




**CERTIFICATION GUIDELINE****LEAF Marque Standard**
Version 16.1 1st September 2023

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LEAF Marque CERTIFICATION SYSTEM**1. Introduction**

This document describes the rules for any party seeking certification against the LEAF Marque Standard Version [16.1](#) (hereinafter referred to only as LEAF Marque).

LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) is a leading organisation delivering and promoting Climate Positive, thriving, resilient and exemplar agro-ecological farming at an increasingly global level. Working with farmers, the food industry, scientists, environmentalists, teachers, young people, and consumers we are looking at new ways to deliver productivity and prosperity among our farmers, enrich the environment and engage young people and society in a valuable and meaningful way.

LEAF Marque is an environmental assurance system recognising more sustainably farmed products. It is based on LEAF's nine Integrated Farm Management (IFM) principles.

Any business engaged with the LEAF Marque System must comply with all applicable regional and national laws and regulations, following relevant international treaties, conducting business lawfully and with integrity.

LEAF Marque's Intended Outcomes are aligned with LEAF's beyond certification work which helps farmers and growers across the globe to deliver more sustainable farming. LEAF aims to inspire and enable more circular approaches to farming through integrated, regenerative, and vibrant nature-based solutions, that deliver productivity and prosperity among farmers, enriches the environment, and positively engages young people and wider society. Within the context of IFM, the LEAF Marque system aims to deliver positive action for climate, nature, economy, and society transforming farming and food at an increasingly global level through:

1. Building resilience
2. Implementation of regenerative practices
3. Implementation of strategies to reduce GHG emissions and sequester carbon
4. Improved soil management to enhance soil quality and soil health
5. Improved implementation of effective IPM solutions for crop health and protection
6. Improved implementation of waste management best practice
7. Improved strategies for livestock health, performance, and environmental impact
8. Improved energy use and efficiency
9. Improved management of water use and water quality
10. Enhanced habitats and biodiversity
11. Engagement with local or wider communities

This document describes the basic steps and considerations relevant for the applicant producer to implement the LEAF Marque Standard. It sets the rules on how the audit process works.

2. Normative Documents

The following LEAF Marque Standard normative documents provide information for the implementation and audit assessment of the LEAF Marque Standard. The current version of the following documents will be taking into account for LEAF Marque Certification process:

- a) LEAF Marque Standard [v16.1](#)
- b) LEAF Marque Standard [v16.1](#) Checklist

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- c) LEAF Marque System Rules.
 - d) CB Licence Agreement. This document details the rights and obligations of LEAF Marque Ltd and of the Certification Body as the independent organisation for verification, audit, certification and/or approval within the LEAF Marque System.
 - e) The Terms of Reference for the LEAF Marque Standard Scheme Rules
 - f) LEAF Producer Group Quality Management System
 - g) LEAF Product List.
 - h) Certification Body Fee Structure.
 - i) LEAF Marque Oversight Programme.
 - j) LEAF-Brand-Guideline.
 - k) LEAF Marque Claim Rules.
 - l) LEAF Marque web reference for Claims & Labelling <https://leaf.eco/leafmarque/claims-and-labelling>.

3. Certification Options and LEAF Marque Membership

3.1. Certification options

Individual Producer

Individual producer or one organization owns one or several production sites that do not function as separate legal entities.

In instances where a business works in partnership with another business, the 'whole farm businesses can include both businesses, for example, 'Farm A incorporating Farm B'.

Producer Group Certification

- a) A producer group applies for group certification. The approach for LEAF Producer Groups is similar to that for GLOBALG.A.P. Option 2 producer. For GLOBALG.A.P. Option 2 businesses, the whole farm business includes all growers within the LEAF Producer Group.
- b) It is a pre-requisite that the LEAF Producer Group is certified to GLOBALG.A.P.
- c) "LEAF Producer Group" signifies the operator of the Quality Management System. This is the legal entity which is certified.
- d) A group shall have a QMS implemented and comply with rules set out in the LEAF Produce Group Quality – current version.
- e) The "producer(s)" refers to the farm(s) or farmer(s) within the LEAF Producer Group.

3.2. Approved baseline system pre-requirement

LEAF Marque is an environmental assurance system that is supplementary to other baseline certification systems. As a whole farm approach, there must be baseline certification from a LEAF Marque approved certification system for all products [that the producer wants to include in the LEAF Marque certificate](#).

The applicant shall be a certified full member of a LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system for each product [that the producer wants to include in the LEAF Marque certificate](#). For Fruit & Vegetables LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system could be GLOBALG.A.P. IFA Crops F&V or other approved baseline certification systems described in LEAF-Product-List.

Independently verified baseline certification systems must be approved by LEAF Marque.

Certificate(s) from approved baseline certification system(s) include all products within the legal entity business, as defined in the LEAF Marque Certification System Rules.

The LEAF Marque Standard applies to all products and land within the control of the farming business **but only those products that are certified under a baseline certification approved by LEAF Marque could be included in the LEAF Marque certificate.**

If a business' product(s) change after their audit, Production Information should be updated either via the LEAF Sustainable Farming Review or LEAF Charity membership details, and the ACERTA should be informed, and scope extension point will be followed.

3.3. LEAF Marque Membership

LEAF Marque Membership applies to the whole farm business. This business is the entity that is audited and awarded certification once ACERTA has verified compliance with the LEAF Marque Standard.

The whole farm refers to the farming activities a business has full responsibility for. The whole farm business must have the capacity to enter into contracts and to be held responsible for its actions.

LEAF Marque Membership is created when the business establishes a legally enforceable contract with ACERTA.

LEAF Marque Membership is independent of LEAF Marque certification status and is updated annually on renewal of the contract between ACERTA and business.

