

RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

POLICY:

Adjusted Timelines for the Transition and Full Certification Cycles of the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Certification Program

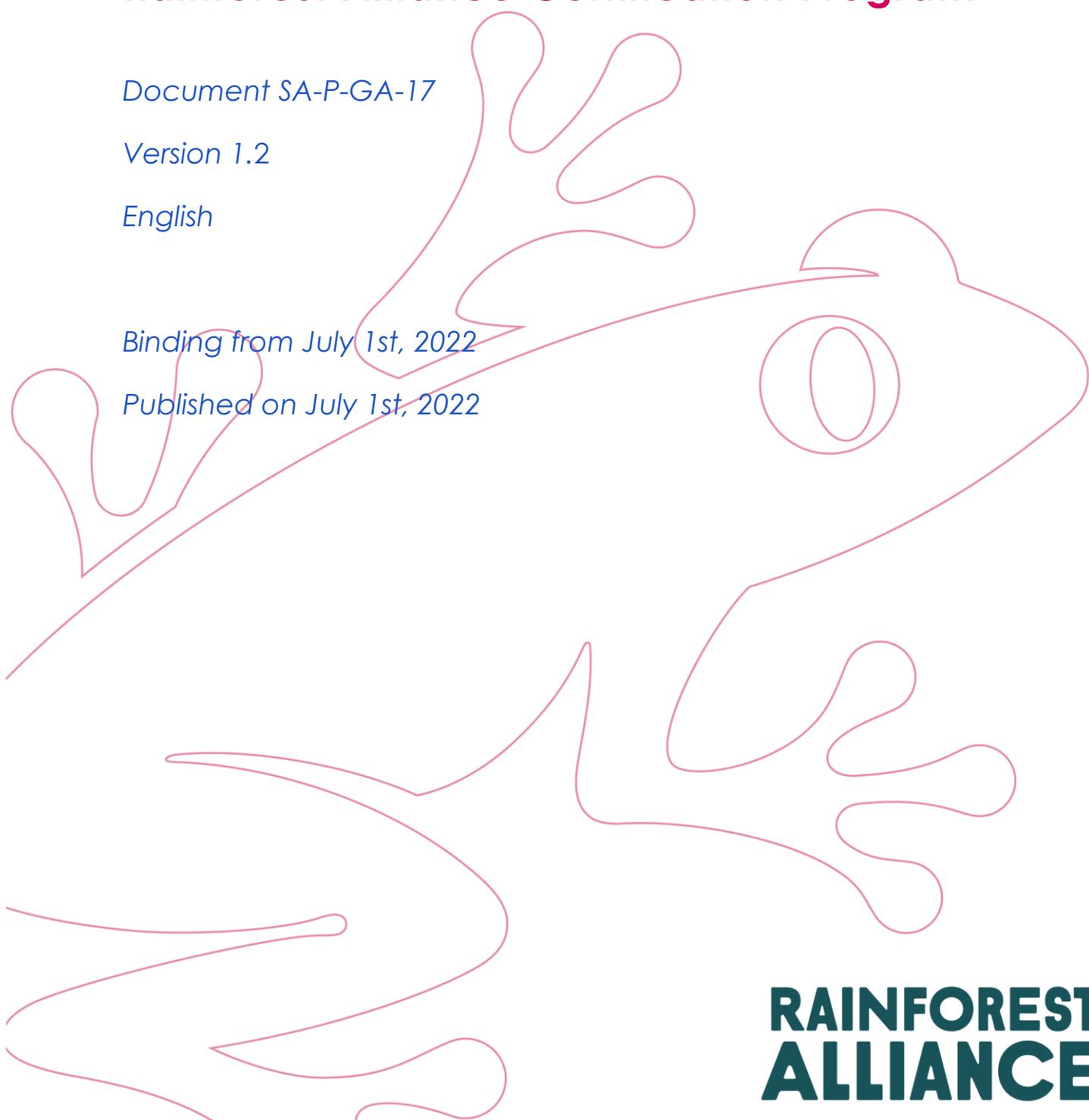
Document SA-P-GA-17

Version 1.2

English

Binding from July 1st, 2022

Published on July 1st, 2022



**RAINFOREST
ALLIANCE**



The Rainforest Alliance is creating a more sustainable world by using social and market forces to protect nature and improve the lives of farmers and forest communities.

