
Overview of the SRP Assurance Scheme v 2.0



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About the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP)

The Sustainable Rice Platform e.V. (SRP) is a global multi-stakeholder alliance comprising over 100 institutional members from public, private, research, civil society and the financial sector. Co-convened by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and private sector partners. SRP works with its members and partners to transform the global rice sector by improving smallholder livelihoods, reducing the social, environmental and climate footprint of rice production, and by offering the global rice market an assured supply of sustainably produced rice.

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Definition

Appeal: Request by the client to the CAB or by the CAB to SRP for reconsideration of their assessment or approval decision. Also, by a group member regarding their membership of a producer group.

Approval: The process of evaluation and approval of a CAB by SRP to carry out third-party assessment and verification activity.

Approved: Of a CAB, permitted by SRP to carry out third-party assessment and verification activity.

Assessment*: A systematic and careful process that results in a judgement of a producer, producer group or a CAB. As this term has wide application, the following specific types of assessment are defined:

Assurance*: Demonstrable evidence that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled.

Audit*: A systematic, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled.

Auditor*: Person who performs the audit.

Chain of Custody: The custodial sequence that occurs as ownership or control of the material supply is transferred from one custodian to another in the supply chain.

Claim*: A message used to set apart and promote a product, process, business or service with reference to one or more of the pillars of sustainability: social, economic and/or environmental.

Client*: The person or enterprise that is seeking assurance of a producer's or producer group's conformity with the requirements of a standard.

Compliance audit: An audit that is carried out by a party independent of the CAB that carried out a preceding audit, to assess the quality of that preceding audit.

Complaint*: Expression of dissatisfaction, other than appeal, by any person or organization to a standard/ scheme owner or CAB relating to their respective activities, where a response is expected.

Integrity audit: An audit carried out by SRP as part of oversight of assurance. These may be 'compliance' or 'witness' audits.

Internal Audit*: An internal, systematic, documented process, conducted on themselves by a producer, producer group or CAB, for obtaining relevant information and assessing objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled.

Internal Management System (IMS)*: The documented set of procedures and processes, as set out in the SRP IMS Standard that a producer group or producer with multiple farms/plots must implement to ensure it can achieve its specified requirements.

License and Registration Agreement (LRA): an agreement between SRP and approved CAB which outlines the terms and condition under which the SRP licenses certain rights and registers the CAB under the SRP Assurance Scheme.

Logos: Both SRP-Verified Label and SRP Organizational Logo.

'Label' refers to the SRP-Verified Label indicating the integrity of claims to sustainable best practices according to the SRP Standard, as verified through the SRP Assurance Scheme. The SRP-Verified Label symbolizes a seal of approval.

'Logo' refers to the SRP Organization Logo, used to uphold SRP's brand value and recognition and to ensure consistent application across all SRP programs, tools and communication materials.

Non-compliance* (synonym: non-conformity): An identified occurrence of non-conformance with one requirement of a standard, i.e. a missed threshold, identified as part of an assessment.

Oversight: The processes of ensuring that assurance is conducted efficiently and credibly. This includes reviewing audit reports, conducting integrity audits, reviewing and calibrating CAB performance, overseeing remediation of CAB NCs, and applying sanctions as necessary, as well as ensuring competence and qualifications of personnel.

Plot: A small production area within a farm.

Producer (synonym: farmer): The legally responsible individual or business in terms of practices, processes and sales of rice under the scope of verification.

Producer Group: formed by individuals or businesses, either as a legal entity or informally. If legally structured may be known as a 'Farmer Organization'. Such groups may include rice production communities, cooperatives, farmer organizations or millers with contract farmers.

Risk*: The chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives. It is measured in terms of a combination of the probability of an event and the severity of its consequences.

Verification Service Agreement (VSA): an agreement between approved CAB and the producer/ producer group or participating operator which outlines the terms and condition under which the CAB sublicenses certain rights and registers the producer/ producer group or participating operator under the SRP Assurance Scheme.