It is the responsibility of ACERTA and business to annually renew their contract, and the responsibility of ACERTA to update LEAF Marque Membership as determined by the contract anniversary date. The contract includes businesses' agreement to comply with ACERTA rules and LEAF Marque System Rules.

If a business renews their contract/relationship with the ACERTA but does not pay the associated fee on time, the LEAF Marque Membership status will be changed to 'Grace'. If the payment is not made within 3 months, LEAF Marque Membership will be 'Closed' and certification status changed to 'Withdrawn'.

Businesses can change CB at any time but should inform the new CB of any previous certification and membership information. A review of this information must be completed before the certificate status can be confirmed and transferred. Each CB has the right to reject the transfer application if there are outstanding non-conformances still to be rectified or any other certification or membership conditions which have been imposed which prevent the application from being accepted. Non-conformances must be resolved, and any corresponding conditions must be accepted by both the previous and new CB before a transfer can take place.

On creation of LEAF Marque Membership, each business will be allocated a unique 5- or 6-digit LEAF Marque Number. This number is allocated to the applicant and remains the same if the applicant transfers to different CBs.

The membership category for both LEAF Charity Membership and LEAF Marque Membership should be as closely aligned with the LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system membership as possible. For example, GLOBALG.A.P. Option 2 members should have LEAF and LEAF Marque Producer Group membership, and GLOBALG.A.P. Option 1 members should have LEAF and LEAF Marque individual membership.

LEAF reserves the right to refuse or terminate LEAF Marque Membership when it considers that it is necessary to do so, to prevent the standard system from being brought into disrepute.

4. Certification Process

4.1. Registration process

a) New Applicant

When a new applicant contacts ACERTA in order to get information of the certification, ACERTA's Commercial Manager contacts him as well, and confirms under which option the applicant wants to be certified.

The applicant is requested some basic information which will let ACERTA make the appropriate quotation.

Next, by the ACERTA management computer system (SIG), the quotation, which will be reviewed by the Administration Manager, is made.

The applicant who wants to begin the certification shall send this quotation appropriately accepted.

Quotation includes the certification/ recertification audit fee as a minimum, but can also include additional fees for:

- Assessment of additional sites and/or holdings/buildings located away from the main site.
- Unannounced audits
- Spot checks
- Extension audits

Once the accepted quotation has been received, the Technical Department will send the applicant the related documentation.

- Certification Request Form, document to be sent back to ACERTA completed to formalize the certification procedure.
- Certification Agreement, between ACERTA and the applicant company, document where the conditions which will regulate the commercial relationship are specified (enforceable contract)

The applicant will send LEAF Marque request and corresponding signed agreements and the prove of LEAF Marque approved baseline certificate.

ACERTA shall be responsible for carrying out the registration and updating LEAF Marque database, in compliance with the relevant LEAF Marque System Rules and/or other regulations.

If, while registering or updating data about entities, ACERTA detects that any information supplied by the business is inconsistent with registration information previously provided or with the actual production situation, ACERTA shall be responsible for working with the business to take all appropriate actions to ensure that the correct information is entered.

b) Certification Renewal: Previously certified applicant

Registered producers and/or producers with certified products must re-register annually **before the expiry date**.

For this purpose, 6 months before the expiry date, the Technical Departement informs the holder of the certificate (or the relevant office) of the new activities of the certification maintenance to be carried out, by sending the documents to be completed and/or signed:

- Predefined quotation
- Certification Request Form
- Certification Agreement (enforceable contract)

As part of the initial registration, and subsequent registrations for renewal, the LEAF Marque applicant must complete a declaration in ACERTA certification request, regarding any current, pending, or past prosecutions relating to applicable regional and national laws and regulations. ACERTA must request further information regarding the nature of any declared prosecutions including how the applicant has addressed the matter and include this information in consideration of LEAF Marque System Rules 3.6 to determine whether there is risk of disrepute to the LEAF Marque system.

4.2. Internal assessment / LEAF Sustainable Farming Review

- **Individual producer applicants:**

The LEAF Sustainable Farming Review shall be completed by the business within the last 9 months.

LEAF Marque certified / applicant businesses can use the guidance provided within the LEAF Sustainable Farming Review to support their implementation of IFM and their preparation for LEAF Marque certification.

The LEAF Sustainable Farming Review is a self-assessment online management tool for LEAF members to support business implementation of IFM. It enables businesses to monitor their performance, identify strengths and weaknesses as well as set targets for improvement across the business.

ACERTA will check the availability of this internal assessment during registration process.

- **Producer Groups applicants:**

LEAF Producer Groups need to complete the LEAF Sustainable Farming Review for the whole group within the last 9 months.

A minimum of one internal inspection per annum of each registered producer within the LEAF Producer Group must be carried out either by qualified staff within the LEAF Producer Group, a qualified external advisor, a qualified consultant or subcontracted to an external verification body which is separate from the certification body.

This annual internal inspection must be conducted against the LEAF Marque Standard.

This annual internal inspection must be completed before the external verification by ACERTA.

ACERTA will check the availability of this internal assessment during registration process.

4.3. External Assessments

4.3.1. Request review and Job Order issuing

The Operation Manager Scheme Manager or an approved inspector/auditor qualified and approved by ACERTA will draw up a working programme by using the SIG from the review made to the "Certification Request Form" and the documents provided by the applicant during the registration process (Leaf Sustainable Farming Review, Record of Completion and Leaf Membership certificate). Based on the information provided by Certification request, he/she will assign an auditor team, determine the appropriate working days, and define the interval of dates to undertake the audits and inform the auditor or auditor team, in writing, of the assignation, sample and minimum duration of the audit to be carried out, by the "Job order".

Acerta will apply the GLOBALG.A.P. inspector/auditor rotation rules for planning/ conducting LEAF Marque inspections/audits.

