

Almond Growers Field Guidance

A short guide for Australian
almond growers using the
Leading Harvest Farmland
Management Standard



Leading Harvest is a not-for-profit that runs an independent, third-party audited sustainability certification for working farmland. The Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard (FMS) gives growers a credible way to demonstrate sustainable practices to buyers, processors, investors and the public.

The standard is outcome-based: it tells you what sustainable management needs to look like, but leaves you, as the grower, the flexibility to choose the practices that fit your farm's conditions. You demonstrate conformance through evidence of what you already do.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ALMOND GROWERS

This guidance has been specifically designed for almond growers in the field. It summarises key objectives in the Leading Harvest Almond Guidance, into the day-to-day management decisions that you make in the field, and provides examples of conformance evidence.

- You set the practices. The Indicators describe required outcomes, but you choose how to achieve them.
- You choose the conformance evidence. Records, plans, monitoring data and observations in the orchard. Anything that credibly shows the outcome is being met.
- Existing programs count. Participation in FreshCare, GLOBALG.A.P., Almond Hort360 and similar certification programs can be used as evidence where requirements overlap.



THE 13 OBJECTIVES IN THE ORCHARD

The examples below are illustrative, not a checklist. Pick the practices that fit your operation and use them as starting points for the evidence you bring to an audit.

OBJECTIVE	WHAT IT MEANS & WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE ON FARM
1. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE MANAGEMENT	Set direction for your orchard: a written stewardship commitment, sustainability goals, and a plan for adapting to external pressures like climate, water allocations, market shifts and regulation. What this could look like on farm: • A short written stewardship statement and 3-5 measurable goals (e.g., kernel yield per ML water, % orchard floor with cover). • An annual planning cycle that reviews seasonal results and external risks (e.g. climate, water, and market prices). • A succession or business continuity note kept with the management file.
2. SOIL HEALTH AND CONSERVATION	Maintain and build soil structure, fertility and biology across the orchard floor and inter-rows. Manage acidification, salinity, sodicity, compaction and erosion. What this could look like on farm: • Cover crops or permanent sward in inter-rows; mulched prunings spread under-tree. • Routine soil testing (chemical and biological) with results filed and trended over time. • Targeted lime, gypsum or compost applications informed by test results. • Controlled traffic on dedicated rows to limit compaction; ripping or aeration where needed.
3. WATER RESOURCES	Withdraw water in line with entitlements, irrigate efficiently to tree demand, and protect surface and groundwater quality from runoff, leaching and chemical drift. What this could look like on farm: • Pressure-compensating drip or micro-sprinklers are maintained on a scheduled service cycle. • Soil moisture probes, ET-based or deficit-irrigation scheduling, plus daily irrigation logs. • Vegetated buffers and grassed headlands between blocks and waterways or drains. • Backflow prevention on chemigation/fertigation lines; verified irrigation uniformity.
4. CROP PROTECTION	Use integrated pest and disease management (IPDM): scout, set thresholds, and choose the lowest-risk effective control. Store, apply and dispose of crop protectants safely. What this could look like on farm: • Weekly pest scouting through the season with records (carob moth, carpophilus beetle, mites, hull rot). • Records of disease monitoring • Mating disruption, beneficial insect support and selective products before broad-spectrum sprays. • Orchard hygiene e.g. mummy-nut removal, levelled orchard floor, sanitation between blocks. • Bunded, locked chemical shed, current SDS folder, calibrated sprayer with drift-reduction nozzles.
5. ENERGY, AIR QUALITY & CLIMATE	Reduce energy use and emissions, manage harvest and orchard dust, and prepare the operation for climate variability and severe weather (heat, frost, drought, storm). What this could look like on farm: • Variable-speed drive pumps, solar on sheds, pump and motor efficiency checks. • Dust-suppression practices at harvest (conditioner adjustments, slower ground speeds, sweep timing). • Frost fans, wind machines or sprinkler frost protection with documented operating thresholds. • A simple climate risk and severe-weather response plan in the management files.