Verification: Issuance of a statement that fulfilment of specified compliance requirements has been demonstrated, following a process of third-party assessment.

Witness audit: An audit that is observed by a party independent of the CAB to assess the quality and integrity of the CAB's audit.

Background

The on-pack '**SRP-Verified**' Label and Assurance Scheme provide a system for supply chain actors to procure SRP-Verified rice and make sustainability claims for rice produced using proven, climate-smart sustainable best practices. Launched in September 2020, the system helps boost incomes for smallholder farmers and enhances their market access. Independent audits provide supply chain actors with a robust and credible framework to de-risk their supply chains, while the on-pack SRP-Verified Label empowers consumers to choose products that directly support efforts to boost farmer livelihoods while reducing the social and environmental impact of rice farming.

The Scheme is based on the [SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation](#), the world's first voluntary sustainability standard for rice. The Scheme provides a robust and credible framework to enable supply chain actors to de-risk their supply chains through audited evidence of compliance with the SRP Standard. It is underpinned by proven best practices as advocated by the International Rice Research Institute and provides a robust and transparent process to assess compliance.

This [SRP Assurance Scheme Version 2.0](#) defines rules for actors engaged in measuring compliance or demonstrating improvements, providing demonstrable evidence of compliance with the [SRP Standard and Performance Indicators](#) and the use of SRP trademarks (Claims, Logos or Label) upon achieving assurance. The SRP Assurance Scheme focuses on verification, is built on strong internal assessment and provides farm registration as a starting point to entering the SRP Assurance Scheme. The SRP Assurance Scheme encourages innovative landscape assessments, participatory schemes, individual producer assessments and producer group schemes using Internal Management Systems (IMS).

As a demand-side action, the Assurance Scheme targets the global rice trade as an essential complement to SRP's efforts to incentivize wide-scale farm-level adoption of climate-smart, sustainable best practice, and contribute to a transformation of the global rice sector and to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Figure 1: Features and Benefits of SRP Assurance Scheme

Features	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly overseen by SRP • Internal assessment and farm registration via a third-party CAB as a starting point • Focus on verification rather than certification • Stepwise approach to scoring, claims and label usage • Encourages use of producer group internal control mechanisms using an Internal Management System (IMS) Standard • Complemented by a Chain of Custody Policy and Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A robust, cost-effective and transparent path to sustainable procurement • Enables value chain actors to de-risk supply chains and make measurable contributions to corporate sustainability commitments • Empowers consumers to help small farmers and the environment by choosing SRP-Verified rice • Catalyzes a wide-scale shift to sustainable practices by small farmers, boosting incomes and contributing to UN Sustainable Development Goals

Key actors in the SRP Assurance Scheme

The SRP Assurance Scheme involves multiple actors with different roles and responsibilities, all of whom must be familiar with the details of the SRP Assurance Scheme, SRP Standards and Performance Indicators. The key actors and their roles are summarized below:

- 1) **SRP Secretariat.** Under the strategic oversight of the SRP Board, the SRP Secretariat is responsible for the following functions:
 - a) Overall management and improvement of the SRP Assurance Scheme, including information management and risk management procedures.
 - b) Set requirements for CAB application and approval.
 - c) Set requirements for maintenance (or loss) of CAB approval.
 - d) Specify oversight procedures and reporting requirements.
 - e) Set KPIs for CABs.
 - f) Award, maintain, suspend, withdraw or reinstate approval of CABs.
 - g) Maintain a register of approved CABs.
 - h) Oversee CABs, including review of audit reports, witness and compliance audits¹, review of CAB performance and assessment of CABs against KPIs, CAB calibration, overseeing remediation of non-conformities (NCs) by CAB and applying sanctions to non-compliant CABs.
 - i) Ensure competence and qualifications of oversight personnel, including initial training and ongoing professional development delivered by the SRP Capacity Development Manager.
 - j) Provide training to CAB auditors and other personnel as necessary.
 - k) Provide guidance and clarification to CABs as necessary.
- 2) **Conformity Assessment Body (CAB).** CABs approved by SRP are responsible for planning and carrying out audits, making verification decisions as well as verification, suspension and withdrawal decisions, providing reports and updating the SRP Data Platform accordingly. CABs are also responsible for maintenance and oversight of competence and impartiality of auditors as well as complaints and appeals management as set out in this document.
- 3) **Data Collector.** Person responsible for collecting registration and internal assessment data from producers, and for submitting such data to an approved CAB to validate and upload. A data collector may be a farm assurer, research institute, company, extension worker, project owner, group manager or miller.
- 4) **Farmer Organization (FO).** Legal entity responsible for commissioning and paying for SRP verification audits at its own cost without any sponsor organisation. To commission an audit directly, an FO must be a member of SRP and is subject to payment of annual SRP membership dues and farmer registration fees.
- 5) **Producer or Producer Group (PG).** An individual or group of farmers responsible for production of rice, who is eligible to apply for verification under the SRP Scheme. Within a Producer Group all members are required to sign an agreement to comply with the SRP Standard and Internal Management System (IMS). Producer groups can be legally