- ↪ **Option 1 (without QMS):** Operation Manager or Scheme Manager will plan the Inspections ensuring that the same inspector does not inspect a producer for 4 consecutive years (regardless of whether it is an announced or an unannounced inspection).

For example, inspector #1 inspects a producer in years 1, 2, 3 and 4.
in year 5 another inspector (inspector #2) must do the annual inspection.
In years 6, 7, 8 and 9 the inspector #1 may do 4 consecutive inspections again.

- ↪ **Option 2 and Option 1 multisite with qms:** Operation Manager or Scheme Manager will plan the Audits ensuring that the same auditor does not inspect a QMS for 4 consecutive years.

For example, auditor #1 inspects a QMS in years 1, 2, 3 and 4.
in year 5 another auditor (inspector #2) must do the annual audit.
In years 6, 7, 8 and 9 the auditor #1 may do 4 consecutive audits again.

This also applies for the group member inspections.

When the CB has only one inspector in a given country/region, exceptions may be given case-by-case, under previous authorisation of Leaf Marque.

The 4-year period will be calculated starting since the inspection / audits carried out in 2023.

4.3.2. Audit Plan

After receiving Job Order, the auditor will make the “Audit Plan”, and send it to the applicant and ACERTA’s Technical Department. If the applicant does not agree with any aspect, he/she will be able to notify it within the 3 subsequent days after the communication. In this case, the auditor / inspector or the Technical Department and the applicant shall have to reach an agreement and a new “Audit Plan” will be sent.

The applicant is aware that only the auditors identified in the Audit Plan or equivalent document can perform the audit and commits to report immediately ACERTA in case of any incidence in this regard, as well as prevent access to the facilities of persons who claim to act on behalf of ACERTA but who are not identified in the aforementioned documents.

4.3.3. Annual certification and renewal Inspection / Audit

ACERTA shall be responsible for carrying out the verification/audit activities in compliance with the relevant LEAF Marque System Rules and/or other regulations.

The first audit will take place by arrangement between ACERTA and the business, at a time that enables an effective and representative audit and there must be an audit for each time LEAF Marque certification is renewed.

The business must have prepared all relevant documentation and records prior to an audit.

LEAF Marque certified business must adhere to the version of the Standard that is applicable at the time of the audit.

The audit report recording the conformity against each Control Point must be completed during the LEAF Marque audit.

Promptly, and no later than 7 days after the last day of the audit, businesses will receive an Audit Summary Report which includes, at a minimum, any identified non-conformances against Essential and/or Recommended Control Points, the deadline for submission of corrective evidence to close non-conformances, and non-conformances identified in the previous audit (if applicable). The non-conformities from the previous audit shall be provided to the auditee together with the on-field results sheet at the end of the audit.

a) Inspection / Audit scope

Individual producer and Multisite without QMS applicants:

The verification/audit activities of ACERTA are to be carried out at the respective registered production site(s) of the business and, to the extent relevant, at their relevant administrative sites.

The inspection scope shall include:

- All production sites.
- All products

When the producer has different fields managed as one production unit, sharing the same resources, but not necessary all of them are together in the same location this is considered one unique production site.

Within each Production Site:

The minimum number of fields to be inspected = \sqrt{VF} , being “F” the number of fields of the farmer included (*if \sqrt{VF} is a decimal number, the higher whole number will be taken*), with the condition that all the vegetable (species) products are inspected.

Producer Group and Multisite with implemented QMS applicants:

Audit of the QMS occurs once before certification; subsequent inspections must be repeated annually.

External audit is annual.

Selection is made by taking a sample that as a minimum is the square root of the total number in the LEAF Producer Group. The sample should take into account factors such as crops grown and/or animals reared, location, size of production site, volume supplied, internal inspector(s), previous audits, travel time and external influences.

If the producers in the LEAF Producer Group are a subset of a larger group then calculation is based on the number in the LEAF Producer Group (for example, if the GLOBALG.A.P. group is 100, CB completes 10 producer inspections, if the LEAF Producer Group is 36 of the 100 then ACERTA will complete 6 LEAF Marque inspections).

When a producer member owns more than one production sites and this is chosen in the sample, the **square root of the production sites** owned by the sampled member is inspected.

Within each Production Site:

The most representative field (larger in hectares or due to other reason) shall be inspected as far as all the crops are inspected. If the same producer / production site is repeated over the years, the inspected field is rotated.

b) Inspection / audit Documents

Checklist:

ACERTA inspector / auditor shall always inspect the complete checklist of the LEAF Marque current checklist issued by ACERTA and confirm the information that was provided by the applicant in the LEAF Marque registration form.

Remarks and **comments shall be given in all cases (Yes/No/NA)** for every control point in all assessments.

Remarks and comments (e.g., which document(s) were sampled) shall be site-specific and included in the checklist, showing that all the control points have been properly inspected.

c) Inspection / Audit timing

The first audit will take place by arrangement between ACERTA and the business, at a time that enables an effective and representative audit.

There must be an audit for each time LEAF Marque certification is renewed. If ACERTA requires to see the business operations at different times of year, the audit can take place 4 months prior to or after the certificate ‘valid to’ date. The certification cycle would remain the same regardless of the audit date. If the business wishes to align their LEAF Marque audit with a LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system audit, the LEAF Marque audit can take place at any point prior to the ‘valid to’ date. The business can also have different certification cycles for different certification systems.

Audits can occur either at the same time as the LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system(s) audit, or as a stand-alone audit.

d) Inspection / Audit duration

ACERTA will calculate the time taken to conduct a LEAF Marque audit, which must be shared with LEAF Marque on request, based on:

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- Size of site, number of sites and their geography, complexity of business, any other baseline schemes being inspected as part of a joint audit.
 - Assignment of time for on-site office-based inspection and on-site non-office-based inspection.
 - Consideration of appropriate duration of audits for LEAF Producer Groups.
 - Format of audit (on-site, remote, or combination of approaches).