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6. WASTE AND MATERIAL MANAGEMENT	Dispose of waste responsibly, recover resources from orchard by-products, and manage agricultural chemicals, fuels and containers safely. What this could look like on farm: • Hulls and shells returned for stockfeed, mulch, energy or co-product use rather than landfill. • Prunings mulched and incorporated rather than burned where feasible. • drumMUSTER participation and triple-rinsed container records. • Bunded fuel and oil storage with spill kits and disposal records for used oils and filters.
7. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY	Identify and protect species at risk, native habitats and ecologically important areas on and around the property; avoid further habitat conversion and deforestation. What this could look like on farm: • Mapped remnant vegetation, waterways, wetlands and known threatened species records (use state databases). • Pollinator support: managed-hive agreements, beekeeper liaison, flowering inter-row species. • Nest boxes, raptor perches and habitat corridors retained or planted along block edges. • Spray buffers and timing aligned with sensitive species and active bee hives.
8. PROTECTION OF SPECIAL SITES	Identify and appropriately manage culturally, historically, ecologically or scientifically significant sites within the operation. What this could look like on farm: • Property map flagging cultural heritage sites, scar trees, middens or registered sites. • Written engagement record with Traditional Owners or the local Aboriginal Land Council where relevant. • Operating procedures that exclude works (ripping, deep cultivation, new tracks) from flagged sites. • Staff induction includes a brief on special-site locations and rules.
9. LOCAL COMMUNITIES	Contribute economically, engage positively with neighbours and Traditional Owners, and protect public health and safety around the orchard. What this could look like on farm: • Local employment, local suppliers and on-time payment records, tax and rates paid. • Neighbour notification before spraying or harvest dust events, visible contact information at gates. • Community engagement: school visits, sponsorships, open-orchard days, complaints log on farm with resolutions. • Acknowledgement of Country and Reconciliation Action statement where appropriate.
10. PERSONNEL AND FARM LABOUR	Provide equal opportunity, a safe and respectful workplace, and ongoing training, including chemical handling, machinery, and seasonal labour management. What this could look like on farm: • Position descriptions, EEO and anti-discrimination policy, and grievance process. • Inductions for permanent and seasonal workers; ChemCert / spray operator licences current. • Toolbox talks, near-miss records and first aid kits checked on schedule. • Heat, fatigue and accommodation standards documented for harvest crews.
11. LEGAL AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE	Maintain current compliance with all applicable laws, permits and licences relevant to the operation. What this could look like on farm: • Register of licences: water entitlement, chemical user, biosecurity, workplace health and safety. • Records of inspections and any corrective actions closed out. • Insurance certificates of currency on file.

OBJECTIVE	WHAT IT MEANS & WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE ON FARM
12. MANAGEMENT REVIEW & CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT	Review performance against your goals at least annually and capture what you will improve next season. What this could look like on farm: • Annual management review meeting with notes for continuous improvement. • A running 'improvements' list with owners and target dates. • Updated goals or KPIs for the coming season filed against objectives.
13. TENANT-OPERATED OPERATIONS	Where land is leased to or from a tenant operator, ensure tenant practices meet program requirements. What this could look like on farm: • Lease or share-farm agreement that references Leading Harvest expectations. • Periodic joint walk-throughs and shared records (irrigation, chemical, soil tests). • Clear allocation of responsibility for compliance items between landowner and tenant.

GETTING STARTED IN THE ORCHARD

- Write down your stewardship commitment and a short list of sustainability goals for the operation (Objective 1).
- Map your high-value areas: waterways, native vegetation, heritage or culturally significant sites, neighbours and sensitive receptors (Objectives 7, 8, 9).
- Document what you already do: irrigation scheduling, nutrient and soil testing, IPM and pest scouting, chemical records, training logs, waste and container management (Objectives 2-6, 10).
- Plan a yearly management review to identify what is working, what needs improving, and what evidence you will gather next season (Objective 12).

