# Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2025 Guidebook – USA

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Acknowledgements

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# SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

The Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2025 (LH Standard) Guidebook is intended to help Standard Users and Certification Bodies understand, interpret, and implement the LH Standard 2025. **It does not replace any portion of the LH Standard and is for guidance purposes only to support the use of LH Standard by Standard Users.** It explains why the LH Standard was created and then provides detailed information for implementing the LH Standard. The guidebook also provides additional information that may help Standard Users make management decisions to meet LH Standard and systematically identify gaps in their management system that might lead to non-conformance with the LH Standard. It is not a list of tasks, another management system, or an official interpretation of LH Standard. It may be used by Standard Users to help them improve their existing system of management.

# SECTION 2

## BACKGROUND

# Background

## What is Driving the Demand for Farmland Sustainability Assurance?

The first iteration of the LH Standard launched in 2020 and was created in response to the overlapping demands of key stakeholders, such as supply chains, retailers, farmland investors, and consumers. Stakeholder interest in sustainable agriculture is growing rapidly with increasing attention to how agricultural systems affect and interact with the environment and society.[1] Agriculture plays a global economic, social, and environmental role: it employs over one billion people, produces over $1.3 trillion of food each year, and it occupies 50 percent of the world's habitable land, impacting climate, biodiversity, and water supplies.[2] As a result, businesses in the agricultural sector are taking action:

**Farm and agricultural businesses** are increasingly applying sustainability strategies to advance resiliency and efficiency, better retain talent, and reduce regulatory burdens[3] while addressing growing demands for assurance from supply chains.

**Supply chains and retailers** are responding to the growing interest of consumers in sustainable, healthy food by increasingly sourcing products, which provide the assurance of sustainability.

**Investors and capital providers** increasingly expect assurance that their capital will not only generate sustainable financial returns but also contribute to a more sustainable society.[4]

The LH Standard addresses these diverse needs for assurance by providing a framework to help family farmers and farm managers methodically tackle agricultural sustainability and make verifiable claims to the market while strengthening credibility, reputation, and social license of businesses and investors across the value chain.[5] Use of the LH Standard may help Standard Users address requirements of other agricultural sustainability programs such as OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains[6] and UN Principles for Responsible Investment for Farmland.[7]

## Why a New Agricultural Sustainability Program?

The LH Standard was created in 2020 because a scalable, sector-wide response to the demand for sustainability assurance in agriculture did not exist. Although there are globally over 400 other farm sustainability standards, most are either: 1) limited in scope to specific crops and regions; or 2) required specific practices that were not always adaptable to the broad diversity of agricultural systems in the U.S.[8]

The LH Standard has been designed to be universally applied across all crops and regions and address the full spectrum of environmental, social, and economic concerns. Furthermore, it is 'outcomes-based", which allows Standard Users, family farmers and farm managers to flexibly apply the LH Standard to their particular operating context while still achieving widely desired, long-term sustainability outcomes. Independent, third-party auditing plays a key role by verifying and assuring that those outcomes are being met across a great diversity of farms.

[1] Levin, J., and M. Stevenson. 2012. The 2050 criteria: Guide to responsible investment in agricultural, forest, and seafood commodities. Published by World Wildlife Fund, Washington, DC. Power, A. 2010. Ecosystem services and agriculture: tradeoffs and synergies. Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B 365: 2959-2971.

[2] World Bank. 2017. Agriculture and Food. World Bank, Washington, DC.

[3] Whelan, T. and C. Fink. 2016. The Comprehensive Business Case for Sustainability. Harvard Business Review, 21.

[4] Fink, L. A. 2020. Fundamental Reshaping of Finance. BlackRock, Inc.

[5] Moore, S., Cubbage, F., Eicheldinger, C. 2012. Impacts of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Forest Certification in North America. Journal of Forestry 110(2): 79-88. Levin, J., and M. Stevenson. 2012. The 2050 criteria: Guide to responsible investment in agricultural, forest, and seafood commodities. WWF, Washington, DC; Molenaar, J. and J. Kessler. 2017. The business benefits of using sustainability standards: A meta-review. Commissioned by ISEAL Alliance. Aidenvironment, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

[6] OECD/FAO. 2018. OECD-FAO Pilot project on the implementation of the OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains : Baseline Report, OECD Publishing, Paris. OECD/FAO. 2016. OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains, OECD Publishing, Paris.

[7] UNEP Finance Initiative and UN Global Compact. 2016. Responsible Investment In Farmland Report 2014-2015. UNEP Finance Initiative.

[8] International Trade Centre. 2017. Standard Map: Your roadmap to a sustainable future. Geneva, Switzerland.

## How was the LH Standard developed?

The LH Standard was initially drafted prior to 2020 by a team of farm managers, environmental organizations, asset managers, and agricultural sustainability experts, and was modeled after widely adopted sustainable forestry certification standards. Other leading agricultural standards and programs were also consulted to prepare the draft LH Standard, including (but not limited to): FAO Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agricultural Systems Guidelines, GLOBALG.A.P., National Sustainable Agriculture Standard – LEO-4000, Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Network, Round Table on Responsible Soy, Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform, Unilever Sustainable Agriculture Code, and UN Principles for Responsible Investment.

The draft LH Standard was then field tested and reviewed by stakeholders, representing farmers, environmental groups, farm labor, agricultural scientists, rural communities, and agricultural services. The field test occurred in major agricultural areas of the U.S. on 22,000 acres to assess practicality and scalability of the Standard. The draft LH Standard was also shared in three workshops in major agricultural regions (California, Iowa, and Georgia) with key stakeholders who suggested over 400 improvements, most of, which were incorporated into the final LH Standard. Results of the field test and stakeholder feedback were used to revise the draft LH Standard so that it would be scalable and practical, responsive to stakeholders' concerns and interests, and credible.

## How was the LH Standard revised in 2025?

In late 2023, Leading Harvest assembled a dynamic coalition of volunteers - the Standards Committee - to spearhead the 2025 revision of its Farmland Management Standard. This diverse group brought together Leading Harvest Standard Users, auditors, industry leaders, and sustainability experts, united under the leadership of Scott Hansen, Director of Standards and Education.

The committee examined trends from audit results, addressed auditor feedback to refine the precision of indicator language, monitored evolving industry practices, and absorbed stakeholder insights. By mid-2024, these efforts crystallized into a first draft, which was reviewed by the Leading Harvest Resource Group in June before being opened to public consultation in September.

The public comment period spanned 60 days, inviting input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Each comment was carefully weighed and discussed among the Standards Committee, guiding the creation of a refined second draft in November 2024.

Beyond the Farmland Management Standard, the revision extended to three other normative documents: the Group Certification Module, the Standards Management Procedure, and the Certification Body Management Procedure. With a second draft ready for review in December and a final approval vote in January 2025 by the Board of Directors, Leading Harvest's standards revision exemplified its dedication to transparency, inclusivity, and innovation.

# SECTION 3

## SCOPE OF THE LH STANDARD

# SCOPE OF THE LH STANDARD

## What is the LH Standard?

The LH Standard is a third-party audited certification standard for providing assurance for the sustainability of farmland management. Farmland managers and owners can use LH Standard to become certified and certify farmland under their management and then to make verifiable sustainability claims to the market regarding their management.

The LH Standard is outcome-based using qualitative indicators that serve as farm management unit goals. **It does not prescribe activities necessary to achieve conformance with the LH Standard but allows farmers and farm managers the flexibility to apply practices best suited for their operation to achieve sustainable outcomes**. This approach allows for adaptation across crops and agricultural regions, recognizing that even a single crop can require unique management strategies in different regions. This approach is possible because it includes a credible system to ensure that desired outcomes are being met. Third-party auditing by independent and accredited certification bodies credibly assess whether the practices applied are sufficient to conform to an outcome described by an indicator.

Finally, the LH Standard requires farmers to continually improve their operations, year over year, following improvement in regional agricultural best management practices. The LH Standard itself is revised on a regular basis through a public process to ensure it reflects the latest insights regarding agricultural sustainability. Collectively these processes are part of the continuous improvement of the LH Standard and farmland management by Standard Users.

## What types of land does the LH Standard address?

The LH Standard applies to all farmland across all crops and regions of the world, though the guidance contained in this document are specific to the U.S. Farmland includes agricultural land, cropland, rangeland, grassland, pasture land, incidental forest land and wetlands that are part of a farm or farm management unit. This can include land that is not used to grow crops or support agriculture directly. Agricultural land is land that is used directly or indirectly in the production of agricultural products, including cropland, grassland, rangeland, pasture, roads, crop buffer areas, farm building areas, and other land on, which agricultural products or livestock are produced and resource concerns may be addressed. Agricultural land is a sub-set of farmland. It is an area of farmland where a Standard User focuses their attention on crop production. Cropland includes land primarily for the direct production of agricultural products for harvest, including, but not limited to, land in row crops or close-grown crops, forage crops, permanent hay land, horticultural crops, orchards, vineyards, cropped woodland, marshes, cranberry bogs and other lands used to produce crops. Hence, farmland includes cropland, agricultural land, and incidental land not used in production that is part of a farm or farm management unit participating in the LH Standard.

Animal agriculture management canbe assessed using the Pasture and Livestock version of the LH Standard. Forest and wood-fiber management on land such as natural forests, plantation forests, short rotation woody crops, and/or agro-forestry cannot be assessed using the LH Standard.

# SECTION 3
SCOPE OF THE LH STANDARD

## What topics does the LH Standard address?

The LH Standard addresses thirteen topics that are core to farmland sustainability. These were selected resulting from a review of many other agricultural standards and because they reflect major stakeholder concerns and address major risk and materiality issues:

1. Sustainable Agriculture Management
2. Soil Health and Conservation
3. Water Resources
4. Crop Protection
5. Energy Use, Air Quality, and Climate Change
6. Waste and Material Management
7. Conservation of Biodiversity
8. Protection of Special Sites
9. Local Communities
10. Personnel and Farm Labor
11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance
12. Management Review and Continual Improvement
13. Tenant Operations

## Who can implement the LH Standard?

Standard Users of the LH Standard can be enterprises such as:

- family farmers including small and large family farms;
- organizations that own or have management authority for farmland including farmland asset managers and contract farm managers;
- agricultural product processors with farmer suppliers who elect to participate as a group;
- or farmers' cooperative where co-op members elect to participate as a group.

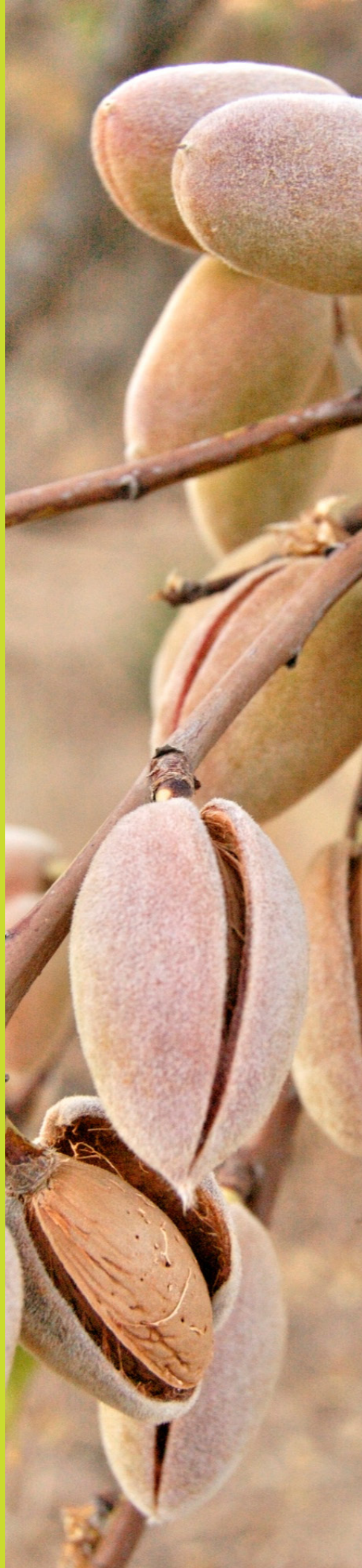
## Are large and small farms held to the same requirements by third-party auditors?

The LH Standard can be applied to farm management units of any size. All Standard Users are held to the same LH Standard, but expectation of conformance evidence may vary with the scope and scale of the Standard User as the size of their farm management unit influences the risk level of adverse impacts it may pose to society and the environment. Large operations, whether they are defined by size of operation, number of employees, or annual revenue, have both the potential for greater adverse impact and potentially greater resources to act proactively to achieve positive impacts and mitigate potential adverse impacts than small operations.[9] Hence large operations may be expected to exhibit more activity (e.g., practices, training, documentation, monitoring) under the LH Standard to demonstrate effective management of greater risk of adverse impacts than small operations.

[9] OECD/FAO (2016), OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains, OECD Publishing, Paris.

# SECTION 4

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LH STANDARD – GENERAL INFORMATION



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LH STANDARD – GENERAL INFORMATION

*This section identifies general information about the LH Standard, which is useful for understanding the LH Standard.*

## LH Standard Structure

The LH Standard is hierarchically structured, starting with Principles at the highest level and ending with Indicators at the finest level (Table 1). The Principles provide the overall vision for the LH Standard. Standard Users are assessed by certification bodies for conformance with the Objectives, Performance Measures, and Indicators.

The order of Objectives, Performance Measures, and Indicators provide increasing directive detail about conformance to the LH Standard. At the finest level, conformance to Indicators can provide evidence that the Objectives are being achieved by the Standard User. Indicators are contextual—that is, they only apply to farms where relevant. For example, Indicator 3.1.3 (Water Conservation) would not apply if water is not being extracted for agricultural operation such as irrigation. To determine conformance of a farmland unit to the standard, a certification body will review the conformance evidence for each indicator and assess whether the conformance evidence is sufficient to address the requirements described by the indicator with consideration of local conditions and guided by regional agricultural best management practices.

Table 1. The hierarchical format of the LH Standard, including definitions and examples of Principles, Objectives, Performance Measures, Indicators, and conformance evidence.

| DEFINITIONS | LH STANDARD EXAMPLES |
|---|---|
| A **Principle** is a statement that expresses the **vision and direction** for sustainable agriculture with respect to one or more environmental, social, and economic topics. | **Principle 2. Soil Health and Conservation**<br>To maintain or enhance long-term soil health and soil productivity and to protect soil from degradation. |
| An **Objective** is a fundamental **goal** of sustainable agriculture with respect to one or more of the **Principles**. | **Objective 2. Soil Health**<br>To maintain or enhance soil health to optimize crop yield and protect long-term soil productivity on agricultural lands. |
| A **Performance Measure** is a statement that identifies key **criterion or criteria** for assessing performance and compliance of a farm operation with an **Objective**. | **Performance Measure 2.1 Soil Health**: Standard Users manage nutrients and apply practices to achieve crop yield and maintain or enhance soil health of cropland. |
| An **Indicator** is a specific **metric** that provides qualitative or quantitative information about performance of a farm operation that is integral to assessing conformance to a standard's **Performance Measures**. | **Indicator 2.1.1 Soil Quality**: Application of agricultural best management practices (e.g., tillage systems, cover cropping, addition of soil amendments) to maintain or enhance soil fertility and physical and biological characteristics of soil. |
| **Conformance evidence** is specific information used to assess whether farm operations have met **Indicator** requirements, including activities, documents, statements, measurements, other verifiable information, and/or observations of behavior, practices, technology, and conditions. | **Some examples of optional conformance evidence**:<br>A description of tillage systems and cover cropping practices, including goals; observations from field visits; invoices for cover cropping and/or soil amendment spreading contracts; soil sampling results; nutrient management plans; records of workshop attendance or trainings related to soil health and fertility |

## Conformance versus Compliance

The LH Standard is a conformance-based standard. Each Indicator specifies outcomes to which Standard Users must conform. This means Standard Users have the freedom to achieve Indicator outcomes by any means consistent with the norms established by the LH Standard.