Name of the document	Date of first publication	Expires by
Policy: Adjusted Timelines for the Transition and Full Certification Cycles of the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Certification Program	March 21 st , 2022	December 31 st , 2023
Linked to		
SA-P-GA-11 Policy on Remote closure of Non-conformities SA-P-GA-8 Policy on Changes to Certification and Auditing Rules for Audits in the Transition Year SA-R-GA-2 Rainforest Alliance 2020 Transition Rules		
Replaces		
SA-P-GA-17-V1.1 Policy: Adjusted Timelines for the Transition and Full Certification Cycles of the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Certification Program		
Applicable to		
UTZ and 2017 Rainforest Alliance certificate holders transitioning into the new Rainforest Alliance Certification Program.		

Policies are binding. Policies complement and/or supersede related rules or requirements for the parties they are applicable to.

More information

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KEY CHANGES

Overview of key adaptations in this document SA-P-GA-17-V1.2, published July 1st, 2022, as compared to the previous version SA-P-G-17-V1.1, published May 6th, 2022

Section	Change
Section 2.	Added: Clause 2.9, for Farm CH: If the corrective action plan addresses non-conformities related to requirements on traceability (chapter 2) and/or shared responsibility (chapter 3), the action plan must include measures to rectify non-compliance retroactively back to the day the contract was signed with the CB to conduct the audit or July 1, 2021 (whichever comes first), as well as measures to ensure compliance in the future.
Section 2.	Added: Clause 2.12, for Farm CH: The second transition audits will be focused on: a) Verifying progress on implementation of any action plan to address root causes and close open non-conformities b) Specific high-risk topics in each crop, country or region as identified in the Certification Application Form (CAF) by the CB
Section 2.	Added: Clause 2.13, for Farm CH: If the focus of the second transition audit (as set out in 2.15) results in a lower time estimation for the audit in the CAF, the CB must record a deviation, and plan the audit based on this clause.
Section 4.	Amended: Clause 4.7, for Supply chain CH: For both the transition audits and year 1 certification audits Closure of NCs which require long-term solutions to address root causes may be closed by an action plan that goes beyond the 10-week period for NC closure, provided that the actions have been started during the 10-week correction period. The verification of closure of these non-conformities will be conducted during the Year 2 surveillance audit. Or (if an audit is not required) an additional verification within 12 months of the first certification audit.
Section 4.	Added: clause 4.9, for Supply chain CH: If the corrective action plan addresses non-conformities related to requirements on traceability (chapter 2) and/or shared responsibility (chapter 3), the action plan must include measures to rectify non-compliance retroactively back to the day the contract was signed with the CB to conduct the audit or the date of first purchase of 2020 certified volumes (whichever comes first), as well as measures to ensure compliance in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

The Rainforest Alliance introduced its Certification Program based on the 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard on 1 July 2021 with the aim to drive transformational change in sustainable agriculture practices and responsible commodity sourcing. To support certificate holders transitioning from the UTZ and 2017 Rainforest Alliance certification programs, Rainforest Alliance allowed for a transition year for implementation. During this period, a number of measures were applied to facilitate existing and new certificate holders to implement the new program in the first year.

For Farm certificate holders these include a provision to only comply with the core requirements of the standard, and modification to the Certification and Auditing rules to reduce the documentation to be presented before an audit and to allow any non-conformities (NCs) which require for long-term solutions to address root causes to be closed by an action plan that goes beyond the 10-week period for NC closure, provided that the actions have been started during the 10-week period.

For Supply Chain certificate holders this included the provision that all required audits should be desk audits rather than on-site audits in the first year¹.

See also: [SA-P-GA-8 Policy on Changes to Auditing Rules in Transition Year](#).²

During this transition year the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have restricted the ability of all stakeholders to ensure training and full implementation of the certification program. In addition, the introduction of a large number of innovations to the Rainforest Alliance certification and traceability platforms, alongside the requirements of the new Standard, has placed additional burden on certificate holders. Rainforest Alliance has received consistent feedback from stakeholders that they require more time to adequately understand and implement the new Rainforest Alliance Certification Program. For this reason, Rainforest Alliance has taken the decision to modify the following aspects of the dates for implementation of the full certification cycle for the Certification Program.

In addition to this, for easier understanding and implementation of the Standard in Version 1.1 for the transition period adaptations were made on the definition of Large farms and on the applicability of the extra requirements on social aspects for small farms. Further nuances may be made at the beginning of the first certification cycle.