The audit duration will be estimated and communicated by the request reviewer during the issuance of LEAF Marque audit Job Order. Auditor shall record the final audit duration in audit report.

For Individual producer and Multisite without QMS

Minimum 2.5h for the simplest situation. It will be increased considering other factors (number of crops, number of plots, location, extension...)

For Producer groups (Option 2) and Multisite with implemented QMS

4h / QMS

1.5h / sampled producer / site

Considering always that these are minimum, and those complex, larger producers will be calculated higher time.

For both cases, it is considered that when the approved baseline system audit (GLOBALG.A.P. inspection / audit) is being conducted at the same time, the LEAF Marque Certification audit can be reduced.

4.3.4. Scope extension

Members must inform ACERTA of any changes to their business involving land area, products, or growers in a Producer Group. Subsequently, ACERTA will conduct a risk assessment to determine the necessary steps to amend the business' certification, following the table below.

Where a business change represents a high risk, and scope extension audit will be conducted.

Where a business change represents a low risk, ACERTA will update the certificate accordingly and the certification cycle will remain the same.

Scope extension audit

Extension audits follow the same procedure as certification and recertification audits but are focused only on the new product and/or land and/or grower, with 28 days to close non-conformances. If non-conformances are not closed within the deadline, the certificate is suspended, and another extension audit is needed to reinstate the certificate. Where no non-conformances are identified or if closed within the deadline, the certification will be amended but the certification cycle remains the same.

For Individual producers:

Change	Risk Assessment	High Risk Thresholds	Low Risk Thresholds	High Risk action	Low Risk action
New Area	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change in proportion to business size 2. Type of land area 3. Risk to LEAF Marque integrity 4. Risk of compliance with Standard 	<p>Any of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. $\geq 25\%$ increase in area/number of livestock 2. New area has environmental significance such as protected or high conservation value areas 3. Any land area that may prevent or constrain implementation of Integrated Farm Management principles, such as conversion of habitat area 4. Any land area that may not be compliant with the LEAF Marque Standard (e.g., deforested land), and/or businesses with significant non conformance history 	<p>All of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. $< 25\%$ increase in area/number of livestock 2. New area is not of environmental significance 3. No LEAF Marque integrity risks 4. No LEAF Marque Standard compliance risk 5. No significant non-conformance history 	<p>If CB is informed of changes 4 months prior to the certificate end date, the audit can be brought forward (certification cycle remains the same) and the usual recertification procedure applies</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Extension audit verifies compliance on new area. If non-conformances are identified, they must be closed within 28 days. The certificate is amended to include the new area.</p>	<p>LEAF Sustainable Farming Review amended & CB records updated</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Certificate is amended to include the new area</p>
New Product	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Type of product 2. Area of new product 3. Risk to LEAF Marque integrity 4. Risk of compliance with Standard 	<p><i>Any of the following:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All products, excluding those in low-risk category 2. Product on land that was previously a habitat area / land not in production 3. Any product with negative associations respective to the business/site context 4. Any product that has a limited capacity to achieve compliance with the Standard (e.g., due to lack of baseline certification system), and/or businesses with significant non conformance history 	<p><i>All of the following:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Product within the same scope of existing baseline certification system for combinable crops or horticultural 2. Product on land used for production previously 3. No LEAF Marque integrity risks 4. No LEAF Marque Standard compliance risk 	<p>If CB is informed of changes 4 months prior to certificate end date, the audit can be brought forward (<i>certification cycle remains the same</i>) and the usual recertification procedure applies</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Extension audit certificate compliance of new product. If non-conformances are identified, they must be closed within 28 days. The certificate is amended to include the new product.</p>	<p>LEAF Sustainable Farming Review amended & CB records updated</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Certificate is amended to include the new product</p>
New Product & Area	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Type of product 2. Area of new product 3. Risk to LEAF Marque integrity 4. Risk of compliance with Standard 	<p>Any of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All products, excluding those in low-risk category 2. New product represents $\geq 25\%$ increase in area/number of livestock, and/or on land with environmental significance such as protected or high conservation value areas 3. Any product or area with negative associations respective to the business/site context, or those that are constrained in the implementation of Integrated Farm Management principles 4. Any product or area that has an increased likelihood of not complying with the Standard (e.g., lack of baseline certification system, deforestation), and/or businesses with significant non-conformance history 	<p>All of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Product within the same scope of existing baseline certification system for combinable crops or horticultural 2. $< 25\%$ increase in area/number of livestock, and not on land with environmental significance 3. No LEAF Marque integrity risks 4. No LEAF Marque Standard compliance risk 	<p>If CB informed of changes 4 months prior to certificate end date, the audit can be brought forward (certification cycle remains the same) and the usual recertification procedure applies</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Extension audit assess compliance of new product and area. If non-conformances are identified, they must be closed within 28 days. Then, the certificate is amended to include new area and product.</p>	<p>LEAF Sustainable Farming Review amended & CB records updated</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Certificate is amended to include product</p>

For Producer groups:

Change	Risk Assessment	High Risk Thresholds	Low Risk Thresholds	High Risk action	Low Risk action
New grower / area / product in LEAF Producer Group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of producers added to the group / multisite 2. Increase in area / number of livestock 3. New product added 4. Risk to integrity of LEAF Marque 5. Risk of compliance with the Standard 	Any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. $\geq 10\%$ new producers in a group 2. $\geq 10\%$ increase in area/no. livestock 3. Any new product 4. Any product, area, or grower that may constrain implementation of Integrated Farm Management Principles, 5. Any product, area, or grower that has an increased likelihood of not complying with the Standard (e.g., lack of baseline certification system, deforestation), and/or businesses with significant non-conformance history 	All of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. $< 10\%$ of new producers in a group 2. $< 10\%$ increase in area / no. livestock 3. No new products 4. No LEAF Marque integrity risks 5. No LEAF Marque Standard compliance risks 	At a minimum, assessment of one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • square root of new producers/sites • square root of producers/sites with increased area and/or new product AND, for high risk businesses as identified by the CB, assessment of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inclusion of changes within QMS, and completion of internal audit of new grower/product/area If non-conformances are identified, they must be closed within 28 days. Then, the certificate is amended to include grower and new area/product if relevant.	LEAF Sustainable Farming Review amended & CB records updated certificate AND Producer conducts internal audit and amends Quality Management System

4.3.5. Follow up / spot checks (complementary audits)

Where the need arises, ACERTA can perform announced spot checks to check that non-conformances have been resolved, or to verify information received from a complaint/informant regarding the business' compliance with LEAF Marque Standard requirements and/or relevant legislative requirement.