## Conformance Evidence

Certification bodies review conformance evidence during a verification audit to evaluate whether a Standard User is in conformance with an Indicator. Standard Users have the discretion to manage their operations however they choose as long as their activities produce the conformance evidence necessary to demonstrate conformance with an Indicator. A certification body takes into account local conditions to determine whether a farm management unit is in conformance with the LH Standard.

There are five common types of activities that serve as conformance evidence: policies and practices, communication and training, documentation, monitoring, and key performance indicators (KPIs). They often overlap. For example, a nutrient management plan is documentation evidence that may describe field practices, which are policy/practice evidence and may be shared among employees and service providers, which is communication evidence. Standard users present their choice of conformance evidence. Some indicators may indicate a type of evidence to be included (e.g., evidence in the form of written documentation, broadly agricultural practices, training exercises, or monitoring practices). Collectively a farm management system may include a selection of these five types of evidence to convey to a certification body that an effective farm management system is in place to achieve conformance with the LH Standard.

1. **Policies/Practices** are farm management and agricultural policies and practices (including evidence of the establishment of roles and responsibilities) that provide information about a Standard User's stewardship activities and performance.[10] Evidence typically may include a description by a Standard User, their staff, and/or tenants; field activities observed in the field or demonstrated (e.g., presence of cover crop stubble in the spring indicates over-winter cover cropping practices); or documentation of activities (e.g., vendor invoices for fertilizer or pesticide applications or CAPEX activities).

2. **Communication/Training** are internal and/or external communication activities (including emails and memos) and materials addressing farm stewardship and employee training to enhance stewardship activities. Evidence may include a description by a Standard User or their staff and/or tenant(s), electronic or printed documents, and signage, employee training sign-in sheets.

   Training evidence can also include resumes and C.V.s, training certificates, professional licenses and certificates, and post-secondary training culminating in diplomas (e.g., in Associate, B.A./B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. programs), and/or other information, which demonstrates Standard User staff and/or contractors have the expertise to achieve the outcome described in an Indicator.

   Other training evidence includes important professional programs that are widely recognized in agriculture in the U.S., including Accredited Agricultural Consultant,[11] Accredited Farm Manager,[12] Accredited Rural Appraiser,[13] Certified Crop Advisor,[14] Certified Professional Agronomist,[15] Certified Professional Crop Consultant,[16] Certified Professional Soil

[10] The LH Standard 2020 Objectives and Performance Measures can serve in effect as organizational policies for Program Users who have adopted the LH Standard 2020.

[11] Administered by the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (ASFMRA). It requires a college education, four years of experience, ASFMRA training credits, acceptance of consulting report, and testing.

[12] Administered by ASFMRA. It requires a college education, four years of experience, ASFMRA training credits, acceptance of consulting report, and testing.

[13] Administered by ASFMRA. It requires four years of experience, ASFMRA training credits, acceptance of consulting report, and testing.

[14] Administered by the American Society of Agronomy (ASA). It requires a high school education, 4 years of experience, continuing education credits, and testing.

[15] Administered by the ASA. It requires a college education, 4 years of experience, continuing education credits, and testing.

[16] Administered by the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants. It requires a college agriculture degree, 4 years of experience, continuing education credits, and testing.

Scientist,[17] NRCS Certified Technical Service Provider,[18] and Pest Management applicator license.[19]

3. **Documentation** is relevant printed and/or electronic documents describing farm stewardship activities. Evidence typically may include formal written policies, emails, standard operating procedures (SOPs), vendor proposals and invoices for installation, goods, and/or other services, monitoring and key performance indicator data, documentation of key stewardship activities, plans (e.g., CAPEX proposals, nutrient management plans), permitting documents (e.g., permits and permit applications submitted to local, state, and/or federal agencies required for farm management activities), lease or other agreements, GIS data layers, and documents establishing participation in other voluntary sustainability programs and certifications,[20] training documents, job descriptions describing responsibilities and roles, and corrective actions (including memos) to remedy non-conformance with organizational or LH Standard objectives.

4. **Monitoring** includes audits or routine reviews of practices and procedures, training, input use, and resource use (e.g., water, fertilizers, crop protectants) and impacts. Evidence may include printed or electronic data forms or data, field or property survey forms, performance reviews, vendor invoices, and crop and input records.

5. **Key Performance Indicators** (**KPIs**) are quantitative and qualitative indicators of resource use and activity impacts used to evaluate progress toward a goal or objective. They may include proxy KPIs. For example, annual energy costs might be reviewed annually as a proxy for tracking annual energy use.

## Enrollment in Other Regulatory and Voluntary Programs as Conformance Evidence

Standard Users may use activities used to meet their existing reporting requirements as evidence to achieve conformance with the LH Standard. This may include reporting requirements for legal compliance (e.g., USDA NRCS program participation, state permits, etc.) and for relevant voluntary sustainability programs (e.g., research, local conservation programs, supply chain surveys, industry programs, etc.). Enrollment paperwork, activities, reviews, trainings, and checklists are useful conformance evidence.

## Interpreting Indicators

Understanding key terms and phrases can help Standard Users interpret each Indicator. Most indicators for Objectives 2 through 8 apply to field operations and may be directed at one of three land types farmland, (e.g., agricultural land and cropland), agricultural land (e.g., land that is used directly or indirectly in the production of agricultural products), and cropland (e.g., land used primarily for the direct production of agricultural products for harvest. Understanding the relevant land types of an Indicator will help a Standard User understand whether an Indicator applies only to cropland, agricultural lands, or to the entire farm unit.

Key phrases can also help a Standard User apply the LH standard. Table 2 identifies the key phrases that a Standard Users can use to identify the type of evidence needed to achieve conformance.

[17] Administered by the Soil Science Society of America. It requires a college degree in soils or related field, 5 years post-B.S. degree or 3 years post-M.S. or PhD degree, credential forms approved by board, and testing.

[18] Administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Its requirements vary across 39 resource categories, but may include post-secondary training, demonstration of previous project experience, state licensing (e.g., Professional Engineer), certification by other professional organizations (e.g., Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition, the American Fisheries Society, Erosion and Sediment Control, Inc., Society of American Foresters, Society of Wetland Scientists, and The Wildlife Society).

[19] Administered by state licensing boards following US EPA Guidelines.

[20] This can include enrollment in USDA NRCS, other federal, state, and local voluntary programs, participation in supply chain programs aimed at improving agricultural stewardship, partnerships with co-ops and other organizations, including local and regional conservation organizations, and crop certification programs (e.g., GLOBAL-G.A.P., national or regional crop certification programs).

Table 2. Key phrases for interpreting the LH Standard Indicators.

| INDICATOR WORDING STARTS WITH… | A DESCRIPTION OF CONFORMANCE EVIDENCE NEEDED |
|---|---|
| A *process* for… | A process is *a purposeful series of practices or routines (formal or informal)*. Having a process requires thoughtfulness that exceeds ad hoc application of activities. Standard Users will have to demonstrate that they have a process with a routine and purpose. The order and application of specific activities can vary from year to year or from application to application. Conformance does not require a SOP document or a policy document. |
| A *program* to/for… | A program is *an organized system or set of activities*. A program requires a systematic level of activity and requires being more methodical and more conformance evidence than a *process*. Written plans often can be used to describe an organized system or *program* for nutrient or water management. Standard Users will have to present evidence that describes an organized system or set of activities. |
| A written… | Standard Users will have to present written policies, statements, or agreements often with evidence of supporting actions to ensure staff understand and are able to implement written policy or agreements. These Indicators may include requirements unique to the LH Standard. |
| Application of *agricultural best management practices* to… | Standard Users will have to present evidence for application of practices. A*gricultural best management practices are practices or a combination of practices developed by land grant agricultural universities in a region considered to be an effective means (including technological, financial, environmental, social, and institutional considerations) of achieving a sustainable agriculture goal*. A region is a homogenous area with respect to crops produced, soil type, climatic conditions, crop association, and generally accepted farming practices. Evidence of practices may be visually seen directly or indirectly (e.g., completed practices) in the field, described by field staff, and/or supported by documentation or evidence of training and/or communication. Indicators with this language are easier to address than Indicators requiring a *process*. |
| Demonstration… | Standard Users demonstrate how they have achieved the outcome described by the Indicator, which may include a commitment or action showing due diligence. |
| Application of… | Standard Users provide evidence of application of practices and/or technologies. These may be described by field staff, supported by invoices or CAPEX documents for equipment, or seen in the field. |
| Management of… | Standard Users must demonstrate sufficient management of topics described in the indicator to achieve the outcome specified by the Indicator. Standard Users may be asked to demonstrate consistency with *agricultural best management practices*. |
| Monitoring of… | Standard Users must show evidence of monitoring activities sufficient to achieve the outcome described in the Indicator. These activities might include monitoring training and documentation and printed or electronic monitoring data. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Participation individually or collaboratively… | Standard Users must show evidence of participation or membership in external efforts and awareness and understanding among appropriate staff. |
| Training… | Standard Users must demonstrate evidence of specific training identified by the Indicator. Evidence might include a description of training events, attendance records, and training content (printed and/or electronic materials and documents). |
| Use of… | Standard Users must demonstrate evidence of activities or equipment described in the indicator. Standard Users may define the scope and what is sufficient to achieve outcome described in the Indicator, but it must be credible to the certification body. |

## More on Agricultural Best Management Practices

Agricultural best management practices (or regional agricultural BMPs in the United States) are a common reference point for Objectives 2 through 5. All regions of the U.S. have land grant agricultural universities which have developed regional agricultural BMPs for managing soil health, water conservation, crop protection, energy use and air impacts, and climate change impacts. Most regions have at least one land grant university that has developed guidance information useful for addressing Objective 6 (Waste and Material Management), Objective 7 (Conservation of Biodiversity) and Objective 10 (Personnel and Farm Labor). Standard Users must only demonstrate the application of applicable agricultural BMPs from the region of the operation and those relevant to the crop(s) under consideration.

# SECTION 5

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LH STANDARD – INDICATOR CONFORMANCE

# SECTION 5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LH STANDARD – INDICATOR CONFORMANCE

This section provides information about each Objective and guidance regarding conformance evidence for each Indicator. **It does not replace any portion of the LH Standard and is for guidance purposes only to support the use of LH Standard by Standard Users.**

An Indicator may have one of three scopes: the management system of the Standard User, farmland enrolled by the Standard User, and farmland tenants (where applicable) on farmland enrolled by the Standard User. Objectives 1 and 7 through 13 **apply to the management system** of the Standard User that is used to manage enrolled farmland, except for Indicators 7.2.3, 7.3.1 and 9.4.1. Objectives 2 through 6 and Indicators 7.2.3, 7.3.1 and 9.4.1 **apply to the management of all farmland** enrolled under the LH Standard. Indicator 13.1.4 **applies to all farmland tenants** of leased farmland enrolled under the LH Standard. The activities of farmland tenants may contribute to the performance of the Standard User for Objectives 2 through 6 and Indicators 7.2.3, 7.3.1 and 9.4.1, but the Standard User is responsible for conformance to these Objectives, Performance Measures and Indicators.

This section provides **guidance** for conforming with each Indicator so that Standard Users can better understand and interpret each Indicator. It identifies key sustainability considerations that help define each Indicator and the conformance evidence necessary to achieve conformance to each Indicator. It also provides **conformance evidence examples** for each Indicator to illustrate a broad range of relevant and discretionary conformance evidence.

## Objective 1. Sustainable Agriculture Management:

To practice sustainable agricultural stewardship to improve crop production and ensure long-term agricultural sustainability.

Background: Sustainable agriculture requires taking a long-term and large-scale management view of agricultural sustainability and considering the sustainability of an operation in the context of its region and crop sector. This includes careful consideration and planning for financial, market, social, and environmental conditions on and off the farm. The purpose of this Objective is to ensure Standard Users apply a long-term and large-scale management view to help ensure the sustainability of their operation(s).

**Performance Measure 1.1 Sustainable Agricultural Stewardship:** Standard Users shall demonstrate their commitment to sustainable agricultural stewardship of farmland.

**Indicator 1.1.1 Farmland Stewardship Commitment**: A written commitment statement and list of goals that describes the sustainable agricultural stewardship of farmland.

Guidance: A written sustainability commitment statement and list of stewardship goals helps Standard Users achieve agricultural sustainability by communicating their purpose and direction to their employees, customers, vendors, and other stakeholders and ensuring consistent strategic direction and operations. It also provides a clear vision to employees necessary to jointly achieve stewardship goals.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A written commitment statement and list of goals, which may be supported by conformance evidence such as a description of how statement and goals are used to guide agricultural stewardship; demonstration that staff understand and implement the commitment statement and stewardship goals; onboard training about commitment statement and goals; and a description of policies and/or practices used to achieve goals.

**Indicator 1.1.2 Farmland Stewardship**: Demonstration of the management of major synergies and tradeoffs between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable agricultural stewardship of farmland while ensuring long-term profitability and sustainability.

Guidance: Sustainable agriculture requires managing for the triple bottom-line (e.g., the economic, social and environmental dimensions which are elaborated by the Indicators in the LH Standard) and their complex synergies and tradeoffs. Successful management of triple bottom-line leads to long-term profitability and sustainability. This Indicator requires Standard Users to describe the integrated management of all Indicators. The conformance evidence for Indicator 1.2.1 (Critical External Factors) may also be applicable to this Indicator, especially for Standard Users with only one farm.

There should also be a process to formally assess the suitability of farmland for its current and planned activities

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of relevant economic, social and environmental factors in area(s) of operation, how synergies and tradeoffs are managed, and long-term profitability and sustainability are achieved which may be supported by: related planning

documents (e.g., business plans, loan documents, cost-share agreements, or acquisition due diligence documents); employee sustainability training; and use of the LH Standard.

**Indicator 1.1.3 Farmland Conservation**: Demonstration that measures are in place and implemented to minimize conversion of prime farmland. Conservation of prime farmland to avoid its conversion to nonagricultural uses when conversion would adversely impact regional agriculture.

Guidance: Prime farmland has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing agricultural products. Its conservation can help sustain regional agriculture. Conversion of farmland may be acceptable when: it is not prime farmland; in areas where agriculture is insignificant or would not be impacted by farmland loss; or small areas are converted to support agriculture (e.g., building of equipment sheds and silos). Indicator 1.1.3 ensures Standard Users support the sustainability of regional agriculture by avoiding impactful prime farmland conversion and manage reputation.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of activities and criteria used to avoid conversion of prime farmland; for participants in USDA FSA programs, a FSA FSA-850 Environmental Screening Worksheet for the farm that describes presence of prime farmland; , a description of farmland conversion practices; knowledge of regional status of prime farmland, regional agriculture, and its conservation by Standard User; a farmland conversion policy; employees knowledge of Standard User's conversion policy; and mapping of ownership and prime farmland.

