



# Farm Sustainability Assessment

## Benchmark Methodology

Version 1.1 Released March 2019

### 1. Introduction

SAI Platform created the Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) as a tool to qualitatively assess the level of sustainability on farm. The intention of FSA is to support the identification of hot spots and best practises, as well as the creation of support for farmers who wish to improve the sustainability of their farms.

FSA can be used in several ways (see [www.fsatool.com](http://www.fsatool.com) for more information), and a key use is as a reference for benchmarking existing standards and codes. This document describes the methodology for benchmarking SAI Platform Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) against:

- Company sustainability codes,
- Private and public standards, including certification schemes, and
- Country/region specific legislation.

The purpose of this document is to clearly explain the methodology used for SAI Platform benchmarking, both so that external stakeholders can be assured of its integrity and so that others wanting to conduct a benchmark against SAI FSA can do so using an agreed and consistent methodology. In order to obtain acceptance by SAI Platform and its members, an approved independent expert must conduct the benchmark, or review and approve benchmarks conducted by others. SAI Platform will provide a list of approved 3<sup>rd</sup> party companies. In order to be transparent on methodology used by SAI Platform, this document will be available online as well as the approved benchmark results.

### 2. Benchmarking Process

The benchmark covers three overarching aspects of the standard:

- Content
- Assurance
- Governance.

Content relates to the requirements included in the standard and how well they align with the questions in FSA in terms of scope and ambition. Governance relates to how the standard is put together, revised, consulted upon etc. Finally, assurance relates to how extensively the standard it is audited and verified. Therefore, a standard receives a score on content (performance levels of bronze/silver/gold or not yet bronze), a summary on governance, and a decision as to whether assurance meets the level of FSA self-assessment and verification (option 2 in the FSA Implementation Framework). A customized excel template of the original SAI FSA should be used to conduct the benchmark (Tables 2&3).



A first draft of a benchmark can be carried out by anyone, however in all cases an approved 3rd party will always perform a consistency check before the benchmark will be approved by SAI platform. This will involve a dialogue/ feedback phase between the standard owner and the consultant, where the results are discussed, in order to improve the accuracy of the benchmark.

The three third parties approved to validate benchmarks are:

- [CLM](#) – Marije Hoogendoorn [mhoogendoorn@clm.nl](mailto:mhoogendoorn@clm.nl)
- [ADAS](#) - Leslie Berger [Leslie.Berger@adas.co.uk](mailto:Leslie.Berger@adas.co.uk)
- [SureHarvest](#) – Nathan Smith [nsmith@sureharvest.com](mailto:nsmith@sureharvest.com)

The benchmarking process is shown in the diagram below (Figure 1). Should a consensus not be reached between the approved 3rd party and the standard owner, SAI secretariat will review the outcome in detail and make a recommendation. In the case of disagreement, a representative panel of SAI platform membership will make a final judgement, convened on request.

The benchmark approval will relate directly to the version of standard that was benchmarked as well as the version of FSA. SAI Platform will publish on its website the full list of benchmarked standards with bronze/silver/gold performance levels and verification levels.

Communication with the owners of standards regarding benchmark results will be conducted via SAI Platform Secretariat. SAI Platform will:

- explain how the FSA works and the value of benchmarking against it
- share benchmark results for discussion
- discuss alignment of priority issues and ways to move up on scoring.
- offer guidance regarding communication options and press release content.

## 2.1 Costs

SAI Platform does not resource benchmarking on behalf of members say for exceptional circumstances. The costs of benchmarking approval depend on complexity, for example; the number of standards to be assessed, number of performance levels within a standard, post-assessment consultation and standards development, need for standard owner engagement etc., and whether a first draft is already available. Simple benchmark exercises typically require 2-3 work days for a consultant to complete. Costs, payment and time scales should be discussed directly with the approved benchmarking consultants.

