

PROCEDURE FOR COMPANY CERTIFICATION

RSPO Certification Systems



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Summary

This presentation details the process which companies wishing to achieve the RSPO certification of their Principles and Criteria should undergo, as well as the requirements with which organizations wishing to become RSPO certification bodies must comply.



Introduction

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is a global, multi-stakeholder initiative, whose Principles and Criteria were adopted in 2005. Its members and participants come from very diverse backgrounds, including plantations, manufacturers and traders of palm oil products, and social and environmental non-governmental organizations from many countries which produce or consume palm oil. The principle objective of the RSPO is to promote the growth and use of sustainable palm oil, through cooperation within the supply chain and open dialogue between its stakeholders.

No public claims relating to compliance with the RSPO Principles and Criteria can be made without third party certification and authorization by the RSPO.



RSPO certification standards

The RSPO certification standards are as follows:

1. Sustainable production of palm oil

Sustainable palm oil production is understood as that which is legal, economically viable, environmentally appropriate and socially beneficial. All this is delivered through the application of the RSPO Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production and the accompanying Indicators and Guides.

2. Supply chain requirements for the production of sustainable palm oil

Palm oil material may pass through many production and logistical stages between the grower and the product.

Any remaining palm oil can be traded through one of three supply chain mechanisms that are approved by the RSPO.

Accreditation of third party certification bodies

1. Certification must be undertaken by a body that conforms to RSPO requirements. Individuals cannot be approved as certification bodies.
2. The RSPO will use a mechanism for the approval of certification bodies based on the accreditation against ISO/IEC Guide 65 and/or ISO/IEC Guide 66.
3. Certification bodies must be accredited by national or international accreditation bodies, so that their organization, systems and procedures conform to the aforementioned Guide 65 and/or Guide 66.
4. The accreditation body itself must operate in accordance with the requirements of ISO 17011. This must be demonstrated either as a signatory to the appropriate International Accreditation Forum Multilateral Recognition Arrangement or through full membership of the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling Alliance.
5. The RSPO requires accreditation bodies to notify it if a complaint is received from any RSPO stakeholder, within their remit or the result of any ac-

creditation procedure. Guide 17011 requires that accreditation bodies handle complaints within 60 days.

6. In order to provide the technical rigor and the credibility required for a sector-specific approach, like the RSPO Principles and Criteria, which includes many requirements based on performance and related to social and environmental criteria, the RSPO has supplemented the requirements of Guide 65 or Guide 66 with a set of certification process requirements.
7. The certification body must demonstrate to the RSPO, through the submission of an annual report, that its accreditation systems include all the incumbent requirements.

Competence of the assessment teams

The certification body should set the minimum level of competency of the assessors and requirements of the evaluation team. As a minimum, these must be compatible with ISO 19011/2002 "Guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems auditing", with modifications to take into account the specific needs of oil palm and chain of custody evaluation.

Procedures for certification assessments against the RSPO Criteria must require that teams have the proven experience necessary to address all of the RSPO Criteria, in terms of a specific assessment of the legal, technical, environmental and social issues, and that teams include members who are proficient in the languages of the potential stakeholders, including local communities. As a minimum, the leader auditors should have:

- University qualifications in agriculture, environmental science or social sciences.
- At least five years professional experience in an area of work relevant to the audit (for example, palm oil, agricultural management, ecology, social sciences).
- Training in the practical application of the RSPO Criteria and RSPO certification systems.
- Successful completion of an ISO 9000/19011 course.

- A supervised training period in practical auditing against the RSPO Criteria or similar sustainability standards, with a minimum of 15 days auditing experience in at least three different organizations.

Currently there are nine accredited certification bodies: Control Union, SGS, BSI, Sirim QAS, PT Mutuagung, PT TÜV Nord, IBD, SAI Global, and PT Sucofindo. A small number of other organizations are in the process of accreditation. Unlike many other bodies, the RSPO does not charge for accreditation. The RSPO talks about sustainable practices and this does not mean increasing operating costs. If the RSPO were to charge, it would be transferring a cost to producers.

Audit process

Once a company that wishes to be certified has chosen a certification body to perform the audit, the RSPO does not interfere. However, it is indispensable that the following steps are taken:

a. A public announcement

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Which must remain on the website of the company (if it has one) and of the RSPO for a minimum of 30 days prior to the assessment. This announcement is prepared by the certification body in a special format with

appropriate language. It must include relevant information for interested parties, such as details about the organization or organizations to be assessed, the location of the organization(s), assessment dates, and contact details for the company and the certification body. The announcement should also encourage interested parties to give their opinion to the certification body. The certification body should send the announcement to the RSPO Secretariat so that it can be published on the latter's own website.

In the case of unforeseen events (such as bad weather), the assessment dates can be changed. However, in no case may the assessment take place before thirty days have elapsed since the publication of the aforementioned announcement.