**Performance Measure 1.2 Critical External Factors:** Standard Users shall manage for potential impacts of critical external factors to help ensure long-term profitability and sustainability of each farm or farm management unit by the Standard User.

**Indicator 1.2.1 Adapting to Critical External Factors**: A process for periodically identifying critical external factors and adapting to their impacts to ensure the long-term profitability and sustainability of agricultural production of a farm or farm management unit.

Guidance: Critical external factors are any off-farm factors that are materially and substantively relevant to the viability, long-term profitability, and sustainability of agricultural production of a management unit or farm. They may include economic factors (e.g., regional market demand and opportunities and regulatory changes), environmental factors (e.g., regional availability of water and other inputs), and social factors (e.g., social license). They can pose business risk or lost strategic opportunities if ignored. Indicator 1.2.1 ensures that Standard Users have considered and adapted to critical external factors for each farm.

The conformance evidence of three other Indicators may be used as evidence for this Indicator. Indicator 1.1.2 (Farmland Stewardship) may have a broader spatial scope (e.g., apply across farm management units for multi-farm Standard Users) and management scope (e.g., all aspects of sustainability and their synergies and tradeoffs), but can include consideration of critical external factors. Indicator 12.1.3 (Agricultural Innovation) requires identification of innovative strategic opportunities, which might also be critical external factors. Indicator 12.1.1 (Performance Review) requires annual reviews in which critical external factors might incidentally be identified.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a purposeful, formal or informal set of practices for periodically identifying critical external factors and adapting to their impacts, which may be supported by: a description of how critical external factors are identified and adapted to for each operational unit while ensuring long-term profitability and sustainability; a description of critical external factors; and documents that identify and plan adaptations or adjustments to critical external factors (e.g., due diligence acquisition documents, loan agreements, CAPEX plans, marketing plans, and business plans).

## Objective 2. Soil Health and Conservation

To maintain or enhance soil health to optimize crop yield and protect long-term soil productivity on agricultural lands.

Background: Soil health is the capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains crops, soil organisms, and humans. Healthy soils are the foundation of sustainable agriculture. Their maintenance includes consideration of the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of soil. They sustain optimal crop yields for people and animals and protect water quality and environmental health.

**Performance Measure 2.1 Soil Health:** Standard Users manage nutrients and apply practices to achieve crop yield and maintain or enhance soil health of cropland.

**Indicator 2.1.1 Soil Quality**: Application of agricultural best management practices (e.g., tillage systems, cover cropping, addition of soil amendments) to maintain or enhance soil fertility and physical and biological characteristics of soil.

Guidance: Maintaining or enhancing soil health includes maintaining or enhancing its chemical, physical, and biological characteristics and is the foundation to sustainable agriculture. It starts with the application of regional agricultural best management practices (regional agricultural BMPs) as needed to maintain or enhance soil health.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of the application of regional agricultural BMPs that maintain or enhance soil fertility and physical and biological characteristics of soil, which may be supported by conformance evidence such as annual planning documents and vendor invoices; soil testing data for chemical, physical, and/or biological characteristics of the soil; soil maps; and relevant credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or vendors.

**Indicator 2.1.2 Soil Health Monitoring**: Monitoring of soil health characteristics, including nutrients from different sources necessary to maintain or enhance appropriate nutrient balance and soil health.

Guidance: Soil health monitoring ensures that soil health is routinely assessed so that a farmer can take action to ensure its maintenance if necessary. Monitoring soil health includes tracking nutrients from different sources necessary to maintain or enhance appropriate nutrient balance and soil health. The monitoring system should consider monitoring of other soil health characteristics, but these will vary depending on the cropping system, soil type, and guidance from regional land grant universities.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of soil health monitoring system, which may be supported by conformance evidence such as soil test data for nutrients and other chemical, physical, and/or biological characteristics of the soil; nutrient inputs and losses, and annual crop nutrient requirements; crop consultant nutrient recommendations; soil maps; credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or vendors.

**Indicator 2.1.3 Nutrient Management Program**: Demonstration of the implementation of an up-to-date nutrient management program that efficiently uses nutrient inputs and nutrients in the soil and crops to create optimum conditions for crop production and nutrient utilization and avoids nutrient loss to water and air.

Guidance: A nutrient management program is a necessary, organized system or set of activities to help ensure that nutrients are efficiently applied and optimally managed to achieve desired crop productivity and avoid nutrient loss to the air and water. For some farms, it may be well described by a nutrient management plan. Standard Users should be keeping fertilizer application records in accordance with relevant legislation and industry guidelines. The conformance evidence for Indicators 2.1.1 (Soil Quality), 2.1.2 (Soil Monitoring), and 2.1.4 (Crop Residues) provide the base evidence for this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of a nutrient management program that efficiently use nutrients to create optimum conditions for crop production and minimize nutrient loss to air and water, which may be supported by: a nutrient management plan; plant tissue data; soil test records; crop consultant nutrient recommendations; credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), crop consultant(s), and/or vendor nutrient applicators.

**Indicator 2.1.4 Crop Residues**: Application of agricultural best management practices to use crop residues to maintain or improve soil health and long-term soil productivity where appropriate.

Guidance: Crop residues are materials from growing crops left on the soil surface or partially incorporated into the soil. They may include stalks, stubble, leaves, chipped branches and vines, woody biomass from orchard and vineyard redevelopment, and seed pods. They contribute to soil health and soil productivity by: increasing soil organic matter and nutrients; controlling soil erosion; improving soil moisture retention, structure, and biodiversity; and improving water filtration. Crop residue retention may not be appropriate when it is overly expensive, supports pests, or reduces crop productivity. The conformance evidence of infield practices for Indicator 6.2.2 (Resource Recovery of Agricultural Waste) may also be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or demonstration of infield application of regional agricultural BMPs used to manage crop residues, which may include: evidence in the field of crop residues; crop consultant nutrient recommendations, which address nutrients in crop residues; credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), crop consultant(s); cover crop invoices.

**Performance Measure 2.2 Soil Conservation:** Standard Users shall implement agricultural practices to minimize soil erosion and avoid degradation of agricultural lands.

**Indicator 2.2.1 Cropland Soil Management**: Application of agricultural best management practices to minimize soil erosion and physical damage (e.g., compaction) of cropland and restore soil health where appropriate.

Guidance: Soil conservation is the prevention of the loss of topsoil from erosion and of fertility from over usage or accumulation of adverse compounds. Soil erosion and damage can reduce crop yields by 50%. Hence regional agricultural soil conservation BMPs, which minimize soil erosion, maintain fertility, and restore soil can be applied to cropland as needed to ensure long-term crop productivity and sustainability. This Indicator focuses on cropland at the field level while Indicator 2.2.2 focuses on all agricultural lands on a farm. The conformance evidence for Indicators 2.1.1 (Soil Quality) and 2.1.4 (Crop Residues) may also be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of regional agricultural BMPs used to minimize soil erosion and damage to cropland and practices used to restore soil health, which may be supported by: crop consultant recommendations for cropping and infield structural practices, which control soil erosion; credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), crop consultant(s); vendor invoices used for sub-soiling and other practices to alleviate soil compaction and damage; NRCS-approved conservation plan or system for all highly erodible land (HEL).

**Indicator 2.2.2 Degradation of Agricultural Lands**: A process to avoid the widespread loss of agricultural lands to soil mismanagement (e.g., failure to prevent extensive soil erosion, acidification, salinization, and accumulation of other adverse compounds).

Guidance: Systematic application of soil conservation principles across a farm operation(s) can prevent loss of agricultural lands from widespread soil degradation. This Indicator focuses on all agricultural lands across the farm while Indicator 2.2.1 focuses on cropland at the field level. The conformance evidence for Indicator 2.2.1 (Cropland Soil Management) may also be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of formal or informal set of routines used to avoid soil mismanagement (e.g., extensive soil erosion, acidification, salinization and accumulation of other adverse compounds), which could be supported by: management and field practices to prevent soil mismanagement; field observations that suggests a lack of soil mismanagement; crop consultant recommendations for practices, which mitigate soil mismanagement; credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), crop consultant(s); NRCS-approved conservation plan or system for all highly erodible land (HEL); soil erosion plans; soil test data for pH, salinization and/or other adverse compounds.

## Objective 3. Water Resources

To protect water resources and manage water for efficient agricultural productivity.

Background: Agricultural withdraws more groundwater than any sector in the United States and is associated with groundwater depletion in some regions. In some areas, it competes with residential and other commercial uses of water use. Agriculture can also be an important source of sediment, nutrients, pesticides, salts, and pathogens in surface water and groundwater. Water use and impacts can pose strategic and reputational risk for agriculture in many regions. Hence, conservation of water resources is a key issue in agricultural sustainability.

**Performance Measure 3.1. Water Use:** Standard Users shall conserve water resources and manage water use to avoid long-term depletion and maintain crop productivity.

**Indicator 3.1.1 Agricultural Water Withdrawal**: A process for avoiding the depletion of available groundwater resources beyond the recharge capacity of the watershed or catchment and by direct withdrawal where groundwater depletion is an issue as determined by a groundwater regulatory agency.

Guidance: Groundwater depletion has become a critical risk to regional agricultural and municipal sustainability in some areas. Groundwater regulatory agencies have been established in some areas to remedy this issue. A groundwater regulatory agency is a public authority or government agency with statutory authority to exercise regulatory or supervisory oversight in the extraction of groundwater. Well-established irrigation practices, such as taking measures to optimize rainwater use, can be used by farmers to avoid contributing to groundwater depletion. This Indicator only applies when Standard Users use groundwater to irrigate crops AND where a groundwater regulatory agency has determined groundwater depletion is occurring. Surplus rainwater should also be captured to help recharge groundwater sources.

Conformance evidence for Indicators 3.1.2 (Regional Water Conservation) and 3.1.3 (Water Conservation) may be applicable to this Indicator 3.1.1 when it addresses groundwater withdrawal and conservation.

Regarding water extraction, it is important for both Standard Users and auditing bodies to be knowledgeable of the legal extraction limits and required licensures for the farmland area, as these must be followed.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a set of informal or formal practices or routines for avoiding the depletion of groundwater resources beyond the recharge capacity where groundwater depletion is an issue as determined by a groundwater regulatory agency, which may be supported by: documentation for groundwater removals; acquisition due diligence reports on water resources; groundwater removal permits and reports; participation in groundwater regulatory agency workshops.

**Indicator 3.1.2 Regional Water Conservation**: Participation individually or collaboratively in regional water conservation programs where appropriate to help foster responsible use and conservation of groundwater and surface water used for agriculture.

Guidance: Regional water conservation programs help conserve groundwater and surface water used for agriculture and ensure its availability and reduce costs. Regional efforts can pool resources, which can scale up water use conservation and help achieve water conservation goals. This Indicator only applies where Standard Users use surface water and/or groundwater to irrigate cropland.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of individual or collaborative participation in regional water use conservation programs (e.g., water district water boards, advisory committees) in agriculture, which may be supported by: communications with regional water conservation programs; meeting attendance records; board membership of regional water use conservation programs; evidence of how participation has helped foster responsible use and conservation of groundwater and surface water.

**Indicator 3.1.3. Water Conservation**: A water management program that uses appropriate technology (including crop/irrigation system design) and applies agricultural best management practices to utilize water efficiently; to provide water tailored to crop needs; and to control pests, pathogens, salinization and accumulation of other adverse compounds.

Guidance: The greatest water conservation gains have been achieved by systematically improving crop/irrigation systems and applying regional agricultural BMPs, which also have reduced costs and increased productivity. This Indicator only applies where Standard Users use surface water and/or groundwater to irrigate cropland. Conformance evidence for Indicator 3.1.2 (Regional Water Conservation) may also be applicable to this Indicator.

An irrigation management plan is important to optimize crop productivity and water use efficiency. This should be based on irrigation equipment calibration and maintenance, frequency and duration, and adequate maintenance of application records.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of an organized process to conserve water and manage pests, salinization, and other adverse impacts to cropland that may include improvements to the irrigation technology and/or regional agricultural irrigation BMPs, which may be supported by: documents regarding water conservation (e.g., irrigation management plans, and agricultural water management plans [California]); water use permits and reports; participation in regional or state water conservation efforts; use of soil- or plant-moisture sensing technologies or commercial irrigation scheduling services.

**Performance Measure 3.2. Water Quality:** Standard Users shall apply a program to properly manage the use of fertilizers and other soil amendments, crop protectants, and other inputs and avoid the release of sediment and nutrients from agricultural lands into groundwater and surface water.

**Indicator 3.2.1 Input Application on Agricultural Lands**: Application of agricultural best management practices when applying fertilizers and other soil amendments, crop protectants and other agricultural inputs to avoid and control infiltration of nutrients, crop protectants and pathogens into groundwater.

Guidance: Nutrients, pesticides, and salts from agriculture can enter groundwater and pose a risk to human and environmental health. Groundwater contamination can be minimized by applying regional agricultural BMPs to control infiltration of agricultural inputs. In contrast to Indicator 3.2.2 (Water Quality Protection), this Indicator focuses on infield application of agricultural input practices to avoid infiltration of all agricultural inputs into groundwater. Conformance evidence for three other Indicators, which address management of agricultural inputs may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicator 2.1.3 (Nutrient Management Program), which addresses

nutrient loss to water; and Indicators 4.1.3 (Pest Control Practices) and 4.2.1 (Application and Storage of Crop Protectants), which address application and storage of crop protectants to avoid their release into groundwater.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of regional agricultural BMPs used to protect groundwater from agricultural inputs, which may be supported by: nutrient management plans; tillage practices (conservation tillage, no-till tillage) that reduce input infiltration; chemical use practices (reduce chemical use, use chemicals with short half-lives) that reduce infiltration.

**Indicator 3.2.2 Water Quality Protection**: Application of agricultural best management practices to manage water runoff from cropland into surface water and protect wetlands, riparian areas, and water quality of groundwater and surface water.

Guidance: Agriculture is associated with water quality impairment of over 20 percent of the total assessed river miles in the U.S. Water pollution from agricultural runoff can be measurably reduced by applying regional agricultural BMPs. Regional agricultural BMPs may include structural practices, which physically control water runoff and protect wetlands and water resources. This Indicator focuses on applying regional agricultural BMPs to manage surface runoff leaving cropland while Indicator 3.2.1 (Input Application on Agricultural Lands) focuses on infield practices for managing agricultural inputs. Water quality protection also includes other sources of wastewater (ex. product washing, equipment washing, including chemical rinsate, industrial processing, runoff from fertilizers and PPPs, irrigation backflush, and kitchen and office facilities). Conformance evidence for three other Indicators may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicator 2.1.3 (Nutrient Management Program) addresses nutrient loss to water; and Indicators 4.1.3 (Pest Control Practices) and 4.2.1 (Application and Storage of Crop Protectants) address application and storage of crop protectants to avoid their release to groundwater and surface water.

Regarding irrigation water quality, it is important for both Standard Users and auditing bodies to be knowledgeable of the relevant legal requirements and industry guidelines, as these must be followed.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of structural regional agricultural BMPs used to protect wetlands and water resources from runoff, which may include: drain practices (e.g., biofilters, flow controls); trapping practices (e.g., terraces, grassed waterways, buffer/filter strips, cover crops); tillage practices (conservation tillage, no-till tillage); chemical use practices (reduce chemical use, use chemicals with short environmental half-lives); and CRP areas.