The scope of this audit will be determined depending on the reason that conducted to perform the audit.

4.3.6. Unannounced Inspections/audits

ACERTA is entitled to perform unannounced audits, either as decided by ACERTA or on direction from LEAF Marque.

4.4. Certification

4.4.1. Assessment results and compliance levels

A positive certification decision will be made when conformance with all Essential Control Points is evidenced, unless the Not-Applicable criteria for Essential Control Point(s) has been met.

Initial audits

For a business' first audit, if a non-conformance against (an) Essential Control Point(s) are identified, the business has 3 months after the end of the audit to resolve them.

If this deadline is exceeded the business must reapply to ACERTA for another audit.

Subsequent audits

On all subsequent audits, if a non-conformance against (an) Essential Control Point(s) is identified, it must be resolved by 28 days after the end of the audit.

If this deadline is exceeded if the client's certificate is still valid it must be withdrawn, and another LEAF Marque audit is necessary.

Corrective evidence submitted to ACERTA must be promptly reviewed within the deadline for closure of non-conformances, to determine whether sufficient action has been taken to close any identified non-conformances.

If circumstances arise beyond the business' control that result in the business or ACERTA being unable to meet the deadlines, ACERTA can send LEAF Marque a non-conformance extension request.

A maximum 28-day extension can be granted. If non-conformances are closed within this period and the subsequent certification decision is positive, the existing certification cycle can be reestablished.

If non-conformances are not closed within the extension period, the business must reapply for another audit.

Producer Groups:

Where ACERTA identifies nonconformance(s) with the QMS, including systematic failure, this prevents certification unless evidence of rectification is approved by ACERTA within the appropriate timescale.

As defined in the LEAF Marque system rules, businesses have 3 months from the first inspection to rectify any non-conformance(s). For all subsequent inspections, businesses have 28 days to rectify non-conformance(s).

4.4.2. Certification decision

Where no non-conformances are identified, the certification decision must be made no later than 28 days after the end of the audit. Where non-conformances are identified, the certification decision must be made no later than 28 days after non-conformances are closed.

The evaluation of the results for the certification process of a file, both regarding individual producers and Producer Groups will be carried out by assessing a revision of the file:

- **Certification Request Form.**
- **Audit Checklists**
- **Final conclusions of the audit**
- **Corrective action plan assessment report closed, and evidence provided.** (If it will be necessary)

The certification decision must not be made by the individual who completed the audit. The decision maker must be trained and able to make an impartial decision.

After technical review process and prior to give any final favorable decision for certificate issuance, ACERTA will ensure that the points 1.1 and 1.3 (LSFR and PRODUCT INFORMATION) are correct by checking LEAF Marque database information. This verification will be done by a properly trained person with enough knowledge.

Clients will be informed of the certification decision promptly and provided performance insights based on the LEAF Marque audit.

4.4.3. Certificate Cycle

LEAF Marque certification is valid for a period of 12 months in which the 'valid to' date corresponds to the initial date of certification (e.g., certification first issued 1st September 2019, certificates renewed 1st September 2020, 1st September 2021). The exception to this is where the business wants to align the LEAF Marque certification cycle with the LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system cycle. In this instance, the certification cycle can be changed to match the first certification date that aligns with the LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system certificate (e.g., certification first issued 1st September 2019, certification for LEAF Marque and baseline system issued 15th January 2020, certificate renewed 15th January 2021, 15th January 2022).

4.4.4. Certificate

All LEAF Marque certificates list a business' certified products.

LEAF Marque certification is a whole farm approach, and all of a business' products must be included within an audit and listed on the certificate. In exceptional circumstance where the exemption criteria stated in the LEAF Marque

Standard is met, a business' product may not be listed on the certificate. However, the product cannot be marketed as LEAF Marque certified and must comply with the LEAF Marque Standard and LEAF Product List.

4.4.5. **Extension of the certification validity**

The validity of a LEAF Marque certificate can be extended to allow for CBs to audit the business at different times of year, to enable alignment with baseline certification systems, or if unforeseen circumstances result in ACERTA being unable to provide the audit as required or due to factors outside the control of the business (e.g., natural disaster, flooding, political instability). Where unforeseen circumstances do occur, approval must be sought from LEAF Marque for certification extension.

For auditing at different times of year and alignment with baseline certification systems, CBs can issue certificate extensions for up to 4 months. Where exceptional unforeseen circumstances occur, approval must be sought from LEAF Marque for certification extension and can be granted for up to 6 months.

4.4.6. **Reporting**

All registration information must be entered onto the LEAF Marque System using the online certification tool. A strict data protection protocol must be used as per described in corresponding section of this document.

