

# RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

## POLICY ON REMOTE AUDITS

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**RAINFOREST  
ALLIANCE**



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Rainforest Alliance Guidelines for conducting remote audits			
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### **Translation Disclaimer**

For any question related to the precise meaning of the information contained in the translation, please refer to the official English version for clarification. Any discrepancies or differences in meaning due to translation are not binding and have no effect for auditing or certification purposes.

### **More information**

For more information about the Rainforest Alliance, visit [www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org) or contact [info@ra.org](mailto:info@ra.org)

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Rainforest Alliance (RA) is a growing network of people inspired and committed to work together in order to achieve our mission to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods. In June 2020, the Rainforest Alliance published its 2020 Certification Program. The Sustainable Agriculture Standard, along with its assurance and technology systems, are designed to deliver more value to the two million farmers and thousands of businesses that use Rainforest Alliance certification to drive more sustainable agricultural production and responsible supply chains. The Rainforest Alliance 2020 program enters into force, replacing the legacy UTZ and RA programs, starting 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

With the intent to facilitate an easy transition to the new certification program, the Rainforest Alliance Transition Rules allows **all supply chain audits completed in the period from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 to be conducted remotely.**

For farm certificate holders, onsite auditing in the farm context remains important. However, considering the continuous development of the Covid19 pandemic in different countries and regions, the Rainforest Alliance recognizes that farm audits will not always be able to be conducted onsite. This Policy on Remote Audits document seeks to provide:

- a framework to determine when remote farm audits are allowable.
- details on what Certificate Holders (CHs) should consider when receiving a remote audit
- details on what Certification Bodies (CBs) should consider when conducting a remote audit.

For more information on how to transition to the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Certification Program see the Rainforest Alliance website : [Guidance on how to transition to the 2020 Rainforest Alliance certification program.](#)

**The requirements in the Policy on Remote Audits are additional and sometimes supersede to the requirements in the [Certification and Auditing Rules version 1.1](#) and [Rules for Certification Bodies version 1.1](#).** If there are contradictions between any of the requirements among these documents, please consult Rainforest Alliance at [cbcert@ra.org](mailto:cbcert@ra.org) for further interpretation.

## Definitions

A more complete glossary of definitions is available on the Rainforest Alliance website or in Annex 1 Glossary: <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/glossary/>.

This section only refers to definitions that are crucial for understanding The Policy on Remote Audits. These definitions may also appear in other documents defined by RA as binding to the certification program.

<b>Transitioning certificate holder</b>	Certificate Holders (CHs) that either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ have a valid certificate, license, or endorsement under either legacy Rainforest Alliance or UTZ certification program, including extensions, as of the date of commencing the registration process for the new 2020 certification program; or</li> <li>▪ whose certificate/license/endorsement expired after June 30, 2020</li> </ul>
<b>Certificate holder with a gap in certification</b>	CHs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ whose latest certificate, license, or endorsement under the legacy UTZ or Rainforest Alliance certification program expired before June 30, 2020 and was not renewed or extended; or</li> <li>▪ that did not complete the transition process</li> </ul>
<b>Newly registered CH</b>	CHs that have never had a certificate, license, or endorsement under either legacy UTZ or Rainforest Alliance certification programs and who wish to join the Rainforest Alliance 2020 Certification Program.



<b>Audit facilitator</b>	A person independent of the certificate holder and affiliated with the certification body who is present on the audit site to support and provide onsite observations to the audit team during the remote audit.
<b>Remote Audit</b>	An audit conducted by auditors who are not physically present on the site of the operations they are auditing. Remote audits therefore make use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (electronic exchange of documents and images and real-time electronic audio-visual calls, interviews and data gathering) to verify compliance when “face to face” methods are not possible or desired (adapted from ISO 19011:2018, Annex A. Supplementary guidance for auditors planning and conducting audits).  The term remote audit covers both full remote audit and partial remote audit.
<b>Partial Remote Audit</b>	Audits that are conducted through a combination of remote and onsite checks within a defined time frame (ISO 19011:2018, Audit method selection and determination).  In the context of this document, the term partial remote audit is equivalent to Phase 1 audit and the additional onsite audit is equivalent to Phase 2 audit.