¹ This does not apply to cocoa supply chain actors operating in West Africa, as set out in the Cocoa Policy see <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/policy-for-farm-and-supply-chain-certification-in-cocoa/>

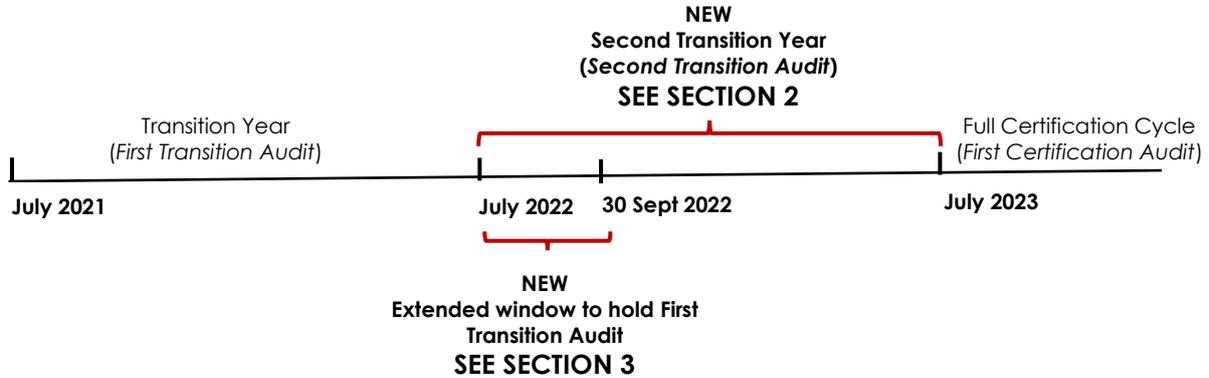
² See: <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Policy-on-Changes-to-Auditing-Rules-in-Transition-Year.pdf>



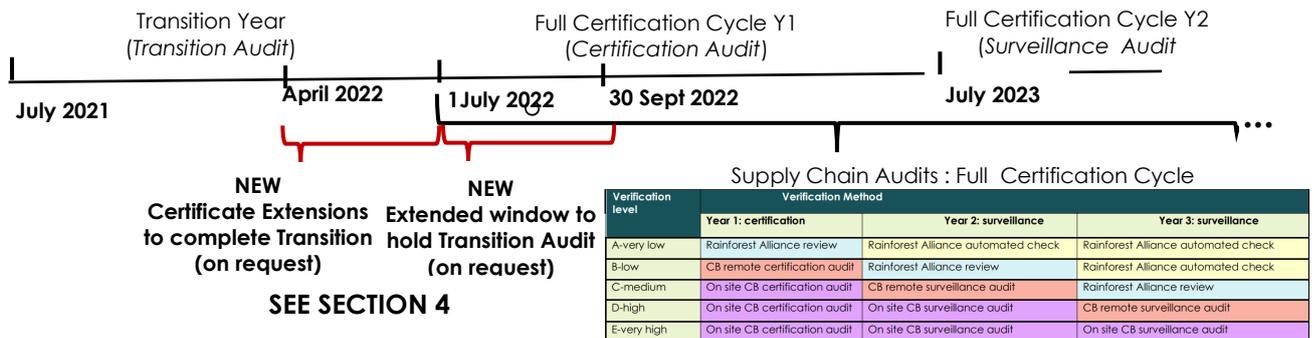
1. OVERVIEW OF ADJUSTED TIMELINES

The diagrams below show the adjusted timelines for the transition and full certification cycles of the Rainforest Alliance Certification Program for Farm and Supply Chain Certificate holders. The details of these adjustments are set out in the following sections of the policy.

FARM CERTIFICATE HOLDERS



SUPPLY CHAIN CERTIFICATE HOLDERS



2. DATE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF FULL CERTIFICATION CYCLE: FARM CERTIFICATE HOLDERS – 1 JULY 2023

- 2.1 Farm certificate holders will only be required to implement the full certification cycle from 1 July 2023. The additional transition year applies to all farm certificate holders. It is not possible for farm certificate holders to implement the full certification cycle before 1 July 2023.
- 2.2 All audits for farm certificate holders that take place before 1 July 2023 will be considered Transition Audits. This means that they:
- Will require compliance only with the core requirements of the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Standard; and
 - Will result in a one-year transition certificate.
- 2.3 All farm certificate holders who are transitioning from the UTZ or 2017 Rainforest Alliance certification program, and who wish to maintain uninterrupted certification shall:
- Complete registration on the Rainforest Alliance platform by June 30th, 2022 which means:
 - Definition of Certification Scope.
 - Submission of Self-assessment in the RACP.