¹ In exceptional circumstances, for instance to ensure adequate language skills, SRP may contract witness or compliance audits to an external organisation. In such circumstances, SRP retains responsibility for ensuring the expertise and competence of all involved and that the processes they are required to follow are as set out in this document, in order to maintain the integrity of all aspects of the associated assurance.

formed or informally formed. If not legally constituted, PGs need to engage with a Sponsor Organization to commission a verification audit.

- 6) **Sponsor Organization.** An organization commissioning a CAB to conduct SRP verification audits of individual producers or producer groups. The sponsor organization:
- a) may be a private sector, not-for profit or other organization, including legally constituted producer groups;
 - b) must be a paid-up member of SRP;
 - c) is responsible for payment of verification audit and other fees as contracted with the CAB.

Assurance Scope

This SRP Assurance Scheme v 2.0 applies to all SRP assurance processes and activities from 1 January 2024, including preparation for such processes and activities. It supersedes and replaces Assurance Scheme v 1.3 which ceases to apply from the same date.

The terminology pertaining to assurance levels has been revised to ensure clarity and differentiate assurance (based on independent third-party audits) from internal or second-party assessment.

- **Internal assessment:** assessment of compliance with the SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation performed by peers, members of an IMS Team or an appointed external party (other than an approved CAB) on behalf of the producer.
- **Second-party assessment:** assessment activity performed by an entity or individual linked to the producer or producer group being assessed.
- **Third-party assessment:** assessment activity performed by an approved CAB that is independent of the producer or producer group being assessed.

The Assurance Scheme 2.0 focuses primarily on third-party assessment as a basis for claiming SRP Standard compliance. Internal assessment remains an important step towards third-party assessment, which will allow sustainability claims and on-pack label use. The rules, requirements and permitted claims under second-party assessment are covered by additional rules currently under development.

The following rules apply to internal assessment:

- a) Producers/producer groups may conduct an internal assessment by an individual or via peer-to-peer internal assessment without external verification/third-party verification.
- b) The internal assessment shall cover all elements of the SRP Standard, including the Internal Management System (IMS) Standard in the case of producer groups,
- c) Producers/producer groups completing an internal assessment without a subsequent third-party verification may not make any SRP claims or use the on-pack SRP-Verified label.

Producer/producer groups seeking to enter the SRP Assurance Scheme and make a SRP-related claim, including use the on-pack SRP-Verified label shall submit to a third-party assessment by engaging an approved SRP CAB, either directly or via a Sponsor Organization.

Verification follows a three-year cycle, during which all producers or producer groups are required to undergo two announced full on-site audits, and one unannounced full on-site audit.

An agreement between a producer or a producer group with an approved CAB should cover the three-year cycle comprising the following audits: 1) two scheduled on-site audits, 2) one unannounced on-site audit.