## 2. POLICY FOR CONDUCTING REMOTE AUDITS

### 2.1 DEFINITION OF CONDITIONS TO ALLOW A REMOTE AUDIT

Onsite audits provide a higher level of assurance to the certification process. For this reason onsite audit remains mandatory whenever feasible.

However, when onsite audits are not feasible, remote audits can be an alternative approach. Remote audits are only allowed by the Rainforest Alliance under certain conditions. This section outlines the conditions under which remote audits are permitted.

- 2.1.1 A **supply chain audit** (audit without farming in scope) performed and completed between July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 and June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 shall always be a full remote audit.
- 2.1.2 A **remote farm audit** (audit with farming in scope) is allowable when the following conditions are met:
  - a. A farm audit of a transitioning CH, during the transition year up to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022;
  - b. An onsite audit cannot be performed. Valid reasons why an onsite audit cannot be performed are, among others:
    - (1) Covid19 infection risks for CB personnel, CH personnel and other personnel such as drivers, interpreters; or
    - (2) Government or any other official travel restrictions, including company policy, restrictions by the community where the CH is located;
  - c. All preconditions (see 2.2 below) are met; and
  - d. A feasibility evaluation (see 2.3 below) has been completed by the CB and it concludes that all audit objective(s) can be achieved by using remote methods.
- 2.1.3 **Remote audits are not allowed** for newly registered farm certificate holders (see definition above) or for farm certificate holders with a gap in certification (see definition above)
- 2.1.4 A **partial remote audit** is allowable only for farm audits. A partial remote audit is focused primarily on reviewing available data provided by the CH and verification of a limited set of samples with fewer interviews conducted remotely (Phase 1). The entire certification process is completed through a targeted onsite audit (Phase 2) at a later stage. A successful partial farm remote audit can certify at maximum 50% of the estimated volume for the expected validity period of the license.
- 2.1.5 The CB shall record in Rainforest Alliance Certification Platform (RACP), or share with RA through another means, the reasoning for the decision to perform, or not perform a remote audit for each request by its client.



## 2.2 PRECONDITIONS

- 2.2.1 The CB shall ensure that the following preconditions are fully met when performing a remote **farm or supply chain audit**.
- 2.2.2 **Collaboration:** Certificate Holders (CHs) and Certification Bodies (CBs) are required to collaborate closely to allow for a successful remote audit and ensure that all audit objectives are achieved.
- 2.2.3 **Confidentiality and security of information:** The CB and the CH shall define and agree on the arrangements to protect information confidentiality and security. If no agreement is in place the CB shall not perform the remote audit. The CB and the CH shall agree on at least the following:
- a. The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) needs to be respected. This requires organizations to conduct due diligence to identify and assess the personal data they process, while only collecting personal data that is required for execution of essential activities.
  - b. Pictures or screenshots are only taken upon consent of the involved parties.
  - c. Videos or audio materials are only recorded with consent of the involved parties.
  - d. Workers are informed prior to the start of the interview of the confidentiality and use of information they share.
  - e. The CH will not record worker interviews.
- 2.2.4 **Stability/quality of information and communication technology (ICT):** a remote audit requires stable internet connections. The CB shall not perform the remote audit when the CB is not confident that the remote audit process will have the required ICT stability/quality to ensure adequate exchange of necessary information.
- a. Prior to the audit, the lead auditor shall ensure that they have agreed with the CH what ICT tools (e.g. Skype, Whatsapp, Teams, Signal, etc.) and equipment (e.g. camera, smart phone, microphone, etc.) will be used during the remote audit.
  - b. Prior to the audit, the lead auditor shall ensure that the audit team and the CH test the ICT tools and equipment required for the remote audit. The test will be performed with CH staff, farmers and workers, where applicable.
    - i. The lead auditor shall only proceed with the remote audit if the tests confirm that the remote audit is feasible.
  - c. The CB shall ensure that the audit team is familiar with the tools and equipment, and that the audit team can easily manage them and guide the client and interviewees in how to use them.
  - d. The CB shall ensure that it provides these ICT tools and/or equipment to the audit team.
- 2.2.5 **Secure location to perform confidential interviews with good internet connection:** The CB shall proceed with the remote audit only when the auditee can guarantee availability of a location to perform secure interviews with good internet connection. The CH takes full responsibilities to make internet available/accessible for the workers to take part in interviews.
- a. It is possible that the calls cannot be established from/to the farm itself or the worker's normal working location, in that case the CB and the CH need to find a location with good signal for phone/internet calls. Regardless of the interview location, the CB audit team shall always ensure confidentiality and privacy of interviews, as well as the selection of the persons is done by the CB audit team.