- iii. Submission of the Group Member Registry (for groups).
 - iv. Submission of polygon data (for individual farms).
- b) Complete two transition audits before 1 July 2023 after which they can start the three-year certification cycle.
- NB** Banana producers must complete two transition audits before 31 December 2023 after which they can start the three-year certification cycle.
- 2.4 The first transition audit must be conducted before 30 September 2022 at the latest, in line with the rules set out in section 3 below.
- NB** For banana producers, the first transition audit must be conducted before Dec 31, 2022.
- NB** Certificate holders, other than banana producers, who conduct their first transition audit after 1 July 2022 will need to schedule their second transition audit less than 12 months later to be certain to complete both transition audits before 1 July 2023.
- NB** For CH in Côte d'Ivoire, [SA-P-AF-19 Policy Certification timelines and procedures for Cocoa groups in Cote d'Ivoire](#)³ supersedes this.
- 2.5 During the extended transition period at least one of the transition audits shall take place during harvest season.
- a) It is the responsibility of the CH to plan at least one transition audit during harvest season.
 - b) Failure to comply with point a) above will result in the cancellation of the certificate.
 - c) The CB shall communicate to Rainforest Alliance on a monthly basis the list of audited certificate holders including if audits took place during harvest season;
- 2.6 All new farm certificate holders who joined the 2020 Rainforest Alliance certification program between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022 shall have a second transition audit between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023.
- 2.7 All transition audits starting on or after 1 July 2022, will be based on version 1.2 of the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Standard.
- 2.8 During the transition period audits, any NCs which require long-term solutions to address root causes may be closed by an action plan that goes beyond the 10-week period for NC closure, provided that the actions have been started during the 10-week correction period and will be completed by the certification audit of the first certification cycle⁴.
- 2.9 If the corrective action plan addresses non-conformities related to requirements on traceability (chapter 2) and/or shared responsibility (chapter 3), the action plan must include measures to rectify non-compliance retroactively back to the day the contract was signed with the CB to conduct the audit or July 1, 2021 (whichever comes first), as well as measures to ensure compliance in the future.
- 2.10 Transition audits already planned, with dates communicated to the Rainforest Alliance, before the publication date of this policy cannot be postponed.
- 2.11 Farm certificate holders who fail to complete their transition audits within the timeframe set out above will not be certified nor able to sell products as Rainforest Alliance certified until they have passed a full certification audit in compliance with the Rainforest Alliance Certification Rules.⁵
- 2.12 The second transition audits will be focused on:

³ See: <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/certification-timelines-and-procedures-for-cocoa-groups-in-cote-divoire/>

⁴ Compliance of requirement 1.2.3, where suppliers and subcontractors need to be compliant and certified, will only be checked during the certification audit of the first certification cycle.

⁵ See: <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/2020-certification-and-auditing-rules/>



- a) Verifying progress on implementation of any corrective action plan to address root causes and close open non-conformities.
 - b) Specific high-risk topics in each crop, country or region as identified in the Certification Application Form (CAF) by the CB.
- 2.13 If the focus of the second transition audit (as set out in 2.15) results in a lower time estimation for the audit in the CAF, the CB must record a deviation, and plan the audit based on this clause.

3. TIMEFRAME FOR FARM CERTIFICATE HOLDERS TO CARRY OUT THE FIRST TRANSITION AUDITS

- 3.1 The timeframe for farm certificate holders to start the first transition audit for the new Rainforest Alliance certification program is extended until 30 September 2022. (For Banana producers 31 December 2022). This means the audit opening meeting shall take place no later than this date.
- 3.2 The certificate holder must obtain their first transition certificate no later than 31 December 2022. This includes finalizing the audit, any follow-up audits to verify closure of non-conformities, and receiving the final certification decision.
- 3.3 The second transition audit shall be finalized no later than 30 June 2023 (For Banana producers 31 December 2023), to ensure that an audit is conducted for each annual harvest cycle.
- 3.4 Transitioning farm certificate holders understand and agree that if they conduct their first transition period audit after 1 July 2022, they will need to schedule their second transition audit less than 12 months later to be certain to complete both transition audits before 1 July 2023.

