



SAI Platform: Farm Sustainability Assessment Benchmark Methodology

Introduction

SAI Platform created Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) as a tool to assess qualitatively 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 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 check a benchmark if one is carried out by others (SAI Platform will provide a list of approved 3rd party companies). In order to be transparent on methodology used by SAI Platform, this document will be available online as will the approved benchmark results.

Benchmarking Process

The benchmark covers two overarching aspects of the standard:

- content
- governance and verification.

The content relates to the questions covered by the standard and how well they align with the questions in FSA, on scope and ambition. Governance and verification relates to how the standard is put together, revised, consulted upon etc., as well as how extensively it is audited and verified. Therefore a standard receives a score on content (performance levels of bronze/silver/gold or not yet bronze) and a summary on governance and verification. A customized excel template of the original SAI FSA should be used to conduct the benchmark (Annex).

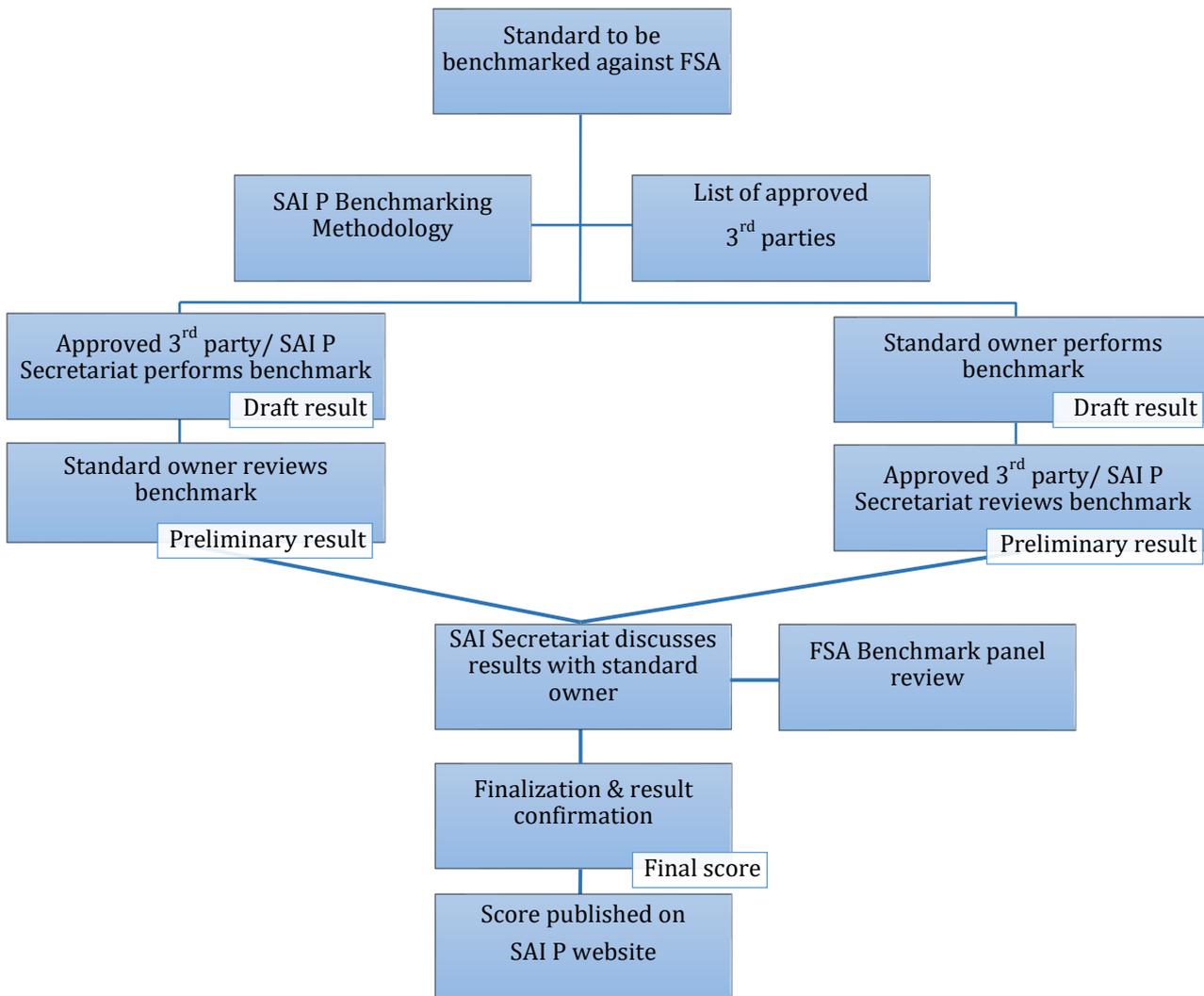
First draft of a benchmark can be carried out by anyone, however in all cases SAI platform secretariat or an approved 3rd party will perform a consistency check.