- 2.2.6 **Availability of required persons both from CB and CH:** The CB and the CH shall commit to and make necessary arrangements so that the audit team has access to all persons as requested by the audit team, including but are not limited to CH staff, farmers, workers, service providers, subcontractors, intermediaries, committee members, management representatives, labor providers.
- a. Remote audits require more attention and energy from the auditors than onsite audits. The CB shall consider its auditors' availability and workload when planning remote audits. (See also Certification and Auditing Rules on auditor's working and overtime hours)
- 2.2.7 **Availability of samples:** The CB shall evaluate and ensure the minimally required samples as defined in the Certification and Auditing Rules are available and accessible during the remote audit.
- 2.2.8 **Full access to key activities and processes:** the CB shall clearly define the audit scope prior to the audit and ensure that all key activities and processes within the audit scope can be observed and evaluated during the remote audit. When this is not possible during farm audits, the CB shall consider a partial remote audit or a full onsite audit.
- a. The CB shall ensure remote farm audits are conducted in a period where there are activities on the farm to verify implementation of applicable requirements.
- 2.2.9 **Timeliness of audit process:** The CB shall ensure remote farm audits are completed within the allowable timeframe in the Certification and Auditing Rules (CARs).
- 2.2.10 **Availability of interpretation (if required);** If an interpreter is required, the audit team shall ensure that the interpreter is present directly in the calls/interviews that interpretation service is needed to fully understand the conversation (See also Annex AR11 in Certification and Auditing Rules).
- 2.2.11 **Protection of Health and Safety:** The CB shall always ensure health and safety of the audit team and the staff and workers of audited organisations during the audit. This includes ensuring remote interviews are conducted in a secure and confidential environment. Any audit personnel operating onsite during an audit (e.g. audit facilitators for a remote audit or auditors in the case of partial remote audits), will observe all relevant health and safety protocols including social distancing and use of PPE (masks, gloves, boots etc) to perform the audits.

## 2.3 FEASIBILITY EVALUATION

- 2.3.1 The CB shall consider at least the following conditions to decide if a remote farm audit is feasible.
- a. The audit team shall be able to perform virtual visits to/video tours of the desired locations, including but not limited to farms/farm units, processing units, worker houses, via live video of the desired locations during call(s).
- i. Where a live video is not possible (e.g. due to lack of cellular service in the area), this may be replaced with a video of the desired location which is taken during the audit by the audit facilitator or CH staff. The video shall be taken following the instructions of the audit team. The audit team shall review the videos and request additional footage or information before the closing meeting.
- b. The audit team shall be able to have confidential and safe interviews with farmers/group members. These interviews can be done at locations outside of the farms.
- c. The audit team shall be able to have confidential and safe interviews with (1) non-administrative workers, including farm workers and CH administrative workers/staff, with focus on the most vulnerable workers; (2) other key actors including but not limited to intermediaries, subcontractors, service providers and especially labor providers; and (3) other relevant persons such as Grievance



Committee, Gender Committee, Assess and Address Committee members, union representatives etc.

- d. The audit team shall have full access to all relevant records of the CH, including records from farms, e.g. harvest records, processing records, worker's data, etc., in a manner that can be presented digitally either prior to or during the remote audit.
- e. The CB shall evaluate the Certificate Holder risk level using the RA risk assessment template when evaluating the feasibility to conduct a remote audit.
  - i. If the result of this risk assessment shows *very high risk* the CB shall not perform a full remote audit. The CB may consider a partial remote audit if it can provide a clear plan to provide adequate remote verification of the high risk factors.
  - ii. If the result of this risk assessment shows *high risk*, the CB shall not perform a full remote audit, however, a partial remote audit is allowed.
  - iii. In case of doubt, the CB shall contact RA for further clarification before making a final decision.