## Objective 4. Crop Protection

To achieve crop protection objectives while protecting people and the environment.

Background: Appropriately used, crop protection and the use of crop protectants can enhance productivity and reduce crop losses. Crop protectants may have deleterious impacts to humans and wildlife when poorly managed. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) has been shown to reduce crop protectant risk to humans and environment and enhance crop productivity while reducing costs.

**Performance Measure 4.1. Integrated Pest Management:** Standard Users shall protect crops against pests by implementing an Integrated Pest Management program that uses appropriate biosecurity to achieve crop protection objectives.

**Indicator 4.1.1 Pest Monitoring**: Monitoring of pests to prevent excessive crop loss and economic injury to crop plants.

Guidance: Pest monitoring is essential for detecting and applying timely controls when pests are at low densities. It can significantly reduce the use of crop protectants and their cost and avoid major crop losses. It is also a core part of any IPM program. An IPM should be based on relevant legal requirements, training and/or advice from a qualified source.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of pest monitoring efforts and its contribution to reducing crop loss and crop plant injury, which may be supported by: identification of threshold effects resulting in excessive crop loss and crop plant injury; pest scouting records; service provider invoices for monitoring; and pest scouting credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or vendors.

**Indicator 4.1.2. Crop Protection**: Implementation of a process for preventing excessive crop loss from pests, crop protectant resistance, and buildup and spread of pests.

Guidance: Pests can be responsible for crop losses up to 50% for some crops. IPM reduces crop losses by applying a set of regional agricultural BMPs to prevent excessive crop loss from pests, crop protectant resistance

and buildup, and spread of pests. It often includes the prudent application of crop protectants. Conformance evidence for two other Indicators may be also applicable to this Indicator: Indicators 4.1.1 (Pest Monitoring), which focuses on pest monitoring and 4.1.3 (Pest Control Practices), which focuses on applying lowest risk, selective treatments when appropriate.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or documentation of the set of informal or formal practices used to achieve crop protection, including the prevention of excessive crop loss, crop protectant resistance and buildup and spread of pests, which may be supported by: pest scouting records; vendor invoices for monitoring and application; and pest applicators licenses of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or applicators.

**Indicator 4.1.3 Pest Control Practices**: Prioritization of the use of lowest risk, most selective treatment options to achieve crop protection goals whenever appropriate.

Guidance: A key IPM practice is to prioritize low risk, selective treatments, which also can help maintain natural enemies of pests and other beneficial invertebrates such as pollinators and reduce human health and environmental risks from crop protectants. Low risk, selective treatments can also reduce costs. Conformance evidence for Indicator 4.1.2 (Crop Protection) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of how lowest risk, most selective crop protection treatment options were selected and applied, which may be supported by: crop protectant recommendation reports; staff knowledge of pest control options; infield observations of physical (e.g., dust management to control almond spider mites), genetic (e.g., pest resistant and GMO varieties), cultural (e.g., crop rotation, cover crops, mulching), and/or biological controls (e.g., owl nesting boxes, bio-pesticides, matting disruptor materials); vendor invoices for pest control treatments; and pesticide applicators licenses of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or applicators.

**Performance Measure 4.2. Crop Protectant Management:** Standard Users shall select, use, and store crop protectants in accordance with label instructions and regulatory requirements.

**Indicator 4.2.1. Application and Storage of Crop Protectants**: Application and storage of crop protectants according to label instructions and regulatory requirements and application of practices to protect employees, farm workers, public health, and the environment and avoid drift of crop protectants offsite.

Guidance: Crop protectant label instructions and regulatory requirements provide instructions for safe and effective use of crop protectants and help achieve maximum benefits and compliance with regulatory requirements. They also provide guidance for regulatory compliance in the application and storage of crop protectants which helps human and environmental health. This includes consideration of crop protectant application practices, storage practices, and facilities.

Standard Users should ensure adequate changing and washing facilities are provided to persons who handle or use fuel, fertilizers, plant protection products (PPPs) and other hazardous substances. They should also ensure that relevant laws or other guidelines (such as from the manufacturer) for the calibration and servicing of plant protection product (PPP) and fertilizer application equipment are followed. Conformance evidence for Indicators 4.1.2 (Crop Protection) and 4.1.3 (Pest Control Practices) may be applicable to this Indicator where it addresses application practices for crop protectants. Conformance evidence for Indicator 6.1.1 (Waste Disposal) and Indicator 6.1.3 (Management of Agricultural Chemicals and Other Materials) may be applicable to this Indicator where it addresses appropriate disposal of agricultural inputs, including crop protectants. Conformance evidence for Indicator 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training) may be applicable to this Indicator where it addresses employee training for storage and application of crop protectants.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of how crop protectants are stored and applied according to regulatory requirements, which may be supported by: visual evidence in the field of appropriate crop protectant storage; SDS sheets available to employees; crop protectant recommendation documents; staff and/or vendor knowledge of label restriction; vendor invoices for selective treatments; and pest applicator licenses of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or applicators.

## Objective 5. Energy Use, Air Quality and Climate Change

To conserve energy used by agricultural operations and minimize adverse impacts to the atmosphere and the global climate; and to be resilient and prepared for adverse climatic and weather events.

Background: Agriculture consumes less than 2% of energy used in the U.S., with direct energy costs (electricity and fuels) accounting for 10% of farm costs and indirect energy costs (crop protectants, fertilizers, and other inputs) accounting for 10-35% of farm costs. Agriculture contributes about 10% of U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, including $CO_2$ from equipment and $NO_2$ from emission from soils. This objective recognizes how agriculture has a unique opportunity to help both reduce energy use and air emissions, which may affect climate and human health and increase resilience to climate change.

**Performance Measure 5.1 Agricultural Energy Use and Conservation:** Standard Users shall conserve energy resources, especially fossil fuels, used by agricultural operations.

**Indicator 5.1.1 Energy Conservation**: Use of technologies and application of agricultural best management practices to conserve energy where appropriate.

Guidance: Energy conservation is the decrease in energy use. It can be achieved in farming by using technologies and practices, which reduce direct energy use (e.g., use of electricity and fuels) or indirect energy use (e.g., reduction in energy consuming agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, crop protectants, and/or water). It leads to increased efficiency and reduced costs and emissions that are harmful to human and environmental health. Regional agricultural BMPs for energy conservation may not always be available or cost effective for all crops and so may not be appropriate for all operations. Standard Users could also have a preventative maintenance program for the proper, efficient functioning of farm vehicles, equipment and machinery. Conformance evidence for Indicators 2.1.3 (Nutrient Management Program), 3.1.3. (Water Conservation), and 4.1.3 (Pest Control Practices) may be applicable to this Indicator when they include practices or technologies which reduce direct and indirect energy use.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of energy conservation technologies and practices, which may be supported by: tracking of annual energy costs; use of software to track energy use of individual equipment; power units and tractor upgrades to more efficient equipment, including variable speed drives; energy conserving cropping, tillage, and irrigation practices; lighting upgrades, including LEDs; and examples of CAPEX proposals for energy conservation technologies.

**Indicator 5.1.2 Renewable Energy**: Use of renewable energy technologies and application of agricultural best management practices where appropriate.

Guidance: Renewable energy includes energy from sources that are naturally replenishing and virtually inexhaustible such as wood, waste, geothermal, wind, photovoltaic, tides and waves, hydropower, and solar thermal energy. Their use can help reduce fossil fuel use and air emissions that are costly and harmful to humans and the environment. Renewable energy and regional agricultural BMPs and technologies may not be available, practical, and/or cost effective and hence appropriate for all operations. Standard Users should list their energy sources and quantify their energy needs.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or Pro Forma documents indicating analysis and consideration of renewable energy technologies and practices, which may be supported by evidence such as a description and/or infield demonstration of renewable energy use, including wind turbines, geothermal, and/or solar panels.

**Performance Measure 5.2 Air Quality:** Standard Users shall minimize adverse impacts to air quality from agricultural operations.

**Indicator 5.2.1 Air Emissions**: Use of low-emission technologies when compatible with agricultural best management practices.

Guidance: Use of fertilizers, pesticides, and fuels in farming can be significant sources of air emissions, which are detrimental to human and environmental health. Technologies and practices, which reduce direct energy use (e.g., use of electricity and fuels) or indirect energy use (e.g., reduction in energy consuming agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, crop protectants, and/or water) may also reduce air emissions. Conformance evidence for Indicators 5.1.1 (Energy Conservation) and 5.1.2 (Renewable Energy) may be applicable to this Indicator when it reduces air emissions.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of low-emissions technology upgrades, which may be supported by: a description of and/or documentation of CAPEX proposals indicating attention to low emissions technologies; a description and/or infield demonstration of low emissions technology, such as replacement of fuel driven pumps with electrical and/or VSD pumps; reducing field passes; chipping instead of burning wood waste; and installation of renewable energy; upgrading tractor engines to Tier 3.

**Indicator 5.2.2 Airborne Dust Control**: Application of agricultural best management practices to minimize airborne dust where and when it adversely affects human health and/or the environment.

Guidance: In some areas and/or time of year, dust from agricultural operations can be a human health hazard. This indicator applies only when and where airborne dust adversely affects humans and/or the environment. The need for dust control measures may vary seasonally and across cropping systems.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of dust control measures applied when necessary to avoid human health and/or environmental adverse impacts, which may be supported by evidence such as vendor invoices for road dust control and/or equipment upgrades to reduce dust emissions (e.g., almond harvesters). Conformance evidence to Indicator 9.4.1 (Public Health and Safety) may be applicable to this Indicator when it addresses dust emissions to be managed to protect public health.

**Performance Measure 5.3 Climate-Smart Agriculture:** Standard Users shall apply the principles of climate-smart agriculture and/or carbon farming to reduce adverse impacts to the global climate and adapt to climate change.

**Indicator 5.3.1 Greenhouse Gas Emissions**: Application of climate-smart agricultural best management practices that minimize greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural operations and farmland and/or sequester greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change where appropriate.

Guidance: Agricultural sector contributes about 9% U.S. GHG emissions, which impact climate. Climate change poses a significant threat to the global environment and agriculture. All sectors need to reduce GHG emissions to address this challenge. Many farms apply regional agricultural BMPs, which reduce and/or sequester GHG emissions as they aim to cut costs, reduce energy or fertilizer use, and/or improve soil health. Conformance evidence for four other Indicators may be applicable to yield conformance evidence for this Indicator: Indicators 2.1.3 (Nutrient Management Program), 5.1.1 (Energy Conservation) and 5.1.2 (Renewable Energy), which may reduce fossil fuel use or NOx emissions and hence GHG emissions, and Indicators 2.1.4 (Crop Residues) and 6.2.2 (Resource Recovery of Agricultural Waste), which may increase soil organic matter and hence carbon sequestered on soil.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of regional agricultural BMPs that minimize GHG emissions and/or sequester GHGs, which may be supported by evidence such as crop consultant recommendations; no-till, conservation tillage, or other cropping practices; soil conservation practices; precision agriculture practices; crop rotation; and efficient management and application of nutrients and agricultural chemicals. Examples could include, but are not limited to, application of low-emission technologies and practices that reduce the use of agricultural inputs or their volatilization, increase carbon sequestration using farmland, and reduce volatilization of greenhouse gases.

**Indicator 5.3.2 Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience**: Application of climate-smart agricultural best management practices to adapt to climate change impacts and enhance farm or management unit resilience where appropriate.

Guidance: Climate-smart agricultural practices promote sustainable increases in crop productivity (including sustainable intensification) while adapting to climate change. Crop productivity is greatly impacted by weather and is vulnerable to climate change. Key solutions focus on building resilience by improving soil health and management of water going on and coming off cropland. Conformance evidence for four other Indicators may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicator 2.1.1 (Soil Quality) may enhance soil health and weather-resilience; Indicator 3.1.3 (Water Conservation) may enhance irrigation in drought years; and Indicators 2.2.1 (Cropland Soil Management) and 3.2.2 (Water Quality Protection) aim to control soil erosion and runoff, which could impact soil health and water quality.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of climate-smart regional agricultural BMPs, which may be supported by evidence such as soil health and water management practices; employee awareness about potential climate change impacts to regional agriculture; and crop insurance. Examples could include, but are not limited to, use of heat-resistant crop varieties, new crop species, practices that increase soil moisture retention and soil drainage, and training on management of new crop pests.

**Indicator 5.3.3 Preparedness for Severe Climate and Weather Events**: Application of climate-smart agricultural best management practices to prepare for and mitigate the impact of severe climate and weather events on agricultural operations.

Guidance: Preparedness is increasingly important as the number of extreme weather events rises with global warming. Developing emergency plans, as well as agricultural insurance can help demonstrate conformance. Conformance evidence for Indicator 1.2.1 (Critical External Factors) to predict extreme events and impacts weather-resilience may also be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A demonstration of having identified the extreme events that can occur and having developed emergency plans. A demonstration of having crop insurance that covers crop loss due to extreme events.

## Objective 6. Waste and Material Management

To manage waste, agricultural chemicals, and other materials from agricultural operations to minimize their adverse impacts to agriculture and the environment.

Background: Waste and material management is typically a minor sustainability issue on most farms because farmers primarily generate agricultural products and try to minimize its waste. Nevertheless, waste and surplus management on farms has an important sustainability role because it can reduce farming and waste disposal costs, improve crop productivity, threats to human and environmental health, and reduce the environmental footprint of agricultural products, which is important to supply chains.

**Performance Measure 6.1 Management of Waste and Other Materials:** Standard Users shall minimize solid waste and hazardous waste from agricultural operations and manage waste and agricultural chemicals in compliance with applicable laws, statutes, regulations, and best management practices and programs.

**Indicator 6.1.1 Waste Disposal**: Implementation of a process for properly handling and disposing of universal, hazardous, and solid waste, avoiding the burning of rubber, plastics, chemically treated materials, or other material which produce excessive or noxious smoke, unless combustion results in usable energy or some other demonstrably beneficial byproduct, or where viable alternatives to not exist.

Guidance: Only about 10% of U.S waste is hazardous. Hazardous waste, which can be liquid, solid, gas or sludge, is waste that is dangerous or potentially harmful to human and environmental health. It may include large volumes of discarded products, like unused crop protectants. Its improper disposal can make cropland unsafe for growing feed or food. Universal waste includes hazardous waste that is limited to common hazardous waste such as batteries, crop protectants, mercury-containing equipment, and lamps. Solid waste is any solid, semi-solid, liquid, or that contains gaseous materials such as garbage, construction debris, and commercial refuse. Proper waste handling by Standard Users can prevent costly regulatory actions and negative effects to social license to operate and human and environment health.

This indicator requires that Standard Users have a set of informal or formal routines for properly handling and dispose of universal, hazardous and solid waste. Elsewhere in the LH Standard, Standard Users are also expected to achieve legal compliance concerning the handling and disposal of universal, hazardous and solid waste. Conformance evidence for other Indicators may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicator 4.2.1. (Application and Storage of Crop Protectants) and Indicator 6.1.3 (Management of Agricultural Chemicals and Other Materials), and 9.4.1 (Public Health and Safety) also address safe handling of certain waste categories; Indicators 10.3.3 (Employee Sustainability Training) also addresses relevant safety and handling training; and Indicators 11.1.2 (Standard User Compliance Program) and 11.2.1 (Written Compliance Policy) also address legal compliance assurance, which includes compliance for waste laws and regulations.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or written documentation of formal or informal routines for properly handling and disposing of universal, hazardous and solid waste, which may be supported by evidence such as infield demonstration of appropriate waste management and storage of waste; vendor agreements and field practices for waste management; crop consultant recommendations for managing left over pesticide; farm employee training; and credentials of farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or crop consultant(s).