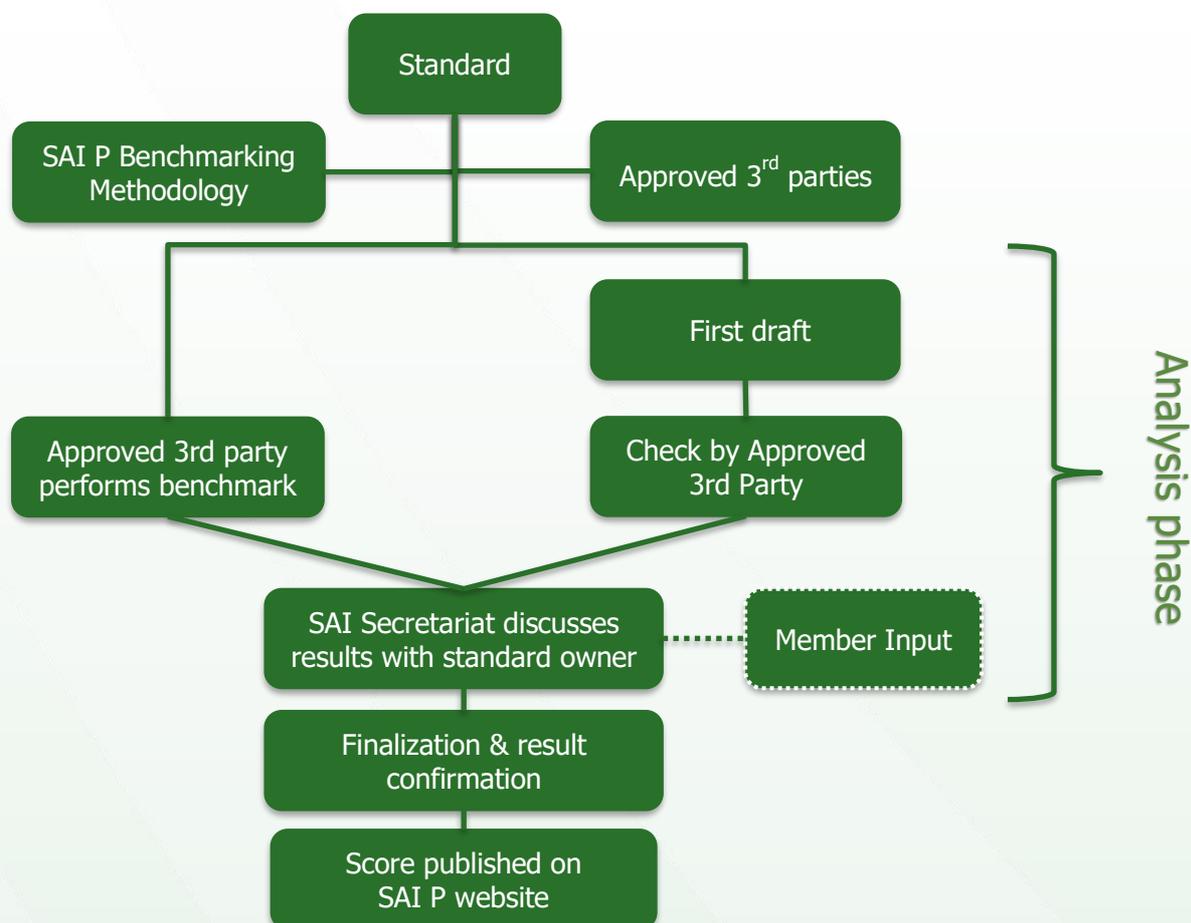


Figure 1. Benchmarking Process

## 2.2 Content Benchmark

There are two types of content benchmarks;

- National or regional legislation
- Sustainability schemes or standards

Benchmarking of a standard can be done in isolation, in combination with one or more other standards, and in some cases (see 2.2.1) also include legislation. Therefore, it is important to clearly state what the benchmark includes and if it's crop-specific for example.



## 2.2.1 Benchmarking legislation

FSA questions covered by national legislation that are not part of the standard can only be included in the benchmark score in very low risk countries, and low risk countries provided that the scheme has measures in place that help ensure producers comply with the law. This could be achieved by the scheme's operations, for example:

- publishing regulatory compliance training or guidance materials,
- raising awareness about upcoming changes to the law,
- having reporting channels back to scheme management for complaints about breaches in the law.