2.3.2 The CB shall follow these guidelines in deciding if a remote audit is feasible:

- a. The CB **shall not** perform a remote audit when it is:
  - i. an audit of a farm CH with gap in certification; or an audit of a newly registered farm CH as described in 2.1.3
  - ii. an audit of a farm with a risk level that does not allow adequate remote verification of the main risk factors as described in 2.3.1.e; or
  - iii. not meeting all the preconditions as set out in section 2.2 of this document; or
  - iv. not possible to fully perform all four types of activities (virtual visits; interviews with farmers; interviews with administrative and non-administrative workers, and other actors; and document reviews) with a representative sample *selected by the CB*.
- b. The CB shall **consider a partial remote audit** when it is:
  - i. meeting all the preconditions as set out in section 2.2 of this document; and
  - ii. possible to perform all four types of activities (virtual visits; interviews with farmers; interviews with administrative and non-administrative workers, and other actors; and document reviews) with at least 15% of a representative sample *selected by the CB* (i.e. half the 30% of the entire sample to include in the partial remote audit). The remainder of the sample in the partial remote audit can be suggested by the CH.
- c. The CB shall **consider a full remote farm audit** when it is:
  - i. meeting all the preconditions as set out in section 2.2 of this document; and
  - ii. possible to fully perform all types of activities (virtual visits; interviews with farmers; interviews with administrative and non-administrative workers, and other actors; and document reviews) with a representative sample *selected by the CB*.

**Note:** Please see Certification and Auditing Rules for criteria on selecting farms/farm units, workers for interviews and other sampling requirements.

2.3.3 If a remote audit cannot be performed, the CB shall report to the Rainforest Alliance with detailed explanation of the decision.

- a. In this case the CH may request for an exceptional extension of the certificate. Such exceptional extensions will be granted on a case by case basis and Rainforest Alliance reserves the rights not to grant extensions.



- b. When an exception request is not granted, the certificate becomes invalid until the CB can perform the next audit successfully.

## 2.4 CONDUCTING THE REMOTE AUDIT

- 2.4.1 The CB shall ensure that the applicable rules from the Rainforest Alliance Certification and Auditing Rules are respected.
- a. The requirements on sampling in the Certification and Auditing Rules remain applicable to remote audits.
  - b. The CB audit team shall ensure that the audit sample is always selected by the audit team, not by the CH.
    - i. Exceptional circumstances may allow the CH to suggest a limited part of the sample size in a partial remote audit (see 2.3.2.b above).
- 2.4.2 The CB shall respect the following requirements on distribution of sample and audit activities:

Audit element	Partially remote audit		Fully remote audit
	Phase 1 (remote)	Phase 2 (on-site)	
Off-site investigation.	Not included	Included if applicable	Not included
Stakeholder consultation	Not included	Included if applicable	Included if applicable
Sample size	Minimum 30% of the total audit sample	Remaining 70% of the total audit sample	100% per Certification and auditing Rules
Interview duration	As per CARs for the selected sample.	As per CARs for the selected sample.	As per CARs
Worker interviews – tool to be used	Via telephone (non-visual), via video-call at least with half of the workers to be interviewed	On-site, in person	Via video call

**Note:**

- The partial remote audit and the onsite audit are considered parts of one single certification process and should be planned accordingly. The audit plan must describe which requirements will be audited remotely and which will be onsite.
  - The CB should add additional time for remote interviews as experience shows that these interviews often need more time to build trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. Moreover, audit planning should factor in potentially unexpected technical challenges for having and/or continuing the conversations (e.g. breaks in the remote connection).
- 2.4.3 The CB shall ensure that the CH provides all the required data and that the audit team has received such data within the required timeframes (see Certification and Auditing Rules for types of data to be provided by the CH).
- 2.4.4 The CB shall ensure that the CH provides additional data to the CB when requested for the planning and preparation of the remote audit, including but not limited to:
- a. Contact details of workers (telephone number)
  - b. Contact details of farmers/group members
  - c. Contact details of the committees (A&A, Grievance, Gender and Occupational Health and Safety Committee, if applicable)



- d. Contact details of the worker representative/union representative
- e. Contact details of labor providers
- f. Additional maps/layouts necessary to understand the locations of the CH.

**Note:** the audit team can call workers outside of working hours if the audit needs to further investigate sensitive topics, including but are not limited to discrimination, forced labor or sexual harassment.

- 2.4.5 The CB shall ensure that the data shared by the CH is not disclosed to other parties and is retained in the CB record keeping system for the required period only (see Rules for Certification Bodies).