**Indicator 6.1.2 Resource Recovery**: Implementation of a process for properly handling waste to be reused, repurposed or recycled, or converted to energy, where appropriate.

Guidance: Resource recovery is using waste as material to create valuable products and reduce waste. About two-thirds of U.S. waste is repurposed, reused, or recycled. In agriculture, this can include plastic films and containers; metal from equipment, old buildings, and trellises; and wood from old buildings and trellises. Resource recovery can reduce costs and the environmental footprint of materials used in farming. It may not always be cost

effective or appropriate in regions lacking waste recovery facilities. Equipment and containers that will be used again should be safely cleaned and stored in a manner that minimizes adverse risks to people and the environment.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of a set of informal or formal practices or routines to reuse, repurpose or recycle, waste or convert it to energy, which may be supported by evidence such as vendor contractual agreements and field practices for properly storing waste for reuse, repurpose or recycling, or conversion to energy; vendor recommendations for resource recovery.

**Indicator 6.1.3 Management of Agricultural Chemicals and Other Materials**: Management, use, and storage of agricultural chemicals and equipment gases, fluids, and fuels according to regulatory requirements and application of practices to manage spills and protect employees, farm labour and the environment.

Guidance: Agricultural chemicals and equipment gases, fluids and fuels are the most common hazardous materials in agriculture. Agricultural chemicals include fertilizers, liming and acidifying agents, road dust stabilizers, crop protectants (including insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and nematicides) and other agricultural inputs used to support agriculture. Their proper management (including labeling) can help prevent costly regulatory actions and impacts to people and environment. Conformance evidence for other Indicators may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicator 4.2.1. (Application and Storage of Crop Protectants) and Indicator 6.1.3 (Management of Agricultural Chemicals and Other Materials), and 9.4.1 (Public Health and Safety) address safe handling of agricultural chemicals; Indicators 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training) and 10.3.3 (Employee Sustainability Training) address relevant safety and handling training for agricultural chemicals; and Indicators 11.1.2 (Standard User Compliance Program) and 11.2.1 (Written Compliance Policy) address legal compliance assurance, which may include compliance with regulations for agricultural chemicals.

Conformance Evidence Examples: The infield demonstration and/or a description of management, use, labeling and storage of agricultural chemicals and equipment gases, fluids, and fuels, which may be supported by evidence such as a knowledge of regulatory requirements; a description of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and employee knowledge of SOPs for managing spills; infield demonstration of appropriate spill kits for managing spills; USDA FSA Environmental Risk Survey Form; licensed pesticide applicators recommendations for using of crop protectants; pesticide applicators' license held by farmer(s), farm manager(s), and consultant(s); and safety data sheets (SDS) for crop protectants available to employees.

**Performance Measure 6.2 Food and Agricultural Surplus and Waste Resource Recovery:** Standard Users shall ensure efficient handling and recovery of agricultural products, surplus, and agricultural waste.

**Indicator 6.2.1 Food and Agricultural Product Waste**: Prevention of excessive loss of food crops and other agricultural products during harvest and on-farm storage.

Guidance: About 20% of food in North America is lost on the farm. Lost agricultural products also increase environmental impacts per unit of product, which increases the product's environmental footprint. Supply chains view food waste as a significant contributor to the environmental footprint of crop. Farmers can reduce the environmental footprint of agricultural products and costs by preventing food waste and crop loss on the farm and address supply chain concerns.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description efforts to prevent excessive loss of food crops and other agricultural products during harvest and on-farm storage, which may be supported by evidence such as an annual review of harvest records; informal or formal SOPs for crop harvesting and storage; routine calibration of harvest equipment to minimize crop loss; sanitation of harvest and storage equipment to avoid mold and vermin; effective harvest logistics; crop loss monitoring; harvest equipment loss checks when starting a new field or block; and weather review and crop inspection to ensure optimal timing of harvest to minimize losses.

**Indicator 6.2.2 Resource Recovery of Agricultural Surplus and Waste**: Reuse, repurpose, and/or recycle surplus product or crop residues, manure, other agricultural wastes and/or agricultural inputs (e.g., tailwater recovery) where appropriate.

Guidance: Agricultural Waste is solid waste that is generated by the rearing of animals (e.g., manure) or the production and harvest of agricultural products (e.g., crop residues). It can be used to improve soil health and soil productivity by increasing soil organic matter and nutrients; control soil erosion; and improve soil moisture retention, structure, biodiversity, water filtration, and water retention. Recovery of these materials can also reduce fertilizer

expenses but may not be cost effective for all cropping systems. The conformance evidence for Indicator 2.1.4 (Crop Residues) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of reuse, repurposing, and/or recycling of product or crop residues, manure, other agricultural wastes, and/or agricultural inputs, which may be supported by evidence such as crop consultant recommendations that consider reuse, repurposing, and/or recycling of agricultural wastes and/or agricultural inputs; nutrient management plans; nutrient test results for applied agricultural waste; and vendor invoices for application of agricultural waste.

## Objective 7. Conservation of Biodiversity

To manage farmland in a manner that maintains agricultural production while conserving biodiversity where appropriate or legally required.

Background: Globally, agriculture is considered the largest threat to biodiversity. Hence many supply chains seek agricultural trading partners who conserve biodiversity. Although this Objective prioritizes agricultural production over biodiversity, it looks to Standard Users to conserve biodiversity where appropriate or legally required. Conservation of biodiversity in agricultural landscapes focuses on conservation of rare and at-risk species, conservation of both natural and managed (e.g. farmed) habitats, avoiding habitat conversion to agriculture, and conserving genetic diversity of crops.

**Performance Measure 7.1 Species Protection:** Standard Users shall protect species at risk.

**Indicator 7.1.1 Species at Risk**: A program to locate and protect known viable occurrences of species at risk on enrolled farmland. A protection program may be developed independently or collaboratively and may use easements, conservation land sales, exchanges, or other conservation strategies.

Guidance: Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species are one essential part of conserving biodiversity. They are species with a T&E status designated by the U.S. Department of Interior through a long process that includes public comment. Their conservation helps maintain biodiversity and avoid risk of regulatory actions. NatureServe and state wildlife agencies can provide databases of occurrences of T&E species on farmland and advise how best to protect T&E species present. Conformance evidence for Indicators 7.2.1 (Native Habitats and Natural Communities) and 7.2.2 (Ecologically Important Sites) may include protection of habitat of T&E species and so be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: An analysis for presence of T&E species using NatureServe or state wildlife agency databases; a description of an assessment of T&E species to determine if any T&E species are present; a description of policies and practices for managing T&E species when present; a T&E species assessment, which can be based on a due diligence assessment before farmland acquisition; materials for field staff for identifying and managing for T&E species; a USDA NRCS Summary Data for Biological Evaluation form completed by NRCS for NRCS participants which evaluates effect on T&E species; USDA FSA Biological Assessments form which evaluates effects on T&E for participants in FSA programs; guidance from USDA FSA or NRCS about T&E species management; and employee training on T&E species identification and management.

**Indicator 7.1.2 Species at Risk Protection**: Protection of species at risk when they occur on enrolled farmland and management of agricultural operations with consideration of species at risk in the local watersheds catchments and landscapes of operation.

Guidance: Conservation of at-risk species can prevent local extirpation and future designation as T&E species. At-risk species are species with an at-risk designation by state wildlife conservation agencies or NatureServe. Their designation is carefully reviewed by scientists. Most at-risk species do not occur in landscapes or watersheds dominated by agriculture. Standard Users only need to protect known viable occurrences of at-risk species. Viable occurrences are species occurrences with good or excellent viability according to NatureServe, including occurrences that exhibit favorable characteristics with respect to population size and/or quality and quantity of occupied habitat, and, if current conditions prevail, the occurrence is likely to persist for the foreseeable future (i.e., at least 20-30 years) in its current condition or better. NatureServe and state wildlife agencies can identify whether viable occurrences of at-risk species occur on farmland and advise how to best protect viable occurrences of at-risk species. Standard Users should take measures to prevent the illegal extraction of flora and fauna on their land (including hunting and fishing), including rare, threatened and endangered species, in accordance with relevant legislation and customary laws. Conformance evidence for Indicators 7.2.1 (Native Habitats and Natural Communities) and 7.2.2 (Ecologically

Important Sites) may include protection of habitat of viable occurrences of at-risk species and so be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: An analysis for presence of populations of at-risk species and their viability using NatureServe or state wildlife agency databases; policies and management practices for managing at-risk species when viable occurrences are present; an at-risk species assessment, which may be found in due diligence documents created before farmland acquisition; materials for field staff for identifying and managing for at-risk species; and employee training on at-risk species identification and management.

**Performance Measure 7.2 Wildlife Habitat Conservation:** Standard Users shall conserve native habitats, wildlife habitat, natural communities, and Ecologically Important Sites on enrolled farmland.

**Indicator 7.2.1 Native Habitats and Natural Communities**: Maintenance or conservation of native habitats and natural communities in areas not used for agricultural production.

Guidance: Loss of native habitats and natural communities is the chief global threat to biodiversity. Native habitats are areas where a native species naturally occurs and that have the living and nonliving environmental conditions necessary for survival, including areas for feeding, shelter, protection and/or reproduction. Natural communities are an assemblage of interacting plant species and animal species and their common environment, recurring across the landscape, in which the effects of human intervention are minimal. Both can serve as essential habitats for common and rare wildlife and plant species, including T&E and at-risk species, and allow species to disperse across landscapes. Conformance evidence for 7.2.2 (Ecologically Important Sites) and 7.3.1 (Habitat Conversion) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: An assessment of native habitats and natural communities to determine their presence (this may have occurred during due diligence conducted before farmland acquisition or during USDA Highly Erodible Land HEL Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification for wetland natural communities); a description of policies and practices for managing native habitats and natural communities; and materials and training for field staff for identifying and managing for native habitats and natural communities; and a USDA NRCS Summary Data for Biological Evaluation form completed by NRCS for NRCS participants which evaluates effect on native communities; USDA FSA Biological Assessments form which evaluates effects on native communities for participants in FSA programs; guidance from USDA FSA or NRCS about native community species management.

**Indicator 7.2.2 Ecologically Important Sites**: Participation individually or collaboratively in plans or programs that manage Ecologically Important Sites in a manner that takes into account their unique qualities.

Guidance: Ecologically Important Sites are sites of exceptional ecological importance including areas with critically imperiled or imperiled species or natural communities (species or natural communities with NatureServe conservation status ranks of G1 or G2), rare natural communities or unique ecological landscape features. Conserving these sites can prevent the loss of rare species and biodiversity. Standard Users may develop their own plans or programs or collaborate with others. Standard Users should avoid the deliberate introduction, cultivation and use of known invasive species. Managing Ecologically Important Sites appropriate to their unique qualities does not require protection of these sites. Conformance evidence for Indicators 7.2.1 (Native Habitats and Natural Communities) and 7.3.1 (Habitat Conversion) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of plans or programs for managing Ecologically Important Sites, including management practices, which may be supported by evidence such as plans for managing Ecologically Important Sites; materials and training for field staff for identifying and managing Ecologically Important Sites; certifications or degrees of contractors who developed plans or programs.

**Indicator 7.2.3 Cropland for Wildlife Habitat**: Application of agricultural best management practices on cropland to create temporary wildlife habitat where appropriate.

Guidance: Agriculture has most widespread impact on wildlife habitat of any activity in the U.S. Many regional agricultural best management practices for cropland (e.g., no-till, structural practices to control soil erosion) can be used create temporary habitat for mammals, birds, and soil organisms and protect aquatic habitats. These practices can contribute to conserving biodiversity in agricultural landscapes. Standard Users should have a plan in place to promote a healthy ecosystem by protecting/promoting beneficial species of flora and fauna. Conformance

evidence for Indicators 2.1.1 (Soil Quality), 2.1.4 (Crop Residues), and 3.2.2 (Water Quality) may be applicable to this Indicator when it creates temporary wildlife habitat.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description or infield demonstration of application of regional agricultural BMPs on cropland used to create temporary wildlife habitat, which may be supported by evidence such as reports and/or SOPs describing the application of regional agricultural BMPs on cropland used to create temporary wildlife habitat; and vendor invoices for applying specific practices (e.g., cover cropping). Examples could include, but are not limited to, no-till practices, cover cropping, adding soil amendments made up of organic matter, bird boxes, soil erosion control structures (e.g., grassed waterways), delayed mowing, intercropping, seeding areas with native grassland seed mixes, tailwater recovery pond managed as wetlands, and water level management of rice fields for waterbirds.

**Performance Measure 7.3 Avoided Conversion:** Standard Users shall avoid conversion of natural forests, other natural communities and Ecologically Important Sites.

**Indicator 7.3.1 Habitat Conversion**: Demonstration of commitment and due diligence to avoid the land use conversion and fragmentation of natural communities and Ecologically Important Sites on enrolled farmland.

Guidance: Habitat loss through conversion is the greatest threat to biodiversity in the U.S. Grasslands are the chief habitat converted to crops in the U.S., a change that can be detrimental for many rare grassland pollinator, bird, and plant species. Avoiding land use conversation helps maintain regional biodiversity. The deliberate use of fire for land clearing purposes should also be avoided, when and where applicable.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of commitment to avoid the land use conversion and fragmentation of natural communities and Ecologically Important Sites, which may be supported by evidence such as infield demonstration of conserved natural communities and Ecologically Important Sites; employee training about habitat conversion commitment; a habitat conversion policy; management plans for conserved natural communities and Ecologically Important Sites; and conserved natural communities and Ecologically Important Sites identified on maps and/or GIS layers.

**Indicator 7.3.2 Deforestation**: Demonstration of commitment to prevent deforestation of natural forest when farming where biome-specific or geography-specific deforestation protocol(s) are in place, by a written policy to demonstrate the Program User's commitment to a zero-deforestation policy that identifies the regions of application, relevant natural forest types, and appropriate deforestation cut-off date(s) in areas with biome-specific or geography-specific deforestation protocols.

Guidance: Globally, deforestation to create cropland is a huge threat to climate and biodiversity. The U.S. lacks deforestation protocols. Hence it lacks a cutoff date, though Canada has the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework with cutoff year of 2003. A written zero deforestation policy should identify the regions of application, relevant natural forest types, and appropriate deforestation cut-off date(s) in areas with deforestation protocols. Standard Users may elect to have a simple zero deforestation policy without a cutoff date, but which identifies the application region and relevant natural forest types because the U.S. lacks a deforestation protocol.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A written policy to demonstrate the Standard User's commitment to a zero deforestation policy that addresses the regions of application, relevant natural forest types, and appropriate deforestation cut-off date(s) in areas with biome-specific or geography-specific deforestation protocols; and training to ensure appropriate employees understand written zero deforestation policy.

**Indicator 7.3.3 Responsible Land Acquisition**: Demonstration of due diligence to prevent the acquisition of farmland that was converted from natural forest after an appropriate deforestation cutoff date(s) identified by the Standard User in areas with biome-specific or geography-specific deforestation protocols.