Or via specific provisions in the standard, such as:

- designated accountability for legal compliance to a single farm staff member,
- a general legal compliance requirement and passive monitoring during 3rd party farm audits,
- legal compliance requirements for specific farming practices and active monitoring during 3rd party farm audits.

For a list of countries by risk categorisation please see annex 1.

For a global or regional standard, if legislation is included in the benchmark, it must be clearly stated which country/region that benchmark applies.

The legislation benchmark of EU countries includes compulsory EU Cross Compliance measures and applicable EU directives, but not voluntary initiatives such as greening measures. Where standards have been combined with the EU CAP and EU directives, the result is only applicable for 'very low' or low risk countries depending.

It must be noted that legislation alone, or legislation plus EU Cross Compliance measures, cannot be used as a substitute for the FSA, even if the score is bronze or above. It is critical that there are management and support systems in place for farmers, as well as a verification or assurance system, which is commonly provided in the presence of voluntary sustainability schemes.

There may be SAI FSA questions that are not part of either legislation or the standard but could be seen as 'normal or common practice' in a country or region. This common practice cannot be considered in the benchmark. SAI Platform recommends that the common practices are added to the standard to ensure they are covered during the benchmark and to ensure they are truly complied with.



## 2.2.2 Scoring

SAI Platform's FSA contains three levels of questions: Essential, Basic and Advanced. Every FSA question should be assessed individually on its coverage by the standard or legislation under review. The possible scores are "Yes", "No", "Partly" or "Not Applicable". These have the following significance:

- Yes: the standard/legislation covers 100%, or is more ambitious than the FSA
- No: the standard/legislation does not cover the FSA question
- Partly: the standard/legislation covers only some of the issues included in the FSA question.
- Not Applicable: an FSA question contains topics that do not refer to the agricultural material or region covered by the standard (e.g. questions related to irrigation if irrigation is not used).

Some standards categorise their requirements as:

- Mandatory/major criteria or 'musts' – normally 100% compliance is required
- Minor criteria or 'should' – often a certain x% of compliance is required; some standards require that a farmer must meet all these minor criteria in a specified timeframe.
- Recommendations – compliance is generally not required.

The FSA includes questions that are essential, basic and advanced. All FSA questions can be covered by a standard's mandatory, major or minor criteria, according to the method described below. Recommendations are not considered in the benchmark.

The most fair and pragmatic way to make a distinction between major and minor criteria is to make separate scoring columns for the individual FSA questions:

1. Score of all requirements, without distinction in Mandatory/major and Minor.
2. Score of all requirements, with an adjusted calculation of the FSA questions with a "Yes" score when they covered by Minor requirements. In order to weight a "Yes" score in this case it should be multiplied by the % of compliance of this category of requirements required by the standard. Note that to achieve Bronze a standard must meet 100% of the essential questions; therefore, if any essential questions are covered by minor criteria with only x% compliance required, the standard will not achieve the bronze performance level.

The score in the first column of the benchmark excel shows the minimum score of the standard, representing farmers who comply with the absolute minimum of the standard. The score in the second column should be seen as a maximum score. The score published will be that of the minimum compliance required.

When scoring a benchmark, "Yes" is 1 point, "Partly" is 0.5 points, and "No" is 0 points. In case of a minor criteria, the score is multiplied by the % of compliance. Questions that are deemed "Not applicable" are removed from the total number of questions, to ensure that non-applicable questions do not affect the overall score.



If a standard has various performance levels, a separate benchmark will need to be carried out for each performance level, each with its own FSA score.

### 2.2.2.1 Scoring Review

Benchmarking is rarely straightforward. In many cases, one FSA question is covered by several standard criteria, some of which may be mandatory and others minor. Therefore it is important to review the benchmark taking into account the “*spirit of the standard*”. If the standard, for example, has several criteria about water management and pollution control, but the wording of the criteria does not match the FSA question wording, it is necessary to assess whether the intent of the FSA question is covered, and how the criteria represent the overall issue covered by the FSA question. Where coverage is not straightforward and clear, it is important to include in the comments column the reasoning behind listing coverage as “Yes” or “Partly”.

