If the conclusion is positive, a certificate of conformance will be issued.

Ready to get started?
Click here to
learn more
arrange verification

Preferred by Nature is an international non-profit organisation working with farmers, foresters, businesses, NGOs and governments to support better land management and business practices that benefit people, nature and the climate in more than **100 countries**.

For **nearly 30 years**, we have worked to develop practical solutions to drive positive impacts in production landscapes and supply chains. We do this through innovative projects, capacity building and sustainability services. Much of our work focuses on land-use supply chains, where we see the most room for positive change.

Trust well-established certification expertise

As an ISEAL Alliance subscriber, we are dedicated to developing reliable social and environmental standards. With our expertise in performing **5000+ audits annually** worldwide, we are actively engaged with eco-labelling schemes to advocate for ongoing improvement and increase the credibility and impact on the ground. For instance, we participate in the development of certification systems, such as the Forest Stewardship Council™ (FSC™) or Sustainable Biomass Program (SBP), are active in networks such as Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) and contribute to key global discussions at conferences and meetings around the world. Besides our own solutions, we offer a good choice of certification services through well-known programmes.

Services tailored to industry needs

Our experts can assist you every step of the way. Our tailored services give companies the support, tools and data they need to meet their sustainability goals and span the whole supply chain - from production to consumption - and can be applied to all commodities. They include benchmarking policies, due diligence support, risk assessment and mitigation, policy development, training and IT & traceability solutions.

We work with the leading sustainability certification schemes, including FSC™ and Rainforest Alliance programmes.

85+ million hectares of certified forest land

2+ million hectares of certified farms

800,000+ certified farmers and foresters

Sustainability Framework requirements

They are centred around **four principles** related to core sustainability aspects:
1. Management and business practices,
2. People's well-being, including workers' rights, communities and indigenous peoples, 3. Nature and the environment, 4. Climate impacts. Each principle contains several criteria, each specifying the indicators needed for verifying performance.

Sustainability Framework sustainable land management verification. Q&As

Who can earn verification against the Sustainability Framework?

The Sustainability Framework Programme contains requirements applicable to different types of entities, both **farms** and **forests**. The Framework can be used for **different commodities** and can also be used for verifying the sustainability of intercropping systems, such as combinations of shade trees for coffee production. When necessary, Preferred by Nature will tailor and **adapt** the Framework to fit the specific detailed reality of each type of commodity to offer relevant and focused application.

What claims can I make when I am verified?

Companies that have been verified to meet **all applicable requirements** of the Sustainability Framework can **make claims** about compliance with the Framework, including using **the Preferred by Nature logo**. Such compliance claims can be made to buyers and publicly in general, for example, on the company's homepage or through other media. However, compliance claims and the use of the Preferred by Nature logo are not allowed on the products.

For **on-product claims**, Preferred by Nature has developed a dedicated **sustainability seal** featuring our hummingbird logo and language related to people, nature and climate. The on-product seal is allowed to be used only on products for which the **carbon footprint of the entire product has been compensated**. It can also be used in promotional materials related to the products, such as product brochures.

The use of the on-product seal is normally most relevant for final products that will be purchased by the final consumers. Thus, in many cases, the carbon compensation would be done by organisations closer to the consumer market, for example, companies that prepare the final product. Land managers may thus choose to use and sell their products only with the compliance claim or alternatively compensate for the product's climate footprint and use the Preferred by Nature hummingbird seal.

What if I already hold certification from another sustainability certification scheme?

Within the Sustainability Framework Programme, we offer **add-on verification**. Where products are already certified to the existing schemes, we can integrate any **missing aspects** from the Sustainability Framework Standard into the regular audits to minimise duplication, maximise the efficiency of the process and ensure cost savings.

It means that the additional areas can be verified in combination with other certification scheme audits and that you will not have to be audited twice for the same issues.

What does it cost?

The cost of verification depends on the scale and complexity of operations and the existing certifications. It will be calculated based on the expected level of effort and travel of the auditors needed for the given verification scope related to the product(s), production area, total area, geographic location and the number of farms & facilities (such as processing units) included in the scope. Other costs related to auditing include time costs for administrative staff, technical experts or translators and associated expenses related to the audit, e.g. travel and accommodation expenses.

How do I maintain my certificate?

After obtaining the Preferred by Nature verification certificate, you are subject to **annual audits** for the **five-year certificate validity**. After this period, if your company wants to extend the certification status, a new certification audit is needed. The verification process will vary depending on the size and complexity of the operations under evaluation. Generally, we conduct an initial assessment as the basis for issuing a certificate of conformance. Subsequently, you need to undergo annual audits to maintain the certificate.

What about impartiality and confidentiality?

Preferred by Nature's Quality Management System includes several policies that allow our organisation to provide assurance services credibly in compliance with accreditation requirements. These include the Impartiality Policy, which ensures impartiality, transparency and independence in all of our activities, and the Confidentiality Policy, describing our rigorous approach to safeguarding confidential data and information provided by our clients.

What is the procedure for complaints and appeals?

Disputes are divided into two broad categories: complaints and appeals. All complaints and appeals will be processed using the Preferred by Nature's Dispute Resolution Policy for complaints management.

FSC™ A000535 | FSC-accredited certification body

We support businesses and affected stakeholders in complying with EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

Since the proposal for this regulation was announced in November 2021, Preferred by Nature has been following the development process closely. The Sustainability Framework has been revised and benchmarked against the EUDR to ensure that the requirements align with the obligations imposed by the legislation. Products originating from the Sustainability Framework verified farms or forests, with the necessary information on the origin, can therefore be used as a **strong tool** in providing buyers in the EU with all the relevant information and verification of all requirements included in the regulation.

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