If a producer or producer group wishes to change the contracted CAB providing verification services at any time between two full on-site announced audits, they may only do so if there are no outstanding payments, and no open non-conformities. The producer or producer group must inform the new CAB of all relevant verification history, including the previous audit results within that cycle. The new CAB must complete the remaining steps in the producer's or producer group's three-year verification cycle.

Audit timing and frequency

Onsite audits must be conducted at a time when it is reasonably possible to assess compliance with all requirements of the SRP Standard, either via documentation, visually or through interviews.

At least one on-site audit should be conducted during harvest season, or prior to harvest when the rice is ready for harvest. In other words, either a scheduled on-site audit or the unannounced on-site audit should be at a time when an auditor can verify performance in the field.

The seasonality of rice production requires flexibility in audit timing, CABs may use an audit inspection window of 8 months around the 'annual' audit to enable all seasonal aspects to be verified. In other words, the second full audit in a three-year cycle must take between 8 and 16 months after the first full audit in the cycle, and the third full audit between 20 and 28 months after the first full audit in the cycle; although the minimum period between any two audits should not be less than six months or more than sixteen months.

Audit type

Two types of third-party audits are undertaken as part of the verification process: 1) scheduled on-site audits and 2) unannounced on-site audit.

All third-party on-site audits, announced or unannounced, shall be conducted using a SRP Checklist covering all elements of the SRP Standard. In the case of unannounced audits, the CAB may notify the producer or Producer Group ahead of the intended on-farm/plot visit. However, no more than 1 day's notice may be given before the planned audit date (or 2 days where exceptional logistical challenges can be cited).

In exceptional cases where for well-justified reasons it is impossible for the producer to accept the proposed date of the unannounced audit, the producer will receive one more chance to be informed of an unannounced audit. The producer shall receive written notification if the first proposed date has not been accepted and will be given another notification of a visit.

If the visit cannot take place for non-justifiable reasons, the CAB shall inform SRP, which may at its sole discretion revoke the rights of the producer or Producer Group to use SRP-Verified Label and/or Claims.

Additional rules for Producer Groups

The following additional rules apply to all Producer Groups and individual producers with multiple farms/plots.

In order to ensure compliance among its members, the Producer Group must establish an IMS to provide transparent oversight and ensure with confidence that all individual producers within the group meet the requirements of the SRP Standard. At the same time, the IMS plays a vital role in supporting learning for individual producers.

Self-assessment against the IMS Standard is required. The assessment process is designed to establish that the IMS implemented by the Producer Group, including internal assessments, is effective in meeting the requirements of the SRP Standard.

As part of the IMS Standard requirements, the IMS must have a functioning approval and sanction system in place to enable addition or removal of group members.

Potential new producer members shall undergo an internal assessment before being formally included in the Producer Group. The CAB must be informed by the Group so that added members can be registered in the SRP Data Platform using the 'Scope Change' function.

Sampling

Sampling rules for individual producers apply to third-party audits of a Producer Group and to any individual producer with multiple farms/plots. The basic sample size is the square root (rounded up) of the number of group members registered or of farms/plots. The sample size may be adjusted based on risk factors documented in the SRP Assurance Scheme 2.0.

Sample sizes may be increased, at the auditor's discretion e.g. visiting additional farmers in order to determine the extent of a potential non-conformity. In order to allow sampling size reduction, the minimum score in IMS audit shall be either 75% with no missed thresholds in the preceding audit, or if above 85% with no more than 1 missed threshold in the preceding audit.

Non-conformities and its consequences

A non-conformity is an identified occurrence of non-conformance with a single requirement under a standard, i.e. a missed threshold, identified as part of an assessment.

If the audit report reveals a non-conformity, the producer/Producer Group shall provide a Root Cause Analysis (RCA) and Corrective Action Plan (CAP) for each non-conformity and shall be assessed by CAB following the verification timeline.

With the exception of NCs for which evidence can only be validated in the next appropriate production season, the producer or Producer Group shall provide evidence of corrective actions as set out in the verification timeline.