Should a standard be within 3% of a performance boundary (Gold, Silver, Bronze) for either FSA ‘advanced’ or ‘basic’ question coverage, the final result may be upgraded to reflect the wider context. This includes where the scope or ambition of the benchmarked standard significantly exceeds topics for FSA.

It is important to note that this interpretation must be stricter when benchmarking legislation. “Partly” is scored as “No” or 0 points in legislation benchmarks. This is because the level of verification and assurance for legislation is usually much lower than for a standard.

Once the benchmark results are entered into the excel template, the score is automatically generated. Calculation formulas are already available in the excel template (see Tables 2&3).

### 2.2.2.2 Combined benchmark scores of standards and legislation

When standard(s) and legislation have been benchmarked separately, the scores can be combined, as long as it can be ensured that there is no double counting.

In theory, it is possible that legislation covers one part of an FSA question and the standard covers the other part (scored “Partly”): in that case the score should be “Yes” (fully covered). When it is not clear if the standard and legislation combined fully cover the question, a worst-case approach is required. This means that the combined score should also be “Partly”. This assures that double counting is avoided. In reality, our experience is that an FSA question is rarely covered fully by partial coverage of legislation and a standard.

The worst-case combined score of the standard including legislation is automatically generated in the benchmark template. In the rare case that the combined score changes to “Yes”, it has to be filled in manually.

### 2.2.3 Substantiation and references

Standard owners are always asked to send their latest version of standard documents and other relevant information. The name and version number of these documents should be clearly identified in the benchmark document (1<sup>st</sup> worksheet of the excel file). References to the articles/sections in the standard and legal names should be described in the benchmark document and (if needed) additional remarks that explain the score. When FSA questions are partly covered, explanatory remarks should always be added to the benchmark document (see template).

### 2.2.4 Presentation of the results

Results are automatically presented in different tables. The first and most important is the overall performance (Not Yet Bronze to Gold) as explained in Table 1. This reflects the performance levels set by SAI Platform and it is this score which is published on the SAI Platform website.

Table 1: Performance levels and their thresholds set by SAI Platform

Performance Levels	Threshold (see also SAI FSA Guidance on <a href="http://www.saiplatform.org">www.saiplatform.org</a> )
Bronze	Compliance to 100% Essential questions and a minimum of 75% Basic questions.
Silver	Compliance to 100% Essential questions, 80% Basic questions and more than 50% Advanced questions.
Gold	Compliance to 100% Essential questions, 100% Basic questions and a minimum of 75% Advanced questions.
Not yet Bronze	Indicates that the level of performance does not meet the bronze threshold yet.

In addition to the overall performance, an overview of the score is given in more detail in two different tables:

- Scores per Type of FSA question (Essential, Basic, Advanced): amount and percentage of questions with scores “Yes”, “No”, “Partly” or “Not applicable”. See an example in Table 2.
- Scores per Topic: percentage of questions fully covered (score “Yes”), divided per FSA Topic (soil, water etc.). See an example in Table 3.

Table 2: Example of Performance per Type of question.

Performance level		Not Yet	Bronze
Type	Answer	Score (excl. Not Applicable)	Percentage (excl. Not Applicable)
Essential (total=23)	Yes	5 out of 23	22%
	No	0 out of 23	0%
	Partly	0 out of 23	0%
	Not Applicable	0 out of 23	All Applicable
Basic (total=60)	Yes	13 out of 60	22%
	No	2 out of 60	3%
	Partly	3 out of 60	5%
	Not Applicable	0 out of 60	All Applicable
Advanced (total=29)	Yes	3 out of 29	10%
	No	0 out of 29	0%
	Partly	2 out of 29	7%
	Not Applicable	0 out of 29	All Applicable
No Answer		84 out of 112	75%

Table 3: Example of Performance per Topic.