Guidance: This indicator ensures that Standard Users avoid purchasing farmland that was converted from natural forest after an appropriate deforestation cutoff date. A cutoff date is to greatly reduce the incentive for current landowners to participate in deforestation to create cropland. The U.S. lacks biome-specific or geography-specific deforestation protocols and so has not identified a cutoff date, though bordering Canada has the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework with cutoff year of 2003.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of due diligence to prevent acquisition of farmland converted from natural forest after a cutoff date; due diligence standard operating procedure (SOP) to prevent acquisition of farmland converted from natural forest after a cutoff date; and examples of due diligence before acquisition reports.

**Performance Measure 7.4 Crop Diversity:** Support crop diversity on cropland.

**Indicator 7.4.1 Crop and Genetic Diversity**: Use of a variety of crop species, crop varieties, companion crops (e.g., cover crops, cross-pollination donors), and/or crop rotation where appropriate.

Guidance: Crop and genetic diversity can help control weeds and pests, improve soil health, and improve crop yields. It may be achieved by rotating crops, planting different varieties or hybrids in adjacent blocks or over time, cover cropping, and using cross pollination donors. Loss of crops and genetic diversity can increase regional crop susceptibility to infectious pests and diseases. By incorporating crop and genetic diversity into farming, Program Users contribute to the sustainability of regional agriculture.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of variety of crop species, crop varieties, companion crops (e.g., cover crops, cross-pollination donors), and/or crop rotation; maps, GIS layers, and/or annual reports of crops and varieties planted; and a description of management and selection of crop species, crop varieties, companion crops (e.g., cover crops, cross-pollination donors), and/or crop rotation in row crops or orchard or marsh/bog replanting.

## Objective 8. Protection of Special Sites

To manage Special Sites on farmland that are geologically or culturally important in a manner that recognizes and respects their unique qualities.

Background: Special Sites include unique geological or culturally important features that are recognized regionally or nationally or by Indigenous Peoples. They are filled with valuable information about geology or culture and history that explain human history. Their loss can mean the destruction of irreplaceable information and of areas of cultural significance and undermine the social dimension of sustainability. Conservation of Special Sites helps build local support and social license to operate.

**Performance Measure 8.1 Special Site Management:** Standard Users shall manage Special Sites in a manner appropriate for their unique qualities.

**Indicator 8.1.1 Special Site Identification**: Use of information such as existing natural heritage databases (from national or sub-national administrations) or expert advice in identifying or selecting Special Sites.

Guidance: Special Sites are typically cemeteries, Native American sites, archeological sites (post-European settlement sites), and unusual geological features (e.g., remarkable waterfalls, cliffs). They occur infrequently on farmland in the U.S. This indicator helps ensure the use of appropriate information when identifying Special Sites.

Conformance Evidence Examples: Examples where information from existing natural heritage data or recognized experts has been used to identify Special Sites; for participants in USDA FSA or NRCS programs, a FSA-850 Environmental Screening Worksheet for the farm from your FSA office or CR1 form from your NRCS office indicating presence or absences of cultural, archeological, or historic sites; communications with experts regarding information for identifying Special Sites; Special Sites identification policy; and due diligence title search information, which identifies whether Special Sites occur on Standard User's farmland.

**Indicator 8.1.2 Special Site Management**: Appropriate mapping, cataloging and management of identified Special Sites in a manner that recognizes their unique qualities.

Guidance: Special Sites are sites filled with valuable information about geology or culture and history that explain human history. Damage or destruction of these sites can mean the loss of irreplaceable information. It can also lead to the loss of areas of cultural significance to all people, including Indigenous Peoples. This indicator helps ensure use of appropriate mapping, cataloguing, and management of identified Species Sites so the unique qualities of Special Sites are maintained.

Conformance Evidence Examples: Map and catalogue of Special Sites; a description of how Special Sites are managed; communications with experts regarding management of Special Sites; Special Sites management policy; employee training regarding management of Special Sites; and GIS data layers identifying Special Sites and their management practices; for participants in USDA FSA or NRCS programs, guidance regarding management of any cultural resource sites found on your farm (including, "doing knowing").

## Objective 9. Local Communities

To operate safely and responsibly; contribute to the economic well-being, social networks, and health of local communities; and to recognize and respect the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples in regions of agricultural operations.

Background: Societal considerations for agriculture include its impacts to social and economic well-being, public health, and social law legal obligations to local communities and Indigenous Peoples. Agriculture has key positive impacts in many rural areas of the U.S. contributing to economic and social well-being of local communities, especially where agriculture is a large part of the rural economy. Local communities and Indigenous Peoples also may have legal or treaty rights in many rural areas. Indigenous Peoples are defined in the United States as members of federally recognized tribes. This Objective recognizes that rural communities are the mainstay to U.S. agriculture. It helps ensure that Standard Users contribute to the well-being of local communities in rural agricultural landscapes and operate with social responsibility.

**Performance Measure 9.1 Economic Well-Being:** Standard Users shall foster the economic vitality of local communities through business practices that support sustainable agriculture and the local economy.

**Indicator 9.1.1 Economic Contributions**: Payment of all applicable taxes and, as appropriate, employment of staff from local communities and local procurement of supplies and services.

Guidance: Farming is the fourth largest employer in rural counties accounting for about 10% of rural jobs. It has a greater economic multiplier effect on rural economies than other sectors because of its contributions to local employment, tax payments, and local procurement. Farming helps sustain rural economies and fosters local support for agriculture. Standard Users may employ non-local workers and purchase non-local services and materials when appropriate.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of payment of taxes; copies of tax invoices, records, or forms; a description and/or documents indicating local employment and procurement; employment records; local vendor invoices; and employment of summer interns from regional agricultural universities.

**Performance Measure 9.2 Community Relations:** Standard Users shall engage local communities to increase community awareness and support for the practice of sustainable agriculture and maintain or enhance Standard User reputation.

**Indicator 9.2.1 Community Engagement**: Engagement in positive relationships with neighbors and local communities thus raising the awareness of sustainable agriculture.

Guidance: Neighbor and community engagement can be essential to generate local support for sustainable agriculture and maintain relationships and reduce conflicts. Neighbors and local communities can also be engaged to help maintain local support for sustainable agriculture and a social license to operate. Standard Users can apply engagement activities best suited for each operation. Conformance evidence for Indicator 9.3.3 (Local Communities' and Indigenous Peoples' Inquiries) may be applicable to this Indicator (e.g., annual newsletters with contact information).

Standard Users should communicate openly with the community in order to inform them of (and address) any concerns raised over farming operations.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of engagement activities with local communities, which may be supported by: leadership roles filled by farmer(s), farm manager(s), and/or employee(s) in local agriculture-related organizations and local government; farm signage; hosting of agriculture meetings, workshops, and/or presentations for neighboring farm managers, and/or community members; in-kind or financial support for agricultural fairs, secondary vocational programs, agricultural scholarships Future Farmers of American, 4-H, etc.; participation in regional planning efforts related to agriculture; phone lists of key local community contacts; and newsletter for neighbors.

**Performance Measure 9.3 Rights of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples:** Standard Users shall recognize and respect the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

**Indicator 9.3.1 Local Community and Indigenous Peoples Policy**: A written policy demonstrating a commitment to recognize and respect the rights of local communities and treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Guidance: Respect for local community and treaty rights is essential for supporting the social dimension of agricultural sustainability and achieving legal compliance. These rights vary among state and/or county jurisdictions. Local communities may have rights concerning public health and safety, land use, water quality, soil erosion, invasive species, and wildlife. Treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples also vary depending on Indigenous Peoples local group(s) and are often identified during due diligence of title searches when land is purchased. Treaty rights may include access to Special Sites, and water, hunting, fishing, wild food procurement, and other land access

rights. A written policy can be a simple statement making a commitment to respect the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples. It can be shared with employees and stakeholders. Conformance evidence for Indicators 9.4.1 (Public Health and Safety) and 9.3.2 (Land Tenure Rights of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples) may be applicable to this Indicator when it addresses local public health and safety requirements and reveals community and treaty rights during acquisition due diligence.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A written policy demonstrating a commitment to recognize and respect the rights of local communities and treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples, which may be supported by evidence such as a way to ensure staff understand the written policy and are able to implement the written policy of the Standard User; on-board training regarding written policy on rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples; employee training attendance sheet; a description of informal and formal supporting policies and/or practices used by Standard User to conform to written policy; and internal communications.

**Indicator 9.3.2 Land Tenure Rights of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples**: Demonstration of due diligence to prevent infringing on the land tenure rights of local communities and the land tenure rights, access to and use rights, customary rights, and legal rights of Indigenous Peoples when purchasing and managing land.

Guidance: Respect for land tenure rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples begins by first understanding existing rights. Indigenous Peoples are defined in the U.S. as members of federally recognized tribes and may have treaty rights that vary depending on the jurisdiction and Indigenous Peoples local group(s). These rights are often revealed in due diligence during farmland acquisition. Treaty rights may include access to Special Sites, and water, hunting, fishing, wild food procurement, and other land access rights. Respect for the land tenure rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples supports the right to self-determination and legal compliance and helps maintain social license to operate. **This Indicator principally applies when a Standard User is purchasing farmland, but it also applies to management of farmland that was acquired before participation in the LH Standard.** Conformance evidence to Indicator 9.3.1 (Local Community and Indigenous Peoples Policy) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or documentation of due diligence regarding tenure rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples when purchasing and managing land; on-board training regarding land tenure rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples; and due diligence guidelines or SOP for reviewing land tenure rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

**Indicator 9.3.3 Local Communities' and Indigenous Peoples' Inquiries**: Demonstration of commitment to be receptive to local communities' and Indigenous Peoples' inquiries and concerns.

Guidance: Being receptive to inquiries and concerns is important to ensuring effective communication and relationships with key stakeholders and is necessary for maintaining a social license to operate. Responses need not include remedies that satisfy every inquiry or concern. Conformance evidence for Indicator 9.2.1 (Community Engagement) may be applicable to this Indicator when it describes community engagement activities that demonstrate receptivity to local concerns. Conformance evidence for Indicators 9.2.1 (Community Engagement), Indicator 9.3.1 (Local Community and Indigenous Peoples Policy), and Indicator 9.3.2 (Land Tenure Rights of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples) may be applicable to this Indicator when it demonstrates receptivity to inquiries and concerns.

Conformance Evidence Examples: Farm signage with contact information; periodic listening sessions with stakeholders from local community and Indigenous Peoples; online anonymous suggestion box; records of inquiries from local community or Indigenous Peoples and Program User's response; submission of news articles in local newspapers about sustainable agriculture and contact information for inquires; providing contact information to neighbors and leaders in local communities and Indigenous Peoples communities; employee training for managing inquires; and public inquiry policy.

**Performance Measure 9.4 Public Health:** Standard Users shall apply measures to protect public health from adverse impacts of enrolled farmland.

**Indicator 9.4.1 Public Health and Safety**: Application of health and safety agricultural best management practices that protect public health from adverse impacts of agricultural chemicals, excessive nutrients, equipment gases and fluids, fuels, and air pollution and that train employees to operate equipment safely.

Guidance: The largest concern of local communities for agriculture is health and safety impacts. Protecting public health and safety helps protect human and environmental health and maintain a social license to operate and public support for agriculture. Conformance evidence for four other Indicators may yield conformance evidence for this Indicator: Indicators 4.2.1 (Application and Storage of Crop Protectants) and 6.1.3 (Management of Agricultural Chemicals and Other Materials) may provide relevant evidence where regional agriculture BMPs are applied to protect human and environmental health from crop protectants and other agricultural chemicals; Indicators 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training) and 10.3.3 (Employee Sustainability Training) may provide evidence of employee safety BMP training for this Indicator. Standard Users are expected to comply with applicable laws, statutes, and regulations concerning the handling and use of agricultural chemicals and equipment gases, fluids, fuels, and wastes.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of the application of health and safety regional agricultural BMPs, which may be supported by evidence such as employees training to operate equipment safely; farm public health policy; licensed pesticide applicators recommendations for applying crop protectants; pesticide applicators' license held by farmer(s), farm manager(s), pesticide consultant(s); safety data sheets (SDS) for crop protectants available to employees and where materials are stored; a description of management, use, and storage of agricultural chemicals and equipment gases, fluids and fuels; a description of knowledge of regulatory requirements; a description of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and employee knowledge of SOPs for managing spills and protecting employees, farm labor and the environment; USDA FSA Environmental Risk Survey Form; and infield demonstration of appropriate materials and supplies necessary to manage spills and protect employees and the environment.

## Objective 10. Personnel and Farm Labour

To provide a safe and healthy working environment, fair compensation and training for Standard User personnel, contract management company employees and contract farm labour necessary to improve the practice of sustainable agriculture.

Background: Agriculture presents a challenging work environment because it relies on employees to work independently and in teams in a dynamic yet casual environment with unique human health risks. It requires that farmers and farm managers always work toward creating a safe and respectful working environment and provide quality supervision and training to foster the routines, talent, and teamwork necessary to achieve business objectives and long-term viability and sustainability.

**Performance Measure 10.1 Safe and Respectful Working Environment:** Standard Users shall foster a culture of safety and respect among Standard User personnel and contract management company employees to minimize injuries, help establish safe routines and enhance employee productivity.

**Indicator 10.1.1 Equal Opportunity Employment**: Provision for equal opportunity employee recruitment and occupations, including equitable access to professional development.

Guidance: Equal opportunity environments can help attract qualified talent, comply with state and federal laws, and have a fair and effective workplace culture. Workplace fairness is essential to ensuring that talented employees advance and contribute to business performance and sustainability. Women and non-Hispanic minority field employees are greatly under-represented in U.S. agriculture though the ratio of female to male agricultural college students is now nearly balanced. Barriers include discrimination, lack of training opportunities, pipeline barrier in the sciences, and lack of childcare. Conformance evidence for Indicator 10.1.2 (Respectful Work Environment) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Example: A description of equal-opportunity, informal or informal policies and activities to achieve equal opportunity employee recruitment and occupations; confidential employee interviews; employee recruitment programs targeting women and minorities; hiring of women and minority interns; equal opportunity training for hiring staff; and development of a respectful work culture.

**Indicator 10.1.2 Respectful Work Environment**: Maintain a safe, gender-equitable, and professional work environment.

Guidance: Working in the dynamic and casual environment of agriculture can make it challenging to establish an effective professional environment without being rigid. Women and non-Hispanic minority employees are greatly under-represented in US agriculture. A gender equitable, professional working environment fosters high morale, consideration of diverse perspectives, promotes

collaboration, and business and professional growth for everyone, and contributes to greater productivity and sustainability. Conformance with four Indicators may yield conformance evidence for this Indicator: Indicator 10.1.1 (Equal Opportunity Employment) may yield evidence, which addresses recruitment and hiring employees to help achieve gender equity; Indicator 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training) may yield evidence such as employee training to help achieve a safe, gender equitable and professional work environment; Indicators 11.1.1 (Access to Compliance Information), 11.1.2 (Standard User Compliance Program), and 11.1.3 (Compliance Commitment) may yield evidence, which could include Federal, state, and/or local workplace equity compliance information; and Indicator 12.1.1 (Performance Review) may yield evidence such as employee coaching or responsiveness to workplace concern of employees.