**Note:** If audit data is uploaded to 'public' cloud servers, such as Dropbox or Google Drive, the CB should consider moving the information to their own data storage system when the audit has been concluded.

- 2.4.6 The CB audit team shall consider good practices in performing a remote audit in [Annex 1](#) of this document.

### **Applicable to farm and supply chain audits with social topics in scope:**

- 2.4.7 Prior to the audit, the CB shall ensure that the sample size of worker interviews is pre-defined, using as a minimum data from the worker registry and the outcome of the risk assessment. This is defined as minimum inputs and as per the requirements of the Certification and Auditing Rules, including Annex AR3 and Annex AR4.1.
- a. The CB shall ensure that its audit team receives the GMR (including data on number of workers at farms) and worker registry and contact details of workers (i.e. phone numbers) and all other actors (subcontractors, intermediaries, service providers, labor providers).
- 2.4.8 Prior to the audit, the CB shall test and select location(s) from which the worker interviews will be performed during the remote audit.
- a. The audit team shall ensure that the location has the level of privacy required for worker interviews.
  - b. The tests can be done by using the intended technologies and tools/equipment with the audit facilitator or with staff of the CH.
- 2.4.9 Prior to the audit, the CB and CH shall define the tools/communication platforms/equipment that will be used for worker interviews, ensuring that all workers, especially vulnerable workers, can be reached through these means and can feel comfortable in speaking through these means. (See Certification and Auditing Rules for more information on conducting interviews)
- 2.4.10 During the remote audit, the audit team shall ensure that all interviews are performed following the requirements of the Certification and Auditing Rules, e.g. privacy is always ensured, workers are compensated for the time at an equivalent rate, CH will not intervene during the interviews, will not record the interviews, and will take no retaliatory action for anything said during the interviews, etc.
- 2.4.11 The audit team shall make its best effort to use video while conducting remote interviews. Where video calls are not possible, voice calls can be conducted as a substitute. It is important to use video to see facial expression and body language and ensure interviews can be conducted confidentially.

### **Roles and responsibilities of an audit facilitator**

The Audit Facilitator (see definition above) operates under clear instructions given by a qualified auditor. An audit facilitator can play various roles during a remote audit, including but not limited to:

1. Ensuring the independence of the (lead) auditor by observing that the CH provides access to documents, persons, locations as requested.



2. Checking the identity of interviewees to ensure that the person the auditor is talking to is indeed the person requested.
3. Observe the conditions under which interviews take place to ensure that the conversation/interview has the necessary level of privacy, as in an onsite audit.
4. Facilitate the calls/video tours by using his or her own device, where needed, and point the camera to the locations instructed by the auditor, for example:
  - a. At the farm fields, near production or where main activities take place
  - b. In a processing facility
  - c. In a storage room: PPE, pesticides, fertilizers
  - d. In a house
  - e. On a farm, with a farmer
  - f. In a (video) call with a worker who does not have a (smart) phone
  - g. Taking pictures, GPS coordinates for the audit team.

An audit facilitator should understand the purpose of an audit and preferably has previous experience with an audit process, although they do not need to be an auditor.

### Obligations for CBs for using audit facilitator

- 2.4.12 The CB shall always ensure that an audit facilitator is used for remote audits when:
- a. the result of the risk assessment shows a high-risk level. If the conditions of such an audit do not allow the presence of the audit facilitator at the audit site, the CB shall not conduct a full remote farm audit. The CB may consider a partial remote farm audit in case it has good justification; or
  - b. social topics are included in the scope of farm and supply chain audits and it is feasible for the CH to receive the audit facilitator.
    - i. If conditions do not allow an audit facilitator to be onsite at the CH's premises, the CB shall implement alternative approaches(s) to ensure at least: (1) The remote interviews always have the level of privacy as in face-to-face interviews and (2) An interpreter is used when there is language barrier between the auditor and the interviewee.
    - ii. When it is not feasible to have an onsite audit facilitator, the CB shall record the reason(s) in its audit report.

**Note:** The following examples are considered non-feasible to have onsite audit facilitator(s):

- The CB has made several attempts to locate such a person but could not find a suitable candidate.
- The CH does not allow an external person to visit their locations due to safety concerns.