SAI Platform Verification and Integrity committee will issue on its website a list of 3rd parties approved to carry out benchmarks and will provide training for a key contact within those organizations to ensure consistent benchmark results. Only independent companies will be approved, and will need to have a system in place to train those carrying out the benchmark.



The benchmarking process is shown in the diagram below. 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, final judgement will be made by a representative panel of SAI platform membership, 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 as well as a list of standards with bronze/silver/gold performance levels and governance levels.



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

- share benchmark results for discussion, context explained (if legislation included etc)
- discuss alignment of priority issues, ways to move up on scoring.



Part 1: Content Benchmark

Types of content benchmarks

There are two types of content benchmarks;

- benchmark of country/region legislation
- benchmark of a standard.

Benchmarking of a standard can be done standalone or including country legislation. It is also possible to combine benchmarks of two or more standards. It is important therefore to clearly state what the benchmark includes, and if, for example, it is crop-specific.

FSA questions covered by in-country legislation which are not part of the standard can be added to the benchmark score for that standard, when the country in question is deemed low risk for lack of compliance to and enforcement of applicable laws. SAI Platform is currently assessing the tool to use when determining legal compliance/enforcement risk. Until the risk of a country is determined by SAI Platform, all benchmarks that include legal requirements will have an interim score. A notable exception is when the standard includes legal requirements as part of its audit and verification process. If the standard is deemed to have stringent governance and verification levels and the audits cover legal requirements as well as standard requirements, then the legislation benchmark can be added to the standard benchmark score (see Scoring below).

For a global or regional standard, if legislation is included in the benchmark, it must be clearly stated which country that benchmark applies to and therefore the benchmark score is country specific.

The legislation benchmark of EU countries includes compulsory EU Cross Compliance measures, but not the voluntary ones unless they are part of the mandatory country specific legislation in question. 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 standards.

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 taken into account 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.

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 question
- 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 y years.



- 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 taken into account 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 are covered by Minor requirements. In order not to take fully into account 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 a minor criteria with only x% compliance required, the standard will not achieve the bronze performance level.

The score in the first column represents a maximum score of the standard. The score in the second column should be seen as a minimum score, representing farmers who comply with the absolute minimum of the standard. 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. 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.

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, and "partly" is not an option for 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 Annex).



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 a 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.

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.

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).

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 www.saipatform.org)
Partially equivalent	Equivalence in part, however there are missing 'Essential' areas and/or <75% of 'Basic' questions are covered.
Bronze	Compliance to 100% 'Essential' questions and a minimum of 75% 'Basic' questions.
Silver	Equivalence with 100% of the 'Essential' questions, 80% 'Basic' questions and a minimum of 50% 'Advanced' questions.
Gold	Compliance to 100% 'Essential' questions, 100% 'Basic' questions and a minimum of 75% 'Advanced' questions.



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 (Soils, 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	23 out of 23	100%
	No	0 out of 23	0%
	Partly	0 out of 23	0%
	Not Applicable	0 out of 23	All Applicable
Basic (Total=60)	Yes	41 out of 60	68%
	No	14 out of 60	23%
	Partly	5 out of 60	8%
	Not Applicable	0 out of 60	All Applicable
Advanced (Total=29)	Yes	9 out of 29	31%
	No	18 out of 29	62%
	Partly	2 out of 29	7%
	Not Applicable	0 out of 29	All Applicable

Table 3: Example of Performance per Topic.

Scores (answer: Yes / (Total - Not Applicable))	Essential	Basic	Advanced
Legal Compliance	100%	100%	No Advanced
Farm Management	No Essential	50%	0%
Health & Safety	100%	100%	50%
Local Community	100%	No Basic	50%
Planting	No Essential	40%	0%
Soil Management	No Essential	0%	0%
Nutrient Management	No Essential	50%	0%
Crop Protection	100%	80%	100%
Agro-chemicals	100%	100%	No Advanced
Waste Management	No Essential	50%	No Advanced
Water Management	100%	50%	0%
Biodiversity	100%	67%	0%
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	No Essential	0%	0%
Air	No Essential	No Basic	0%
Financial Stability	No Essential	0%	0%
Market Access	100%	50%	100%
Labour Conditions	100%	100%	50%
TOTAL	100%	68%	31%
	No Answer		0%



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.

Length of validity

The FSA will be revised every three years, as directed by the FSA Verification and Integrity 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.

Part 2: 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 governance and verification required by the standard and compare it to the requirements of FSA Implementation Framework Version 2; useful information for organizations who wish to make sustainably sourced volume claims via the benchmarked standard. For standards that do not meet the requirements as identified in IF version 2, 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 and the governance 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? (order is not indicative of order of preference)	i) Third party, accredited to ISO or EN system; (ii) Third party, not accredited to ISO or EN; (iii) Second party (supplier or other non-independent party); (iv) Self-assessment with 3 rd party verification (on all or sample of assessments) (v) Self-assessment without 3 rd party verification
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? Please describe.	



Annex

[FSA 2_0 Template_Benchmark Excel Tool (released 24 April 2015)]