Standard Users should ensure all personnel are provided with adequate breaks and provision of potable water, shade, and sanitation during their work shift, in accordance with relevant legislation, ILO Conventions or, in their absence, industry guidelines and regional best practices.

Standard Users should ensure that overtime work is voluntary and compensated, in accordance with relevant legislation and ILO Conventions.

Conformance Evidence Example: A description and/or infield demonstration of application of health and safety regional agricultural BMPs; confidential employee interviews regarding workplace professionalism; signage as required by law to inform employees of labor rights; on-board training of new employees about safe, respectful, and gender-equitable work place requirements; leadership, managerial, and other professional development training opportunities for employees; employee handbook that indicates expectations for workplace behavior; attendance records for professional meetings; safety reports; safety KPIs; and performance reviews that review work safety expectations and outcomes.

**Performance Measure 10.2 Occupational Training:** Standard Users shall provide training for Standard User personnel and ensure adequate training for contract management company employees necessary to improve the knowledge and practice of sustainable agriculture.

**Indicator 10.2.1 Personnel and Contract Worker Training**: Workplace health and safety education and training for Standard User personnel and contract management company employees.

Guidance: Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in the U.S. leading to a workplace setting, which is highly regulated by Federal laws. Health, safety, and occupational employee training plays a key role in avoiding costly workplace injuries and cost regulatory actions and improving employee knowledge to advance sustainable agriculture. This Indicator focuses on employee health, safety and occupational training, but overlaps and potentially shares conformance evidence with Indicator 10.3.3 (Employee Sustainability Training), which focuses on agricultural sustainability training sufficient to fulfill their roles and responsibilities under the LH Standard.

Product safety and product quality should also be informed by qualified advisors, including training of such individuals.

Conformance Evidence Example: A description of health, safety and occupational education and training of employees, which may be supported by: confidential employee interviews; infield observations of employees applying health, safety, and occupational education and training; examples of in-house training materials; and training certificates and/or diplomas.

**Performance Measure 10.3 Supporting Capacity for Sustainability:** Standard Users shall require appropriate training of Standard User personnel and contract management company employees so that they are competent to fulfill their responsibilities under the Leading Harvest Standard.

**Indicator 10.3.1 Sustainability Policy Commitment**: Standard Users shall provide a written policy demonstrating commitment to the Leading Harvest Standard that is communicated throughout the organization, particularly to facility and farm managers.

Guidance: The commitment statement provides clear direction to employees and helps ensure consistent execution of the LH Standard. It also communicates to supply chains and other stakeholders how the Standard User is committed to sustainability, which can also help maintain a social license to operate. Conformance evidence for Indicators 1.1.1 (Farmland Stewardship Commitment) and (where applicable) 13.1.2 (Farmland Tenant Agreements) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Example: A written policy describing the Standard User's commitment to the LH Standard, which may be supported by evidence such

as a description of policy communication to employees; confidential employee interviews; on-board training regarding written commitment to LH Standard; training attendance records; and a description of policies and/or practices used to ensure staff are able to implement written policy.

**Indicator 10.3.2 Employee Roles and Responsibilities for Sustainability**: Assignment and understanding of roles and responsibilities for achieving the objectives of the Leading Harvest Standard.

Guidance: The assignment of workplace roles and responsibilities for achieving the LH Standard helps ensure effective communication of expectations, understanding by employees about their roles and key work routines. It also helps ensure that employees are accountable and can work together to achieve the LH Standard Objectives. Conformance evidence for two Indicators may be applicable for this Indicator: 10.3.3 (Employee Sustainability Training), which includes employee training for their roles and responsibilities and 12.1.1 (Performance Review), which provides an accountability mechanism employee regarding their LH Standard roles and responsibilities.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of employee roles and responsibilities and demonstration that employees understand their role and responsibilities for the LH Standard, which is supported by evidence such as confidential employee interviews; job descriptions or organization chart that identify LH Standard roles and responsibilities; periodic (e.g., quarterly, annually) group and individual review of employees on LH Standard roles and responsibilities; performance reviews that address employee role and responsibilities for the LH Standard; and demonstration of relevant professional training (e.g., college degrees, certifications) to ensure employees can carry out their roles and responsibilities.

**Indicator 10.3.3 Employee Sustainability Training**: Staff education and training for Standard User personnel and contract management company employees sufficient to fulfill their roles and responsibilities under the Leading Harvest Standard.

Guidance: Employee sustainability training is essential to them being able to fulfill their roles and responsibilities under the LH Standard. This Indicator focuses on sustainability training as it relates to implementation of the LH Standard while Indicator 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training) focuses on employee safety, health, and occupational training, which may overlap with this Indicator. Hence, conformance evidence for Indicator 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A demonstration of relevant professional training (e.g., college degrees, professional certifications) to ensure employees can carry out their roles and responsibilities, which may be supported by evidence such as attendance records for training workshops and certifications; policy to provide reimbursement and/or time-off to attend training workshops; performance reviews with professional development objectives; and attendance at meetings of professional organizations. Examples could include, but are not limited to, postsecondary degrees and professional certificates, in-house training, continuing education programs for managing waste, recycling, crop protectant safety, professional development opportunities, and participation in agriculture-related professional organizations.

**Performance Measure 10.4 Compensation:** Standard Users shall ensure adequate livelihood for employees and contract management company employees to attract and retain a stable workforce.

**Indicator 10.4.1 Wages and Pay**: Compensation to ensure an equitable and fair wage for Standard User personnel and contract management company employees.

Guidance: Agricultural wages are modest for entry-level workers and only average 60 percent of the nonfarm wages. Hence, they are a significant concern for supply chains. An equitable and fair wage (or "living wage") is estimated from the cost of living in a region based on typical expenses and supports a minimum standard of living. Realistic wages are necessary to attract skilled employees and ensure a long-term labor supply. The wages of the lowest paid employee can often serve as a key reference point for assessing whether wages meet the criteria for an equitable and fair wage. Payment in a reliable frequency is also an important element of an equitable and fair wage. Additionally, any deductions from wages should be legally permitted, clearly recorded and communicated to personnel, and not made for disciplinary purposes.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of wages and/or salaries that demonstrates that employees are receiving an equitable and fair wage, pay stubs, and wage scale documents for low-wage positions.

**Performance Measure 10.5 Farm Labour:** *Standard Users* shall monitor *contract management companies* or *farm labour contractors* to help ensure farm labour working conditions consistent with the *Principles* and *Objectives* of *Leading Harvest Standard.*

> **Indicator 10.5.1 Farm Labor Monitoring Program**: A program to monitor farm labour contractors employed by Standard Users or Contract Management Companies to ensure compliance with applicable labour laws, statutes, and regulations by reviewing policies, practices, and training addressing workplace environment, equal opportunity, workplace health and safety, and compensation, including equitable and fair wage and, where appropriate, housing and transportation.
>
> Guidance: Farm Labor Contractors provide critical services to agriculture. Farm employers are legally required to take reasonable steps to ensure that their farm labor contractors have valid registration certificates. Many contracted farm workers are immigrants who don't know their legal rights and this makes them economically and socially vulnerable. Moreover, labor rights are a key component of the social aspect of sustainable agriculture. This Indicator is not applicable to Program Users who do not contract for labor with contract management companies or farm labor contractors. Conformance evidence for Indicator 11.1.2 (Standard User Compliance Program) may be applicable to this Indicator.
>
> Conformance Evidence Examples: A description and/or infield demonstration of a monitoring program composed of an organized set of activities to address the workplace environment, equal opportunity, worker health, safety, and compensation, including equitable and fair wage and, where appropriate, housing, and transportation, which may be supported by evidence such as farm labor contractor contracts; communications about farm labor contractor monitoring; and annual or more frequent reviews of farm labor contractors.

## Objective 11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

To comply with applicable national and sub-national laws, statutes, and regulations related to agriculture.

Background: Agriculture works in a diverse regulatory environment. Legal compliance is fundamental to the credibility of agricultural sustainability and managing legal risk. Farmer and farm managers encounter social, labor, and environmental legal requirements, which are complex and make legal compliance challenging. By meeting their legal obligations, they can protect the human well-being and the environment, avoid regulatory actions, and achieve efficient operations and safety, positive public relations, and greater employee retention.

**Performance Measure 11.1 Legal Compliance:** Standard Users shall comply with applicable national and sub-national agricultural and related social and environmental laws, statutes, and regulations.

> **Indicator 11.1.1 Access to Compliance Information**: A process by which personnel have access to information of relevant laws, statutes, and regulations in appropriate locations.
>
> Guidance: Knowledge of legal compliance issues is critical to ensuring employees comply with statutes and avoid costly regulatory action. Conformance evidence for two other Indicators may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicator 10.2.1 (Personnel and Contract Worker Training), which may include training to help ensure employees understand relevant legal information; and Indicator 11.2.1 (Written Compliance Policy), which may signal the importance of legal compliance to employees.
>
> Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a purposeful set of formal or informal practices or routines for providing employee access to appropriate legal information, which may be supported by evidence such as confidential employee interviews to assess their awareness of relevant workplace laws, statutes, and regulations; signage as required by law to inform employees of labor rights, workplace requirements, and safety and environmental regulations; an employee handbook; SDS binders in office and pesticide storage areas; voluntary signage to inform employees about relevant legal requirements; and employee training regarding applicable laws, statutes, and regulations.
>
> **Indicator 11.1.2 Standard User Compliance Program**: A program to achieve compliance with applicable national and sub-national laws, statutes, and regulations.
>
> Guidance: Regulatory compliance of a company is necessary to manage regulatory risk and achieve a basic level of sustainability. It helps ensure that a farmer or farm manager meets their legal obligations, avoid costly regulatory actions, and focus on efficient operations, safety, public relations, and employee retention. Conformance evidence for Indicator 10.5.1 (Farm Labour Monitoring Program) is related to this indicator, and it is worth noting that the Standard User should ensure all personnel have a legal right to work in the United States. Conformance evidence for Indicators 11.1.1 (Access to

Compliance Information Indicator), 11.1.3 (Compliance Commitment), and 11.2.1 (Written Compliance Policy) may be applicable to this Indicator when it supports a legal compliance program.

A written policy should be developed to outline a commitment to conducting business transparently and accurately, with a clear zero-tolerance policy for bribery, corruption, extortion, embezzlement, conflicts of interest, and fraud.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a legal compliance program that helps achieve compliance with applicable federal, state or local laws, statutes, and regulations, which may be supported by evidence such as an employee handbook addressing policies regarding ethical and legal compliance issues and obligations; confidential employee interviews; signage as required by law to inform employees of labor rights, workplace requirements, and safety and environmental regulations; employee training to ensure consistent legal compliance; and professional licenses necessary for regulatory compliance.

**Indicator 11.1.3 Compliance Commitment**: Demonstration of commitment to legal compliance through available regulatory action information.

Guidance: Regulatory action information is information related to compliance with government regulations such as permits, reports and documentation of corrective actions, which may be required by a regulatory agency or court. It helps demonstrate a farmer or farm manager's commitment to legal compliance, which is essential to sustainability.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of regulatory action information (permitting applications and reports, permits, and licenses) that demonstrates commitment to legal compliance, which may be supported by evidence such as regulatory permit applications (e.g., USDA Highly Erodible Land HEL Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification; USDA FSA Environmental Risk Survey Form) and reports, permits, and licenses (company or individual [e.g., pesticide applicator license]); corrective action documents demonstrating required and voluntary efforts to remedy legal compliance issues; and signage to inform employees of labor rights, workplace requirements, and safety regulations.

**Performance Measure 11.2 Legal Compliance Polices:** Standard User shall take appropriate steps to comply with all applicable social laws at national and sub-national levels in the jurisdictions where the Standard User operates.

**Indicator 11.2.1 Written Compliance Policy**: A written policy demonstrating commitment to comply with social laws, such as those addressing civil rights, equal employment opportunities, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures, workers' compensation and equitable and fair wage, Indigenous Peoples' rights, workers' and communities' right to know, prevailing wages, workers' right to organize, and workplace health and safety.

Guidance: A written commitment communicates the importance of legal compliance to employees and a commitment to meet legal obligations and protect the health, safety, and welfare of others and the environment. It can help employees understand farming legal obligations so that they can help avoid costly regulatory enforcement actions. It can also contribute to efficient operations and safety, public relations, and employee retention. A written commitment statement helps ensure that farmers are committed to compliance with social laws and the social domain of sustainability.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A written policy demonstrating a compliance commitment to social laws, which may be supported by evidence such as communication to ensure staff understand and implement the written policy; on-board training regarding written policy; an employee handbook; training attendance records; and a description of informal and formal supporting policies and/or practices used to conform to written policy.

**Indicator 11.2.2 Consistency with International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions**: Demonstration of commitment to respect the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Guidance: ILO Principles are an international set of principles aimed at protecting freedom of association of employees and right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labor and workplace discrimination, and the abolition of child labor. Many standards require a commitment to ILO Principles. A commitment demonstrates respect for labor rights, a key social attribute of agriculture, and can bolster credibility and social license with supply chains and other key stakeholders.

This Indicator applies only to the core conventions not fully covered by existing U.S. law, that include No. 87 (Right to Organize), No. 98 (Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining), and No. 111 (Discrimination), which is addressed by Indicator 10.1.1. No. 87 states "Workers and employers…shall have the right to establish, and, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, to join organizations of their own choosing without authorization." No. 98 references federal government obligations to supply the right to organize and collective bargaining. This Indicator helps ensure that Standard Users respect widely respected principles concerning key labor rights set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Conformance evidence for Indicator 10.1.1 (Equal Opportunity Employment) may be applicable to this Indicator.

Standard Users should ensure recruitment fees or other labor costs (e.g., providing PPE) are not charged to workers. Additionally, Standard Users should ensure that personnel do not exceed the maximum number of working hours per day and consecutive working days, in accordance with relevant legislation and ILO Conventions.

Conformance Evidence Examples: The demonstration of commitment to respect principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which may be supported by evidence such as an employee handbook, which addresses relevant ILO Principles; and employee training on ILO Principles and general labor law as it pertains to their responsibilities.

**Indicator 11.2.3 Consistency with Farmland Tenant/ Lease Laws**: Demonstration of commitment to respect the rights of farmland tenants/lessees of leased lands with respect to the covenant of quiet enjoyment as determined by national and sub-national laws, statutes, and regulations.

Guidance: The covenant of quiet enjoyment means that a farmland tenant has the right to enjoy his or her leased farmland without "substantial interference" from the farmland owner. It ensures that farmland tenants benefit from the full use and enjoyment of their leased farmland. This Indicator only applies to Standard Users who lease land to farmland tenants. Conformance evidence of Indicators in Objective 13 may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of activities that demonstrates commitment to respect rights of farmland tenants of leased lands with respect to the covenant of quiet enjoyment as determined by national, state and/or local laws, statutes, and regulations, which may be supported by evidence such as leases or lease templates that include language addressing right to quiet enjoyment; confidential employee interviews; communications with tenants; and employee training on tenant oversight and lease management.

## Objective 12. Management Review and Continual Improvement

To promote continual improvement in the practice of sustainable agriculture by conducting management reviews and monitoring performance.

Background: Continual improvement is ongoing improvement of performance, products, services, or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements. It applies a quality assurance method (e.g., the plan-do-check-act cycle). It leads to an agricultural system that adapts to a changing environment, improves performance and revenue, and reduces impacts. Continual improvement of agricultural practice requires management reviews and performance monitoring.