4. DATE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF FULL CERTIFICATION CYCLE: SUPPLY CHAIN CERTIFICATE HOLDERS – 1 JULY 2022

- 4.1 Supply Chain certificate holders will be required to implement the full certification cycle from 1 July 2022 as previously communicated. This is to enable them to reduce the number of audits they need to undertake in line with their verification level.
- 4.2 Supply Chain certificate holders whose current certificates expire before 1 July 2022 and who are therefore required to obtain a one-year transition certificate shall:
 - a) Complete registration on the Rainforest Alliance platform by 30 April 2022.
 - b) Start their transition audit on or before 30 June, 2022.

Exception: Banana supply chain certificate holders can finalize their 2020 transition audit through December 31, 2022 according to the [Policy on the Transition Period to the 2020 Certification System for Banana Certificate Holders⁶](#)

- 4.3 Supply chain certificate holders who already have an audit scheduled but will not complete the transition audit before their current certificate/ license expires, may submit a request to their Certification Body for an extension of their current certificate/ license for two months past the date of the audit to allow time to finalize the certification process.

⁶ See <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/policy-on-transition-period-to-the-2020-certification-system-for-banana-certificate-holders/#:~:text=Policies%20and%20rules-.Policy%20on%20the%20transition%20period%20to%20the,System%20for%20Banana%20certificate%20holders&text=The%202020%20Rainforest%20Alliance%20Sustainable,first%20audit%20to%20this%20standard>



- 4.4 The timeframe for supply chain certificate holders to start the transition audit for the new Rainforest Alliance certification program can be extended upon request to their Certification Body however audits should start no later than 30 September 2022.
- 4.5 Supply Chain certificate holders who require a transition audit and fail to complete it within the timeframes set out in 4.2 and 4.3 will not be certified nor able to sell products as Rainforest Alliance certified until they have passed a certification audit in compliance with the Rainforest Alliance Certification Rules. See: <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/2020-certification-and-auditing-rules/>
- 4.6 Certificate Holders who do not require a transition audit, and have not started the process for a transition audit, will begin the three-year certification cycle from 1 July 2022 based on the audit schedule determined for each verification level.
- 4.7 For transition audits and the Year 1 audits of the full certification cycle that start prior to 1 July 2023, certificate holders can close non-conformities which require long-term solutions to address root causes with an action plan provided the actions have been started within the 10-week period for NC-closure⁷. The verification of closure of these non-conformities will be conducted during the Year 2 surveillance audit. If a surveillance audit is not required (see table below), an additional verification is required to close the non-conformities within 12 months of the first certification audit, this can be done through remote checks if possible.
- 4.8 If the corrective action plan addresses non-conformities related to requirements on traceability (chapter 2) and/or shared responsibility (chapter 3), the action plan must include measures to rectify non-compliance retractively back to the day the contract was signed with the CB to conduct the audit or the date of first purchase of 2020 certified volumes (whichever comes first), as well as measures to ensure compliance in the future.
- 4.9 Full certification audits scheduled on or after 1 July 2022 will:
 - a) Include onsite verification (For Verification levels C, D and E (see table below)).
 - b) Be based on version 1.2 of the 2020 Rainforest Alliance Standard.
 - c) Result in a three-year certificate

Verification level	Verification Method		
	Year 1: certification	Year 2: surveillance	Year 3: surveillance
A-very low	Rainforest Alliance review	Rainforest Alliance automated check	Rainforest Alliance automated check
B-low	CB remote certification audit	Rainforest Alliance review	Rainforest Alliance automated check
C-medium	On site CB certification audit	CB remote surveillance audit	Rainforest Alliance review
D-high	On site CB certification audit	On site CB surveillance audit	CB remote surveillance audit
E-very high	On site CB certification audit	On site CB surveillance audit	On site CB surveillance audit

⁷ Compliance of requirement 1.2.3, where suppliers and subcontractors need to be compliant and certified, will only be checked during the certification audit of the first certification cycle.



5. ADAPTATIONS IN DEFINITIONS AND APPLICABILITY OF STANDARD REQUIREMENTS

5.1 Definition small and large farms

Until the expiration of this Policy,

- a. Large farms are defined as any farms with 20 or more permanent workers. Farms that fulfil this definition have to comply with the requirements for Large Farms for Group Certification or Individual Certification as indicated in the Farm standard requirements.
- b. Farms with fewer than 20 permanent workers are considered small farms.
- c. 'Permanent worker' is defined as *A person with a work contract for at least 12 consecutive months.*

5.2 Requirements for small farms with average five workers or more

Until the expiration of this policy, the requirements for small farms in group certification with indication 'Applicable in case of average ≥ 5 hired workers' are not applicable for these small farms.

These requirements are still applicable for small farms with Individual certification.