ACERTA will collect the required data from the client and submit that data in accordance with the current user guide for LEAF Marque Certify Online. Data must be submitted on a weekly basis within the time scales below:

- Within 14 days of a client registering with ACERTA, a LEAF Marque account must be created. For renewals, the Membership End Date of the LEAF Marque account must be updated within 14 days of the client renewing their contract/relationship with ACERTA. These updates must be made regardless of whether the payment has been received from the client.
- The upload of the relevant information from the audit (non-conformances, date of audit) must occur no later than 10 days of the audit.
- The update of certificate status must occur no later than 10 days of the certification decision.
- When the entity's status is "Not Approved" and ACERTA certification manager receives documentary evidence that clears the non-conformances, ACERTA must, no later than 10 days of receipt of the documentary evidence, update the status on the LEAF Marque database.
- For Multisite producers (with QMS and without QMS) and for Producer Groups: Production Sites / members shall be recorded in LEAF Marque database. To upload any additional sites for LEAF Producer Groups, a spreadsheet template is available: the completed spreadsheet must then be e-mailed (keeping the template format) to the following address: Leaf.sites@casi.everysite.co.uk
- If ACERTA receives any information that impacts the certification status of a client, the appropriate amendments must be made to the client's information no later than 10 days.

ACERTA shall supply, upon request, in either electronic format that LEAF Marque can access or hard copy, a full list of their customers who are registered for LEAF Marque certification. This will include their full trading name, address, status, LEAF Marque certification number, LEAF charity membership number, enterprises within the legal entity business and detail of baseline system certificates for each enterprise.

ACERTA shall supply, upon request, the rationale for the sample selection for LEAF Producer Group audits.

ACERTA shall supply, upon request, the full assessment report, with sufficient detail, for any audit conducted within the last 6 years including recording objective evidence established against each point assessed.

4.5. **Sanctions**

ACERTA has the right to refuse, withdraw or amend the certification status of a member when it considers that it is necessary to do so to prevent the LEAF Marque System from being brought into disrepute.

ACERTA has the right to immediately suspend or withdraw a LEAF Marque certificate if it receives information – from audits, surveillance, or any reliable sources – that indicates any of the following:

- The business is not maintaining the requirements of the LEAF Marque Standard
- The business' baseline system certification is suspended or withdrawn.
- Any regional or national laws have been broken.
- Requirements and legislation requiring food safety have not been achieved.
- False or misleading statements were made on the application and/or renewal documentation, during an audit or any other communication.

This may lead to exclusion from future membership.

ACERTA will suspend or withdraw certificates depending on the severity of the issue.

If the issue can be resolved and does not risk bringing the LEAF Marque System into disrepute, a suspension will be stated. For example, in response to information that revealed the business had not entered information in the LSFR correctly, and the certificate was suspended until it was amended.

If the situation cannot be resolved, a withdrawal would be applicable. For example, in response to a complaint that demonstrated significant damage to the environment that breaches multiple Control Points.

4.5.1. **Suspension of Certificate:**

ACERTA will inform LEAF Marque and the business within 7 days of a suspension, stating the reason for the suspension, remedial actions, and the deadline in which these actions must be completed.

Businesses with suspended certifications must immediately desist from the sale or advertisement of any of their products as LEAF Marque certified.

Where ACERTA receives evidence of sufficient remedial actions within the required deadline, the certificate will be reinstated.

Where ACERTA do not receive evidence of sufficient remedial action within the required deadline, the certificate will be withdrawn.

4.5.2. **Withdrawal of Certificate:**

ACERTA will inform LEAF Marque and the business within 7 days of a withdrawal, stating the reason for the withdrawal.

Businesses with withdrawn certifications must immediately desist from the sale or advertisement of any of their products as LEAF Marque certified. The existing certification cannot be reinstated, and another audit must be conducted in order to achieve certification.

For issues relation to lack of payment of the associated fee, a notification will be sent to the producer / producer group and the LEAF Marque Membership status will be changed to "Grace". If the payment is not made within 3 months, LEAF Marque Membership will be "Closed", and certification status changed to 'Withdrawn'.

4.6. Variations

ACERTA can submit a variation request in exceptional circumstances where factors outside the control of the CB and/or member may result in a variation from the LEAF Marque System Rules. A written variation request must be sent to LEAF Marque in advance of any deviation from the LEAF Marque System Rules. The variation request must state the relevant clauses, detailed explanation of the justification for the variation, and supporting evidence to demonstrate the integrity of LEAF Marque principles and how LEAF Marque Standard requirements will be maintained if the variation request is granted.

LEAF Marque will approve variation requests that provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that variation is necessary and will not impact the integrity of the LEAF Marque System. On approval, LEAF Marque will send a confirmation letter to the CB which states the clauses the variation is approved for, any associated conditions, and the validity period of the variation.

LEAF Marque and the CB will keep a record of all variation requests which includes the justification and, if approved, the confirmation letter.

5. Information for the applicant

LEAF Marque certified businesses must notify ACERTA of any inspection or activity that identifies a lack of compliance with any legislative requirement, LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system requirement or the LEAF Marque Standard

5.1. Appeals and complaints

If a member has reason to appeal or complain about the audit or certification process, this must first be directed to ACERTA. ACERTA has an appeals and complaints procedure in place for their ISO 17065 accreditation which will ensure your comment is dealt with appropriately.

If your complaint is not dealt with satisfactorily or the issue relates to an issue outside the scope of ACERTA or to the LEAF Marque Standard, then please contact LEAF Marque Ltd (Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, CV8 2LG. Email info@leafmarque.com. Tel: +44 (0) 2476 413911. CB complaints are monitored as part of the Oversight Programme, where sanctions can be enforced in instances of poor CB performance.

For a complaint about the LEAF Marque System, complaints must be made by submitting complaints form to enquiries@leaf.eco. The complaints form and complaints procedure can be found on the LEAF website.

5.2. Use of certification data

Members can access their own data through myLEAF, including LEAF Charity Membership information, Contact Details, and LEAF Marque Certification Status (if relevant).