For NCs for which evidence can only be validated in the next appropriate production season:

- a) If the NC relates to a mandatory compliance threshold, a verification statement cannot be issued until the NC is closed.
- b) If the NC relates to any other (non-mandatory) threshold, a verification statement can only be issued when the CAB has approved a RCA and CAP for all such NCs.
- c) If at the next seasonally-appropriate audit the CAB still cannot close a reported NC then a verification statement cannot be further issued. In other words, if evidence for implementation of the producer's or Producer Group's CAP is deemed insufficient, the verification cannot be carried forward for a further season.

The following table sets out the consequences of non-conformities for which evidence can only be validated in the next appropriate production season.

Consequences of NCs <i>for which evidence can only be assessed during the next appropriate season</i>		
Type of audit	Type of NC	
	For mandatory thresholds	For non-mandatory thresholds
Initial	No verification can be issued until positive subsequent audit outcome	No verification can be issued until positive subsequent audit outcome
Subsequent	Verification suspended. Verification can only be reinstated following positive subsequent audit outcome	Verification retained, but if CAP and evidence are not approved at next audit, verification will be suspended.

Scoring system and associated claims

The SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation allows for stepwise compliance to encourage and reward progress toward full compliance. All requirements have several possible levels of compliance. This allows for the Standard to be used both for assessment and as a directional improvement tool to promote farmer adoption. Different claims are available in recognition that improving farmer compliance takes time and can be a challenging process.

Details of the scoring system available in the SRP Standard document. The total score against the Standard is presented on a 0-100 scale.

In order to be able to make a SRP claim the producer or Producer Group needs to comply fully with the relevant provisions set out in the SRP Assurance Scheme as well as the SRP Brand Manual and Claims Guidelines.

SRP has set a minimum required score (33%) and a set of mandatory compliance levels (thresholds) that must be achieved to meet a claim of "*Working toward sustainable rice cultivation*". This set of mandatory thresholds relate to farmer health and food safety.

A claim of sustainable rice cultivation may only be made if all mandatory thresholds are met, and a minimum score of 90% is achieved.

For Producer Groups and individual producers with multiple farms/plots, the IMS Standard scoring also applies. The total score against the IMS Standard is presented on a 0-100 scale. A claim of 'sustainable rice cultivation' can only be made if all mandatory thresholds are met, and a minimum score of 90% is achieved for the SRP Standard and 75% for the IMS Standard.

Verification timeline, decisions and appeals

The CAB must have a clearly defined system in place for granting, suspension and withdrawal of verification services by the CAB for the scope of the SRP Standard.

Whenever a NC has been identified, the CAB must verify the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) via further on-farm/plot assessment or scrutiny of submitted documentation including updated procedures, records and photographs assessed by a technically competent member or group within the CAB.

All evidence of necessary improvement (passing all necessary thresholds) must be returned, completed and verified by the CAB, within the timescale defined in this document, before an SRP-Verified claim can be granted (see SRP Brand Manual & Claims Guidelines).

Each third-party assessment report must be reviewed by a CAB Reviewer prior to granting verification. This person shall take the final decision to grant the verification. The CAB Reviewer must not be the same person who carries out the audit. This review and decision process cannot be outsourced.

The CAB must inform the producer or producer group and enter the verification decision in the SRP Platform within the schedule defined below:

Responsibility	Action	Maximum calendar days	Maximum elapsed days after last day of audit
CAB Auditor	Produce draft audit report	21	21
CAB Reviewer	Review and approve before send to producer/ producer group	7	28
Producer/ producer group	Check and comment on any inaccuracies	7	35
If NO NCs in the audit report			
CAB	Finalise audit report, update SRP platform and send final report to SRP and producer/ producer group	7	42
If NCs in the audit report			
CAB	Finalise audit report, update SRP platform and send final report to producer/ producer group to build RCA and CAP	7	42
For immediately verifiable NCs in the audit report			
Producer/ producer group	Provide RCA and CAP	28	70
CAB Reviewer	Review and agree CAP	14	84
Producer/ producer group	Provide evidence of corrective action	21	105
CAB Reviewer	Review and approve evidence	14	119
CAB	Finalise audit report, update SRP platform and send final report to SRP and producer/ producer group	7	126
For only-seasonally-verifiable NCs in the audit report			
Producer/ producer group	Provide RCA and CAP	28	70
CAB Reviewer	Review and agree CAP	14	84
Producer/ producer group	Provide evidence of corrective action	At next audit will be reviewed during audit process	
CAB	Finalise audit report, update SRP platform and send final report to SRP and producer/ producer group	7	91