- 2.4.13 The audit team shall ensure that:
- a. The audit facilitator's roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated to the CH prior to the audit.
  - b. The auditor facilitator has a valid contract with the CB and the CB pays the audit facilitator (i.e. the audit facilitator is not paid by the CH).
  - c. The audit facilitator does not have conflicts of interest with the CH.
  - d. The audit facilitator is aware of and maintains confidentiality agreements with the CB.
  - e. The audit facilitator is aware of any potential risks to her/his health and safety facilitating the audit process and the CB takes adequate measures to mitigate these risks.
  - f. The audit facilitator receives clear instructions from the CB/audit team prior to the audit on:



- (1) the preparations they need to complete (e.g. ensuring devices and equipment are available and in working order, additional power bank, mobile phone credits),
- (2) their tasks during the remote audit,
- (3) how to facilitate interviews with farmers and workers.
- (4) what to do when there are challenges with technology in collecting data and conducting calls (e.g. signal is lost, switching between platforms) and

2.4.14 If the audit facilitator also acts as an interpreter for the remote audit, the CB shall give clear instructions to the facilitator prior to the audit on how to perform this task during the virtual calls.

2.4.15 During the audit, the audit team shall ensure that the audit facilitator shall comply with official safety requirements, restrictions set out by the (local) government and by the CH.

The CB shall ensure that the audit facilitator will not perform any tasks of an auditor, for example, they will not conduct interviews independently, and they will not create any audit findings/conclusions.

## 2.5 PERFORMING FARM AUDITS

2.5.1 The CB shall ensure that all steps of the audits as defined by the Certification and Auditing Rules are respected. (See Certification and Auditing Rules and its Annexes)

2.5.2 In an audit of a group CH, the CB may increase the number of farms per auditor per day to a maximum of 8.

- a. The CB shall only do this with good justification and shall include this information in the audit report submitted to Rainforest Alliance (license request). The details should also be recorded on the Deviation Record in the template provided by RA.

## 2.6 PERFORMING SUPPLY CHAIN AUDITS

2.6.1 The CB shall ensure that all steps of the audits as defined by the Certification and Auditing Rules are respected. (See Certification and Auditing Rules and the Annexes)

2.6.2 The CB audit team shall consider good practices in performing supply chain audits in [Annex 2](#) of this document.

# 3. TAKING CERTIFICATION DECISIONS

## 3.1 CLOSING NON-CONFORMITIES

3.1.1 If a CH receives one or more non-conformities (NCs) from a remote **farm or supply chain audit**:

- a. the CH shall close all NCs raised against core requirements; and
- b. the CB shall carry out a follow up audit as defined in the Certification and Auditing Rules and the Rainforest Alliance Policy on Remote Closure of non-conformities.

3.1.2 The CB shall ensure that all NCs are closed within the required timeframe as defined in the Certification and Auditing Rules, section 1.4, before a positive certification decision can be issued.

**Note:** A partial remote audit (including both the remote and onsite parts) is considered as a single audit and the timeframe defined in the Certification and



Auditing Rules apply accordingly, i.e. the first day of the partial remote audit is the day in which the opening meeting was held during the remote part of the audit and the last day of the partial remote audit is the day in which the closing meeting was held during the onsite part of the audit.

- 3.1.3 To decide whether a follow up audit has to be conducted onsite or can be remote, the CB shall follow the Rainforest Alliance Policy on Remote Closure of non-conformities and the requirements in section 3.2 below.

## 3.2 CERTIFICATION DECISION

- 3.2.1 Upon completion of the remote audit (partial or full) the CB shall take a certification decision and complete the submission process in the Rainforest Alliance Certification Platform (RACP) within the timelines defined in the RA 2020 Certification and Auditing Rules.
- 3.2.2 The remote audit may result in a negative certification decision if conditions to issue a negative certification decision as stated in the Certification Rules and/or in this document are met.
- a. In case of doubt, please contact the Rainforest Alliance at [cbcert@ra.org](mailto:cbcert@ra.org) for further clarification.
- 3.2.3 If a full remote audit was conducted but the credibility of the remote audit was compromised during the process, the CB shall postpone its certification decision until an onsite audit is conducted. For example, when the remote audit process did not allow auditors to collect sufficiently strong and objective evidence to take the certification decision.
- a. The CB may convert a full remote audit into a partial remote audit to overcome issues of this kind. The CB can consider using the same approach as defined in 3.2.4.b below.