**Performance Measure 12.1 Farm Review and Continual Improvement:** Standard Users shall establish a management review system to examine findings and progress in implementing the Leading Harvest Standard, improve resource-use efficiency of agricultural production, make appropriate improvements in programs, and inform their employees of changes.

**Indicator 12.1.1 Performance Review**: A system to review commitments, programs, procedures, and measures of progress; evaluate their effectiveness; and review progress toward achieving goals for employees, tenants, use of agricultural inputs, management of adverse and positive environmental impacts, and agricultural production, including greater resource-use efficiency.

Guidance: A performance review system can improve communication and working relationships and provide useful feedback about job and operational performance, ultimately leading to improved farm performance and long-term viability. It also helps farmers and farm managers select timely financial, social, and environmental objectives that reduce cost and increase revenue and efficiency. Conformance evidence from Indicators 1.2.1 (Adapting to Critical External Factors), 12.1.2 (Monitoring Performance), and 12.1.3 (Agricultural Innovation), and 12.1.4 (Annual Review and Improvement) may be applicable to this Indicator where it involves review of operations. If a Standard User had farmland tenants, then

Indicators 13.2.1 (Verifiable Monitoring System) and 13.2.2 (Improvement of the Verifiable Monitoring System) could contribute conformance evidence for this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of performance review system and how it: reviews commitments, operations, and progress; reviews progress toward achieving goals for employees, contractors, use of agricultural inputs, management of adverse and positive environmental impacts, and agricultural production, including greater resource-use efficiency; and evaluates effectiveness. This may be supported by evidence such as performance documents, communications, and confidential employee interviews,

**Indicator 12.1.2 Monitoring Performance**: A program for collecting, reviewing and reporting information to management regarding progress in achieving Leading Harvest Standard Objectives and Performance Measures.

Guidance: This Indicator focuses on the process of monitoring progress toward achieving the LH Standard. This helps prepare Standard Users for the assurance assessment process by a certification body. This also helps ensure that Standard Users apply an organized system, process, or set of activities that helps a Standard User monitor performance toward achieving LH Standard Objectives and Performance Measures. Performance Measure 4.1 (Integrated Pest Management) and Indicator 2.1.3 (Nutrient Management Program) include monitoring to improve performance regarding crop loss and use of agricultural inputs and so may provide conformance evidence to this Indicator. Over time, conformance evidence for Indicator 12.1.1 (Performance Review) may serve as a performance monitoring program, which may be applicable to this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of monitoring performance program for collecting, reviewing and reporting information to management regarding progress in achieving Leading Harvest Standard objectives and performance measures, which may be supported by evidence such as documents, SOPs, manuals, employee interviews, vendor invoices, and relevant farming metrics.

**Indicator 12.1.3 Agricultural Innovation**: A process for identifying and considering opportunities for achieving improved farming efficiency, deploying improved technologies, and using new markets for underutilized agricultural products, new crops and low-grade agricultural materials (e.g., bioenergy markets).

Guidance: Innovation entails improving business operations and processes to become more efficient and less impactful and increase product value, profitability, and financial viability. Farmers and farm managers who routinely apply a purposeful series of formal or informal practices to identify innovative opportunities will discover practices and technologies for improving farming efficiency and new markets. Indicator 12.2.1 (Support for Agricultural Research) addresses the research aspect of R&D whereas this Indicator addresses the development part of R&D and implementation.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a purposeful series of formal or informal practices or routines used to identify and consider opportunities for improving farming efficiency, applying improved technologies, and using new markets, which may be supported by evidence such as employee attendance records for professional meetings; internal review of new technology and market opportunities; and CAPEX project development documents.

**Indicator 12.1.4 Annual Review and Improvement**: An annual review of progress by management and determination of changes and improvements necessary to continually improve agricultural efficiency and farm conformance to the Leading Harvest Standard.

Guidance: Periodic reviews are a key step in continual improvement, improving agricultural efficiency, and achieving the objectives of the LH Standard. Two other Indicators may yield relevant conformance evidence: Indicator 13.2.1b (Verifiable Monitoring System) focuses on improving the tenant performance with respect to application of regional agriculture BMPs; Indicator 12.1.2 (Monitoring Performance Indicator) may provide information useful for annual reviews.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of an annual review of progress and the determination of changes to improve agricultural efficiency and conformance to the LH Standard, which may be supported by evidence such as annual reviews, business plan documents, and/or CAPEX evaluations.

**Performance Measure 12.2 Support for Sustainable Agriculture:** Standard Users shall individually and/or through cooperative efforts support science-based agricultural research programs or partnerships or other efforts by associations to improve soil health, agricultural productivity and sustainable agriculture.

**Indicator 12.2.1 Support for Agricultural Research**: Participation individually or collaboratively in agricultural research or other science-based programs that improve the knowledge and practice of sustainable agriculture.

Guidance: Support for agricultural research can help generate information that leads to improvements in agricultural technologies, practices, and efficiencies and reductions in adverse impacts. Farmers and farm managers who support agricultural research often find it useful for discovering improved practices, technologies, and other new business opportunities and for advancing sustainable agriculture. This Indicator addresses the research aspect of R&D whereas Indicator 12.1.3 (Agricultural Innovation) addresses the development part of R&D.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of individual or collaborative participation in agricultural research or other science-based programs that improve the knowledge and practice of sustainable agriculture, including test plots for crop trials or new practices, which may be supported by evidence of participation in: citizen science projects; demonstration days; research to address agricultural productivity, water quality, and community issues; and other research or science-based programs that improve the knowledge and practice of sustainable agriculture. Examples could include, but are not limited to, test plots for seed or crop trials or new practices; citizen science projects; demonstration days; research or partnerships to address agricultural productivity, water quality, community issues or similar topics that broaden the understanding of the benefits and impacts of sustainable agriculture.

## Objective 13. Tenant-Operated Operations

To promote the use of agricultural best management practices on tenant/leased farmland to broaden the practice of sustainable agriculture and to promote the efficient use of agricultural inputs and the management of adverse environmental impacts.

Background: **Objective 13 only applies to** Standard **Users with management responsibilities for leased farmland.** Farmland leasing is widespread with leased lands composing about 40 percent of U.S. farmland. Almost all farmland tenants also operate their own farmland. Most farmland tenants lease from landowners for longer than 3 years, though most operate using annual agreements. Long-term lease agreements allow farmland tenants to have greater interest in soil conservation and landowners to have greater interest in soil health and other long-term values. Leasing terms can foster application of sustainable agriculture practices by farmland tenants and create opportunities for landowners to influence farming practices by farmland tenant their lands.

Objective 13 and its Indicators are tested at the level of the management system first to determine whether the Standard User is in conformance with Objective 13 Indicators. Operations on tenant-operated lands can then be used to corroborate management system conformance, to determine whether tenant-operated farmlands is managed consistently with requirements in Objective 13: landowner goals for tenant-operated lands (e.g., Indicators 1.1.1 Farmland Stewardship Commitment and 13.1.3 Communicating Leased-Land Objectives) lease agreement requirements (e.g., Indicator 13.1.2 Farmland Tenant Agreements), farmland tenant written social responsibility commitment (e.g., Indicator 13.1.4 Farmland Tenant Social Responsibility Commitment), application of practices consistent with regional agricultural best management practices (e.g., Indicators 13.1.2 Farmland Tenant Agreements and 13.2.1 Verifiable Monitoring System) and LH Standard Principles and Objectives (e.g., Indicator 13.1.1 Leased-Land Program).

The activities of farmland tenants can contribute to the performance of the Standard User for Objectives 2 through 6 and Indicators 7.2.3, 7.3.1 and 9.4.1, but the Standard User is responsible for conformance to these Objectives, Performance Measures, and Indicators. Poor conformance with Objectives 2 to 6 and Indicators 7.2.3, 7.3.1, and 9.4.1 on tenant-operated lands would suggest a failure of appropriate influence and conformance by the management system of the landowner. Conformance issues are the responsibility of the landowner and may reflect their inability to exert influence on farmland tenants to achieve Objective 13.

**Performance Measure 13.1 Leased-Land Management:** Standard Users shall clearly define and implement strategies to ensure that tenant/lessee activities adhere to the principles of sustainable agriculture.

**Indicator 13.1.1 Leased-Land Program**: A program to help ensure that farmland management complies with the agricultural best management practices and the Principles and Objectives of the Leading Harvest Standard as determined by a Standard User and farmland tenant/lessee.

Guidance: This Indicator helps ensure that Standard Users apply an organized system or set of activities to help ensure management of farmland tenants conforms to the regional agricultural BMPs and the Principles and Objectives of the LH Standard. Conformance to regional agricultural BMPs is determined jointly by the Standard User and farmland tenants. Conformance evidence for other Indicators may be applicable to this Indicator: Indicators (13.1.2 Farmland Tenant Agreements), 13.1.3 (Communicating Leased-Land Objectives), 13.1.4 (Farmland Tenant Social Responsibility Commitment), 13.2.1 (Verifiable Monitoring System), and 13.2.2 (Improvement of the Verifiable Monitoring System).

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of an organized system or set of activities used to help ensure farmland management by tenants conforms to the regional agricultural BMPs and the Principles and Objectives of the LH Standard, which may be supported by evidence such as standard operating procedures (SOPs) for lease-land oversight, evaluation, and communication; communications with farmland tenants; and annual review materials shared with farmland tenants.

**Indicator 13.1.2 Farmland Lease Agreements**: Written agreements with farmland tenants/lessees demonstrating their commitment to applying agricultural practices consistent with agricultural best management practices.

Guidance: This indicator helps ensure that Standard Users clearly communicate their commitment to having farmland tenants apply agricultural practices consistent with regional agricultural BMPs and foster farmland tenant commitment. Written agreements can be included in the lease agreement or other types of agreements (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding, Letters of Intent, Memorandum of Agreement). Indicator 13.1.4 (Farmland Tenant Social Responsibility Commitment) is limited to fostering responsible operations, safe working environment, and legal compliance of farmland tenants whereas this Indicator is limited to fostering the farmland tenant application of agricultural practices consistent with regional agricultural BMPs.

Conformance Evidence Examples: Written agreements with farmland tenants demonstrating farmland tenant commitment to apply agricultural practices consistent with regional agricultural BMPs, which may be supported by evidence such as a description of how written agreements are communicated to farmland tenant oversight staff; and employee training regarding farmland tenant agreements including the Standard User's commitment to the application of agricultural practices consistent with regional agricultural BMPs.

**Indicator 13.1.3 Communicating Leased-Land Objectives**: A written statement clearly defining sustainable agriculture goals of the Standard User for leased farmland that is shared with farmland tenants/lessees and made available to appropriate stakeholders upon request.

Guidance: Clear communication with farmland tenants is essential to achieving mutual goals. This Indicator helps ensure that Standard Users communicate their sustainable agriculture goals for leased farmland to farmland tenants. Goals listed for Indicator 1.1.1 (Farmland Stewardship Commitment) should be consistent with goals listed for this Indicator.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A written statement clearly defining sustainable agriculture goals of the Standard User for leased farmland, which may be supported by evidence such as indication that a written statement has been shared with tenants (e.g., shared in meetings with prospective and existing farmland tenants or in routine communications to farmland tenants); farm manager training regarding sustainable agriculture goals of the Standard User for leased farmland; and SOPs for sharing sustainable agriculture goals of the Standard User for leased farmland with prospective or existing farmland tenants and stakeholders.

**Indicator 13.1.4 Tenant/Lessee Social Responsibility Commitment**: A written statement by farmland tenants/lessees demonstrating their commitment to operate safely and responsibly; provide a safe working environment; and comply with applicable country, state/provincial, and local laws, statutes, and regulations.

Guidance: This Indicator helps ensure that farmland tenants clearly communicate their commitment to operate safely and responsibly; provide a safe working

environment; and comply with applicable federal, state and local laws, statutes, and regulations. A written statement by farmland tenants can be included in the lease agreement or be a simple written statement. Indicator 13.1.2 (Farmland Tenant Agreements) intends to foster the application by farmland tenants of regional agricultural BMPs whereas this Indicator intends to foster safe and responsible operations, safe working environment, and legal compliance.

Conformance Evidence Examples: Written Social Responsibility Commitment statement by farmland tenants regarding safe and responsible operations, safe working environment, and legal compliance, which may be supported by evidence such as farm manager training for supporting farmland tenants and their preparation of a Social Responsibility Commitment statement; and educational materials for farmland tenants about Social Responsibility Commitment statement.

**Performance Measure 13.2 Leased-Land Monitoring:** Standard Users shall monitor agricultural practices used by tenants/lessees to ensure their consistency with agricultural best management practices.

**Indicator 13.2.1 Verifiable Monitoring System**: Use of a verifiable monitoring system with:

**Indicator 13.2.1a** A process for monitoring the agricultural practices used by tenants/lessees; and

Guidance: This part of the Indicator helps ensure that Standard Users apply a purposeful series of practices or routines (formal or informal) for monitoring the agricultural practices used by farmland tenants. The monitoring process can be simple and monitor the agricultural practices used by farmland tenants (see Objectives 2-6).

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a purposeful series of practices or routines (formal or informal) for monitoring the agricultural practices used by farmland tenants, which may be supported by evidence such as indications of leased-land visits, written monitoring SOPs, and monitoring forms and records.

**Indicator 13.2.1b** A process for evaluating application of agricultural practices by tenants/lessees and identifying and communicating areas where tenants/lessees can improve their performance and achieve greater consistency with the agricultural best management practices and the Principles and Objectives of the Leading Harvest Standard.

Guidance: This Indicator uses information from Indicator 13.2.1a to ensure that the Standard User actively influences the farmland tenant's practices. It prompts Standard Users to apply a purposeful series of practices or routines (formal or informal) (i.e., a process) to evaluate the agricultural practices of the farmland tenant and then identify and communicate areas of improvement to the farmland tenant. The key reference points for evaluating farmland tenant practices are regional agricultural BMPs and the Principles and Objectives of the LH Standard.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of a purposeful series of practices or routines (formal or informal) used for evaluating the agricultural practices of the farmland tenant, identifying and communicating areas of improvement to the farmland tenant, which may be supported by evidence such as annual performance reviews of farmland tenants; annual face-to-face meetings; communications with farmland tenants regarding performance; and annual or quarterly leased land review forms and records.

**Indicator 13.2.2 Improvement of the Verifiable Monitoring System**: A process for using information from the verifiable monitoring system to identify and demonstrate areas of performance improvement for the verifiable monitoring system.

Guidance: The purpose of this indicator is to ensure that Standard Users have a process to evaluate the verifiable monitoring system for tenant-operated farmland and identify areas of improvement. This could lead to improvements that make the system more effective or provide better tenant oversight. Updates to the verifiable monitoring system are a key part of continual improvement.

Conformance Evidence Examples: A description of the series of practices or routines (formal or informal) for using information from the verifiable monitoring system to identify areas of performance improvement for the verifiable monitoring system, which may be supported by evidence such as updates on using regional agricultural BMPs as an evaluation reference point; review of farmland tenant performance goals; communications describing periodic performance review of the verifiable monitoring system; and a description of changes in the verifiable monitoring system (e.g., data collection, monitoring standard operating procedures, and standardized monitoring forms).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