The CAB must establish a clearly defined and publicly available appeals procedure and ensure its clients are fully aware of the appeal process.

Any complaint or appeal against a CAB must follow the CAB's own complaints and appeals procedure.

In case the CAB does not respond adequately, the producer or producer group may elevate the complaint to SRP and follow SRP's appeals procedure.

Chain of Custody Policy and Standard v 2.3

The SRP Chain of Custody Standard is intended for use in conjunction with the SRP Standard and Assurance Scheme to enable market actors to make verifiable sustainability claims for rice produced using proven, climate-smart, sustainable best practices.

The Chain of Custody (CoC) Standard specifies requirements for all CoC-verified and applicant organizations with respect to sourcing, processing, labelling, and sale of rice-based products as 'SRP-Verified'.

All organizations in the supply chain – from farmer to the entity implementing final packaging of products carrying an SRP claim – are included in the scope of the SRP CoC verification system, which is managed by an SRP-approved CoC CAB. CoC verification shall cover all relevant activities conducted by the certified Participating Operator (including purchasing, processing, storage, marking, record-keeping) to uphold the credibility of the SRP-Verified label.

The CoC Standard stipulates the requirements to ensure traceability of SRP-Verified rice by implementing a CoC system under one of three models: Identity Preservation (IP), Segregation System (Seg) or Mass Balance (MB).

Participating Operators implementing the Mass Balance CoC model need to comply with additional requirements specific to the Mass Balance model as set out in Annex 3 of the SRP CoC Policy and Standard.

Assurance for the SRP Chain of Custody System is addressed separately in the SRP Chain of Custody Policy and Standard² document. Assurance system does not stipulate in SRP CoC Policy and Standard v 2.3, such as oversight of assurance, will follow the SRP Assurance Scheme v 2.0. This means that the oversight program to be implemented will also cover the SRP CoC system.

Conformity Assessment Body Registration Process

New CABs

Only approved CABs that have entered a legal contract with SRP are eligible to conduct third-party assessments and must pass an application process to secure formal approval. The application process requires the CAB joins SRP as a member. The CAB may then download the [CAB Application Form](#) and apply for SRP authorization to conduct SRP verification audits.

The CAB shall submit the completed [CAB Application Form](#) to the SRP Secretariat for registration and evaluation. An evaluation fee applies (for details see [SRP-Assurance-Scheme-v-2.0-Fee-Structure.pdf \(sustainableice.org\)](#)). If necessary, the SRP Secretariat may request additional information and schedule a call to clarify any outstanding queries.

Once the CAB completes the registration and evaluation process, CAB shall pay the annual license fee and auditor(s) registration fees, and then sign the SRP License and Registration Agreement (SRP-LRA).

² Latest version available for download at [Resources - SRP \(sustainableice.org\)](#)

Registered CABs

CABs currently registered under Assurance Scheme version 1.3 are required to re-register and are subject to the evaluation process, but the respective fees are waived for these current CABs. However, CABs shall pay all outstanding invoices payable to the current SRP Assurance Service Provider.

CABs shall proceed with the registration by completing the [CAB Application Form](#). The registration process should be ahead of the next verification audit that takes place in January 2024. Once completed, CABs should immediately sign the SRP-LRA and renew their agreements with all clients before 31 December 2023 using the SRP Verification Service Agreement (SRP-VSA).

On completion of the above administrative processes, CABs may proceed to perform SRP verification audits in accordance with the Assurance Scheme 2.0.