A list of LEAF Marque certified businesses will be made publicly available on the LEAF Website and updated at regular intervals. The business name, certificate scope, and expiry date are published. This list can also reference businesses who were previously certified but have had their certificate suspended or withdrawn.

Additional certification data is available to LEAF Charity members. The LEAF Marque Checker enables members to search a live database of LEAF Marque certified businesses, and access data on business name, LEAF Marque number, postcode, and certification details (status, expiry date, certified products).

There is further opportunity for certification data to be accessed by LEAF Charity members who chose to use the professional status tracker service, which is a commercial service, where information shared can include business name, LEAF Marque number, address, and certification details (status, expiry date, certificate history, certified products).

Data from certified businesses' LEAF Sustainable Farming Review will be aggregated, anonymised, and published in LEAF's annual Global Impacts Report and other Impacts reporting.

If a matter arises which could constitute or lead to an infringement of any laws or LEAF Marque Standard requirement, a relevant regulatory/administrative body/agency/organisation is entitled to provide LEAF Marque and/or CBs with any relevant information.

Where there is mutual benefit to certified businesses and industry partners (including retailers, researchers, government bodies, prospective or existing partnerships), LEAF Marque can share certification data in either anonymised formats (e.g., % certified), or aggregated groups (e.g., certification status of relevant supply base).

LEAF Marque reserves the right to provide information relating to certification data, including certificate withdrawals/suspensions and audit non-conformances, to relevant regulatory/administrative body/agency or relevant organisations where necessary to protect the integrity of LEAF Marque certification and comply with the law.

5.3. **LEAF Marque Claim**

A LEAF Marque claim is either or both of the following:

- use of the LEAF Marque logo at point of sale (on pack AND/OR off pack, e.g., online shop)
- a sustainability claims directly referencing LEAF Marque certification that is used to set apart and promote a product, process, business or service.

5.3.1. **Claims which meet the definition of a LEAF Marque claim**

Claims which meet the definition of a LEAF Marque claim must obtain a Claims & Labelling (C&L) Licence and comply with the C&L Licence Agreement, LEAF Marque Claim Rules, and LEAF Style Guidelines, as is appropriate to the business.

It is the responsibility of any business making a LEAF Marque claim to identify whether they are the relevant Licence Holder.

It is the responsibility of any business making a LEAF Marque claim to identify whether they are the relevant Licence Holder

The LEAF Marque logo must not be used on any product that:

- is not LEAF Marque certified.
- does not have certification from a LEAF Marque approved CB.
- does not have certification against a relevant baseline certification system.
- has been added to the business' production after the LEAF Marque audit has been conducted and before the certificate has been updated.

LEAF reserves the right to withdraw a C&L Licence after giving one months' notice or upon immediate notice if the member fails to comply with the C&L Licence Agreement and LEAF Marque Claim Rules.

The LEAF Marque logo is a registered trademark and must only be used by businesses that are LEAF Marque certified or who support LEAF Marque through supplier requirements or stakeholder partnerships.

The LEAF Marque logo can be used in contexts such as websites and on business resources in order to communicate certification status or support of LEAF Marque. Where possible, the businesses engagement with LEAF Marque should be stated (e.g., certified businesses, supplier requirements), and it should not be used in any way that is false or misleading or could tarnish the reputation of LEAF Marque.

5.3.2. **Claims which do not meet the definition of a LEAF Marque claim**

Claims which do not meet the definition of a LEAF Marque claim must comply with the requirements in the LEAF Style Guidelines.

The LEAF Marque logo is a registered trademark and must not be used in any way outside the scope of the above consent. There must not be use or authorisation of any name, mark, sign or device confusingly similar to the LEAF Marque logo.

The LEAF Marque logo and/or claim shall not be used in any manner that:

- alters, modifies or distorts the LEAF Marque logo and/or claim in any way
- could be construed as distasteful, offensive or controversial
- discredits or tarnishes the reputation or goodwill of LEAF Marque
- is false or misleading
- violates the rights of others, any law, regulation, or other public policy
- mischaracterises the relationship between LEAF Marque and the CB
- identifies LEAF Marque as part of the business (e.g., included in the company name).

5.4. LEAF Marque System

LEAF reserves the right to alter, amend the rules, LEAF Marque Standard or any other document relating to LEAF Marque. The changes will be notified to the participating farmers and others.

Any business engaged with the LEAF Marque System must comply with all applicable regional and national laws and regulations, following relevant international treaties, conducting business lawfully and with integrity.

[ACERTA must define suitable auditor training and qualification criteria for all of the products within the producer's whole farm definition, considering the relevant LEAF Marque Standard sections, control points, and sector relevant management principles.](#)

6. Complaints, Appeals and Lawsuits

6.1. Complaints, Appeals and Litigations:

For the purposes of this document, the following definitions are established:

COMPLAINT: An action taken by an applicant or certification holder, or by an interested third party, expressing in writing their disagreement with the way ACERTA has acted during the evaluation processes.

APPEAL: This is the action taken by an applicant or certification holder, by which he/she complains in writing against the decision taken by ACERTA in relation to the evaluation process that affects him/her. It may be due to discrepancies in the scope or because the certificate has been denied, suspended, or cancelled.

LITIGATION: This is the discussion established through judicial or extrajudicial channels between ACERTA and the applicants, certificate holders or former certificate holders, regarding a disagreement in the resolution of appeals, or for other causes that exceed the entity's capacity to resolve them.

Complaints: Any natural or legal person may lodge a complaint against ACERTA. Complaints may be communicated through formal channels; this is through the form available to the public on the ACERTA's website. If someone tries to make a complaint verbally or by a written means other than the above-mentioned, they will be asked to do so through the indicated channel so that the complaint is recorded, and the information is not misrepresented when it is transferred between people outside the entity.

This information is sent to ACERTA's General Management, who will designate the person who will contact the claimant to acknowledge receipt and clarify any doubts that may arise in this regard.