### PARTIAL REMOTE AUDIT

- 3.2.4 In the case of partial remote farm audits, the CB shall follow the guidelines below when taking a certification decision.
- a. The CB can issue a positive certification decision, with a maximum 50% of the estimated volume, if the following conditions are met:
- The CH received 0 NCs that require an onsite follow up audit (see Rainforest Alliance Policy on Remote Closure of non-conformities); and
  - All other NCs have been properly closed within the given timeframe (see Certification and Auditing Rules) via a remote follow up audit.
- Note:** In case of negative decision, see point 3.2.4.c. below.
- b. If the CH received NCs that require onsite follow up (see Rainforest Alliance Policy on Remote Closure of non-conformities):
- The CB shall not take a certification decision until an onsite audit is conducted (see 3.2.5 below).
- c. The CB shall take a negative certification decision for the entire estimated volume if conditions leading to a negative certification are met (See Certification and Auditing Rules). In this case:
- The CH is non-certified until a new certification decision is made after completing the next certification audit.
  - The CB shall ensure that the next certification audit is conducted fully onsite. The next certification audit shall be performed and completed between 3 months before and 3 months after the start date of the main or small harvest of the main crop to be certified in the expected validity period as required by the Certification Rules.



- 3.2.5 The onsite audit (Phase 2) of the certification process shall be carried out and completed within a maximum of 6 months from the last day of the remote audit.
- a. If the partial remote audit led to a positive certification decision (see 3.2.4.a), and:
    - i. If the second certification decision from the onsite audit is positive, then the second decision will cover the remaining estimated volume
    - ii. If the second certification decision from the onsite audit is negative, then the second decision will cover the remaining estimated volume plus any unsold volumes.

### FULL REMOTE AUDIT

- 3.2.6 In case of full remote **farm or supply chain audits**, the CB shall follow the guidelines below when making the certification decision.
- a. The CB can issue a positive certification decision covering the entire scope if the following conditions are met:
    - i. The CH received 0 NCs that require an onsite follow up audit (see Rainforest Alliance Policy on Remote Closure of non-conformities); and
    - ii. NCs against all other requirement have been properly closed within the required timeframe (see Certification and Auditing Rules) via a remote follow up audit.

**Note:** In case of negative decision, see point c. below.
  - b. The CB may transform a full remote audit into a partial remote audit and take a decision to certify 50% of the estimated volume the CH received NCs that require onsite follow up (see Rainforest Alliance Policy on Remote Closure of non-conformities); and
    - i. The CB shall carry out an onsite audit no later than 6 months from the last day of the remote audit to take a second certification decision.
      - If the second certification decision from the onsite audit is positive, then the second decision will cover the remaining estimated volume
      - If the second certification decision from the onsite audit is negative, then the second decision will cover the remaining estimated volume plus any unsold volumes.
    - ii. In case the onsite audit is not carried out within the given timeframe in this document; the CH shall not be certified for the remaining volume and will proceed to the next certification audit if they still wish to be certified.
  - c. The CB shall take a negative certification decision for the entire scope if conditions leading to a negative certification are met (See also Certification and Auditing Rules).
    - i. The CH certification status in the RA 2020 program is non-certified until a new certification decision is made after completing the next (certification) audit.
    - ii. The CB shall ensure that the next certification audit is conducted fully onsite. The next certification audit shall be performed and completed between 3 months before and 3 months after the start date of the main or small harvest of the main crop to be certified in the expected validity period as required by the Certification Rules.
- 3.2.7 In the case of farm CHs, if the CB identifies that one or more aspects mentioned in the sections [Feasibility evaluation](#) and [Preconditions](#) of this document changed during the audit and the reliability of the process can not be guaranteed, the CB **shall not** issue a positive certification decision for the entire scope until an onsite



audit to evaluate the pending requirements has been successfully completed. However, the CB may convert the full remote audit into a partial remote audit, following the rules in 3.2.6.b above.

- a. The onsite audit shall be completed no later than 6 months from the last day of the remote audit.
- b. If the onsite audit is not carried out within the required timeframe, the CH shall not be certified for the remaining volume and will proceed to the next certification audit if they still wish to be certified.

3.2.8 The CH may request an exceptional extension from RA where specific circumstances require (please see also 2.3.3 in this document).