Scores (Calculation with exclusion of Not Applicable FSA-questions)	Essential	Basic	Advanced
Legal Compliance	0%	0%	No Basic
Farm Management	No Essential	0%	0%
Health & Safety	0%	0%	0%
Local Community	0%	No Basic	0%
Planting	No Essential	0%	0%
Soil Management	No Essential	0%	0%
Nutrient Management	No Essential	58%	50%
Crop Protection	100%	40%	13%
Agro-chemicals	100%	79%	No Basic
Waste Management	No Essential	0%	No Basic
Water Management	0%	0%	0%
Biodiversity	0%	0%	0%
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	No Essential	0%	0%
Air	No Essential	No Basic	0%
Financial Stability	No Essential	0%	0%
Market Access	0%	0%	0%
Labor Conditions	0%	0%	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	23%	19%	4%
No Answer			75%

In addition to the formal benchmark results, it should be noted in the results if the standard is strong on content for a specific region and/or concern, such as water management concerns in Spain, thereby providing context for the benchmark result.



### **2.2.5 Length of validity**

The FSA will be revised periodically, as directed by the FSA Steering Committee. The benchmark score is approved for the standard version and the FSA version used in the benchmark and is valid until an updated benchmark is carried out. Benchmarks will be updated after FSA revision, and will be carried out on the latest version of the standard. A benchmark may be redone, if for example, the standard is revised prior to the FSA revision, and the requesting company would be responsible for the additional costs.

## **2.3 Governance and Verification**

The second phase of the benchmark addresses the governance and verification levels of the standard; how extensively it is audited and verified. Note this second phase is not carried out for legislation benchmarks. The information provided in this section does not affect the content score described in Part 1.

The intention of this step is to check the verification required by the standard and to compare it to the requirements of FSA Implementation Framework Version i.e. random 3rd party verification audits at farm level, above or equal to the sampling frequency required for the FSA.

This can be useful information for organizations that wish to make sustainably sourced volume claims via the benchmarked standard. For standards that do not meet the requirements, we will clearly state that an increase in the level of verification is required for it to support FSA performance level claims.

This section must be carried out for each standard used for the benchmark, if the benchmark combines two or more standards into one benchmark score (e.g. combining a food safety standard and a water management standard).

When discussing sustainable sourcing and the FSA, companies must have clear and transparent communications about the level of verification of the standards benchmarked.



Table 4: Summary of Governance and Verification Criteria.

Governance Criteria	
Who owns and manages the standard?	
How often is the standard updated?	
Does the review/update process involve independent, expert advisors or external consultation?	
Are there publicly stated policies on the development and management of the standard?	
Does the standard have a complaints procedure?	
Verification Level	
What verification/assurance does the standard require on farm level? (orders is not indicative of order of preference)	Third party, accredited to ISO or EN system: Third party, not accredited to ISO or EN: Second party (supplier or other non-independent party): Self-assessment with sample verification audits: Self-assessment without verification audit: Self-assessment without verification audit:
How often are audits required/carried out?	
What percentage of farms are audited?	
Does it meet the minimum sampling and verification audit level described in SAI Platform's Implementation Framework?	



**Annex 1. Country Legal Compliance Assessment: List of Very Low, Low, and Medium risk countries<sup>1</sup> as determined by [RiskHorizons™](#)**

Very Low Risk	Low Risk	Medium Risk
Australia	Czech Republic	Bulgaria
Austria	Estonia	Croatia
Belgium	Hungary	Greece
Canada	Israel	Italy
Denmark	Korea (Republic of)	Romania
Finland	Latvia	
France	Lithuania	
Germany	Luxembourg	
Iceland	Malta	
Ireland	New Zealand	
Netherlands	Poland	
Norway	Portugal	
Sweden	Singapore	
Switzerland	Slovakia	
United Kingdom	Slovenia	
	Spain	
	United States of America	

<sup>1</sup> This list is not exhaustive, as not all countries have been evaluated. To have a countries legislation risk analysed please contact SAI platform.