ACERTA will try to inform the interested party of the decisions taken within a maximum of 10 working days from receipt of the complaint.

Appeals: Any customer or applicant for certification may lodge an appeal against decisions taken by ACERTA.

All appeals must be managed using the form available to the public on ACERTA's website. Appeals will be finalised within 30 calendar days from the date of receipt. Once the detailed and thorough appeal investigation process has been completed, a final response will be communicated in writing.

Litigation: For the resolution of litigations that may arise from certification activity or any other disputes that relate to ACERTA with another party, the resolution of any discrepancies shall be governed by the provisions set forth in the certification agreement.

6.2. Data Protection

ACERTA shall comply, at all times, with the provisions and obligations in accordance with Data Protection Regulations (UK Data Protection Act 2018).

Where ACERTA is established in a member state of the European Union or in the European Economic Area (EEA), it shall appoint a Data Protection Officer in accordance with the Directive 95/46/EC and with the respective national law provisions enacted to implement this directive.

Where ACERTA is established outside the European Union or the EEA, it shall designate an equivalent.

All Personal Data (any information concerning the personal or material circumstances of an identified or identifiable person) which is collected, processed or used shall only be used for the purposes of this Agreement and shall not be further processed or disclosed without the Data Subject's (the individual which this data identifies) providing prior consent.

ACERTA shall comply with all reasonable requests by LEAF Marque and its assessors/auditors, internal or external, and representatives who are subject to reasonable and appropriate confidentiality undertakings being given by LEAF Marque or its representatives to assess ACERTA's Data Collecting (acquisition of data on the Data Subject), Data Processing (the recording, alteration, transfer, blocking and erasing of personal data) and Data Use (use of personal data other than processing) activities, facilities, processes and procedures, documents, resources and equipment to enable LEAF Marque to verify that ACERTA is complying fully with its obligations under this Agreement. For these purposes, ACERTA shall allow LEAF Marque or its representatives access to all of the premises that it occupies or other locations at which any personal data is being held and processed at that time to enable such assessment to be carried out.

ACERTA shall provide LEAF Marque with full cooperation and assistance to ensure that ACERTA complies with its requirements and obligations in accordance with Data Protection Regulations (UK Data Protection Act 2018) without limitation by:

- Notifying LEAF Marque within 5 working days if it receives a subject access request from a Data Subject to have access to his or her Personal Data and at the same time providing full details and a copy of such request.
- Notify LEAF Marque within 5 working days of any complaint received from a Data Subject about the processing of his or her Personal Data and at the same time providing full details and a copy of the complaint.
- Providing reasonable assistance to LEAF Marque in dealing with or responding to any subject access request or any complaint referred to in previous points.
- Providing LEAF Marque within 5 working days of the date of such request from LEAF Marque with any Personal Data that it holds to enable LEAF Marque to respond to requests received by LEAF Marque from Data Subjects.

ACERTA will promptly and properly deal with and respond to any and all reasonable requests and inquiries made by LEAF Marque relating to its Data Processing of Personal Data which is subject to this Agreement.

Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Agreement, ACERTA shall take all reasonable precautions to preserve the integrity and prevent any corruption or loss, damage or destruction of the Personal Data, which is subject to this Agreement.

In the event of termination of this Agreement, ACERTA shall, when directed to do so by LEAF Marque, erase or return all information and Personal Data, which are subject to this Agreement and all copies of any part of the information. This does not apply to those Personal Data, which are subject to legal retention periods. Where data is erased, a Destruction Certificate shall be provided to LEAF Marque.

All Personal Data acquired by ACERTA shall only be used for the purposes of this Agreement.

6.3. Liability

ACERTA shall indemnify and hold harmless LEAF Marque for any direct or indirect damage and costs (including defence costs) to LEAF Marque or its certified businesses arising directly through claims, causes of action, or suits (hereinafter "claim" or "claims"), of whatever judicial or extrajudicial form asserted by ACERTA itself, certified businesses, or any other third part asserting any claim against the certified business and/or CB or LEAF Marque itself, whether sounding in contract, tort, or otherwise, or arising out of any violation of any provision of this agreement.

ACERTA shall indemnify LEAF Marque for damages claimed by third parties that result from the actions set out in clause 19.1.

ACERTA shall provide LEAF Marque with written proof that it has coverage of a minimum of GBP£1,000,000 of "professional liability insurance" per case against this eventuality, unless otherwise specified in the relevant LEAF Marque System Rules or unless an alternative agreement is made with LEAF Marque prior to this Licence being issued. ACERTA shall inform LEAF Marque of any changes to their liability insurance, and annually prove to LEAF Marque that it has sufficient coverage.

6.4. Confidentiality

"Confidential Information" includes all material, non-public information, written or oral, disclosed, directly or indirectly, through any means of communication or observation by the disclosing party or any of its affiliates or representatives to or for the benefit of the receiving party.

LEAF Marque shall make appropriate arrangements to safeguard the confidentiality of the information obtained or created during the performance of its activities at all levels of its structure, including committees and external bodies or individuals acting on behalf of LEAF Marque.

Information about a legal entity or individual shall not be disclosed to a third party without written consent of ACERTA or legal entity concerned, unless required in this Agreement.

ACERTA shall make appropriate arrangement to safeguard the confidentiality of the information obtained or created during the performance of its activities at all levels of its structure, including committees and external bodies or individuals acting on behalf of ACERTA.

ACERTA shall inform all involved Parties involved, in advance, of the information it intends to place in the public domain. All other information, except for information that is made publicly accessible by LEAF Marque, is considered confidential.

ACERTA shall not disclose information about a particular certified business or individual to a third party without written consent of the business concerned, unless required by this Agreement.

Note: Notification of changes to certification requirements is made through the ACERTA website: www.acerta-cert.com