In addition, the certification body must send detailed information to communities located on and adjacent to the plantations concerned, to the relevant departments of the company, and also to local and national NGOs. This is intended to ensure that all potential actors are informed of the process, so that they can present any legitimate complaint during the auditing process. If such spaces for such participation are not generated in good time, this can cause a serious problem later.

The certification body collects all comments which arise during this stage and will know how to act should anonymous comments be received regarding a particular audit, having received training about this eventuality. It is worth emphasizing the importance of feedback from all the actors involved, in particular producers, who are those most familiar with the issues of environmental protection in the plantations and in the processing plants, biodiversity conservation, and social issues such as housing and support for education.

It is crucial to have a clear idea of how the company being assessed is seen by local communities. Such a perspective is provided by those who have lived in these communities for many years, through comments about the type of relation that they have with the company, the participation of community representatives in decisions which affect them or about the company, the plantation, the processing plant, and so on.

b. Audit and audit report

Fundamentally, an RSPO audit is divided into three parts:

The first considers the auditing plan, logistical issues, documentation, legal compliance, and analysis of the responses from interested parties.

Many of these steps can be performed from an office, yet for the second part of the audit a visit to each of the plantations, farms and plants involved is obligatory. In other words, there can be no sampling.

Similarly, it is necessary to visit all the communities located within and near the plantation in order to perform group or individual interviews, a summary of which must be presented by the certifying body to the



RSPO Secretariat in the final audit report. The report must also include other information on the scope of the certification assessment, which national interpretation was used, and on the relevant GPS coordinates, address, province and region.

In the case of Colombia, for example, the certification body would not only have to send the map of the country with the exact location of the audited sites, but also precise information about the region, local communities, nearby towns, description of the supply base, sources, and volumes of the fruit, other certifications that the assessed company has, information about the organization, contact person, the planned schedule for the certification, and so on.

In the public summary of the report, the certification body should annex commentaries about the evaluation process, information about the certification body itself, and the qualifications of the leader of the assessment team. The certifying body does not necessarily need to employ an auditor who complies with RSPO requirements on a permanent basis, but it must have such a person working at the time that the audit is performed.

Post-certification inspection visits must be performed on an annual basis, and the report should specify the dates of the next inspection. Generally, this should be 12 months from the certification date, after which a formal session of the assessment findings with the participation of the certification body and the certified company.

The third part of the report must include a summary of the findings regarding all the RSPO Criteria and effective evidence to indicate how the decision was taken to award conformity or non-conformity. There must be detailed analysis for each of the Criteria. In case of non-conformities arising, the information should be even more detailed, including what was identified, what the corrective actions would be, and what the auditors' conclusions were.

The third part should also include positive comments, points raised by stakeholders and responses to each one, recognition of internal responsibility, and so on.

The elements of the third section form part of the public summary report, but the RSPO Secretariat

may request the complete report. In this case, once the Secretariat receives the complete report, it will present it for consideration to two groups of experts, one made up of independent third parties and the other of audit revisers, including members of the RSPO board with experience in agriculture and social and environmental impacts.

When the technical rigor procedures have been completed, the panel of audit revisers will give, through the Secretariat, the certification to the board so that the company is certified. The company in turn informs the certification body so that it can proceed. It is frequently found that the certification body has to return to the company to collect detailed information.

Audit experiences

In countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, which may be of interest for Colombia, the certification unit is basically the processing plant and its supply base, and the fruit, which can originate from the company's own lands or from small producers, whether associated or not to the plant.

In Indonesia, for example, the company supports small farmers in the management of their crops and buys the fruit from them. In Papua New Guinea, certain rental mechanisms exist, sometimes for a minimum of five years, and there is also geographical association, due to that the fact that there are no other processing plants nearby. In such circumstances, small farmers are considered associates, so that when the certification body performs the audit they can be certified at the same time but under the national interpretation.

When there is resounding evidence for small farmers to be considered as associates, the best course is to certify them at the same time as the plantation. If this is not done, and supposing that small producers supply 20% of processing plant's fruit, then only 80% of the plant's production is certified. The certification can be performed at the same time as the audit or three years after the company's initial certification. In the latter case, only the percentage of the product which comes from the audited company's own plantation is certified. The company can use the three-year period to work with its small suppliers in the correct application of the RSPO Criteria.

Independent producers, who may sell fruit to one processing plant today and to another tomorrow, should choose different certification mechanisms.

It is worth clarifying that the whole certification process is related to palm oil. For example, if a plantation handles other products such as cacao and rubber, the auditor will not check whether these are subject to good agricultural management practices or not.

Another point refers to large organizations. Those which have more than one handling unit or which

possess a variety of processing plants, for example in Malaysia, Indonesia, and West Africa, can only request certification of individual handling units or subsidiary companies if they comply with the following three conditions: a) they are members of the RSPO; b) they establish a schedule, which will be reviewed by the certification body, for all their relevant units to achieve certification; c) they are not involved in significant land conflicts, replacement of primary forests, or unresolved labor disputes, and do not show evidence of legal violations in one or more of their uncertified units.