## ANNEX 1: GENERAL RECOMMENDED GOOD PRACTICES FOR REMOTE AUDITS

Below are some good practices that we have learned in the past by doing and observing remote audits ourselves as well as some good practices mentioned by the sustainability standard community through the coordination of [ISEAL Alliance](#).

1. It is necessary for the audit team and the CH to have (tested) different platforms and channels of communication so that if one fails, the other(s) can be used instead.
2. It is strongly recommended to test the tools/equipment from multiple areas/locations, including remote areas/locations to determine which will likely give best signal for the virtual calls.
3. If the audit will require the use of a CH-specific platform or IT application system, it is necessary to request the CH to provide a designated onsite IT person who will be available when the audit team needs to access the system.
4. During the calls, whenever possible, consider keeping the cameras on to allow a more personal conversation and the participants of the conversation can also read body language. If the background noise allows, it is recommended to leave the microphone open when possible.
5. During the calls, whenever possible, it is recommended to use a headset to increase audio quality.
6. The audit team should factor in regular breaks to avoid fatigue and check in frequently with the auditee if they need a break.
7. The audit team should not take any screen shots or record calls without permission from the auditee/interviewee.
8. The audit team should always make the best effort to confirm what was heard or said and paraphrase where it is needed.
9. During the audit, the audit team should stay open-minded and flexible to adapt since unexpected situations can emerge at any time.
10. The CB should consider which type of data needs to be stored as audit evidence and which data could be deleted from the server/data storage system once the audit has been concluded.
11. The CB should consider sending a letter through the CH management to all workers 1 week prior to the audit, to inform them they might be contacted by the CB and to request their full cooperation. It could include for example the following message:  
*"Due to COVID 19 restrictions, [name of CB] auditors are unable to conduct face-to-face interviews at [Company Name] premises currently. The audit team from [name of CB] may contact you between [first audit date] and [last audit date] to understand how our company is implementing the Rainforest Alliance standard requirements. The management of [Company name] expects full cooperation from you to complete this process. As an alternative, should you wish to talk to our auditor about any employment matters at [Company Name], please SMS text or give a*



missed call to our Auditor on the following number. [Auditor's Name] on [Cell phone #]. He/she will return your call on [date] between [time] and [time] or [date] between [time] and [time]. Alternatively, at any time you may email the auditor at [auditor@ email address]. Any communication with our auditor [auditor name] and [name of CB] shall remain confidential and will not be relayed to your company or any other party/person."

12. In case the remote audit takes place due to Covid-19, we strongly recommend the CB to also further investigate how this has potentially affected the working conditions, by specifically asking about any changes since Covid-19.
13. Prior to the audit, the CB should share with the CH a contact detail for distribution to all workers, farmers, labor providers, committees and representatives of worker organizations/trade unions. This will enable stakeholders directly related to the CH to contact the auditor independently of management.
14. When calculating the audit duration, the CB should consider additional audit time for remote interviews. For example, the CB should include additional time for potential technical hick-ups, bad internet connection or unavailability of workers.

## ANNEX 2: GOOD PRACTICES FOR SUPPLY CHAIN AUDITS

### Good practices with remote supply chain auditing:

- In general, CH provides any procedures, policies, and documents as requested by the CB in preparation of the audit.
- CB performs document review to identify areas/topics for further investigation. Additional time might be required to review the information received and to thoroughly prepare for the remote audit, so that the remote audit can be conducted swiftly.
- During the audit, further investigation on identified topics is done through inspecting CH's traceability platform, conducting interviews with management or staff, and reviewing additional documentation, amongst others.

### Example on requirement 1.6.2:

- Request company's management plan (incl. gender mitigation measures), records of awareness raising activities and documentation of a remediated gender-case (if applicable).
- Reviewing above documentation, CB selects sample of mitigation measures to be further verified for implementation during audit. Prepare interview with gender committee member(s) to understand implementation of mitigation measures and case management. In addition, identify management personnel as well as a sample of workers for interviews.
- During the audit, perform interviews to cross-check information gathered prior to the audit.

### Example on requirement 2.2.2:

- Request company's procedure to verify accuracy of transactions in the platform.
- Reviewing procedure and company's traceability platform to select a sample of transactions to be further verified during the audit.
- During the audit, company is to provide additional documentation (i.e. shipping documents, invoices, etc.) that can be cross-checked with details of the online transaction.