Field to Market Standard Operating Procedure for Approval and Integration of New Crops into the Supply Chain Sustainability Program

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Introduction

Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture is a multi-stakeholder, member-governed organization focused on the environmental sustainability of commodity crop production in the United States. The Supply Chain Sustainability Program and its program elements, including the Fieldprint Platform (metrics, benchmarks), Fieldprint Project reporting, and the Verification Claims protocols, have been designed for crops with complex supply chains. The program at every step is designed to facilitate connections between brands and retail companies through their supply chain all the way back to the field level in order to understand sustainability challenges and to work in collaboration with growers and other partners towards continuous improvement. At the same time, the program must meet the needs of farmers for an open and accessible, scientifically robust set of environmental metrics that can be used to measure performance; receive feedback and guidance to facilitate continuous improvement; and report outcomes to their customers. This document describes the protocols and steps followed when incorporating additional crops into the program.

Incorporating additional crops into the Supply Chain Sustainability Program requires governance approval, technical work, and collaboration with grower communities. In order to serve the needs of all member organizations, new crops are implemented with the support and collaboration of relevant grower organizations and with feedback from both scientific experts and farmers. The process of adding a new crop is led by Field to Market staff and contractors with oversight from the Board of Directors.

New Crop Requests

Any Field to Market member can request additional crops be added to the program. This request should be made to the Board of Directors through the appropriate sector representatives and coordinated by the Science and Research Director. The Board will evaluate the request against the following criteria:

a.) importance to membership;
b.) support from relevant grower and commodity organizations;
c.) available funding for integration into the program;
d.) and place in the overall landscape of sustainability programs.

Staff will assist in gathering relevant information and producing budget and timeline estimates for the Board to help inform new crop approval decisions.

New Crop Integration

Once approved by the Board, the new crop will be designated for inclusion in the next version of the National Indicators Report and for implementation within the Fieldprint Platform. Member organizations are welcome to contribute to this development by providing technical or financial support, and through collaboration on the testing phase.

The development process includes six main steps described below[1]:

STEP 1: Evaluation of production practices and necessary modifications to benchmarks, metric calculations and data entries.

New crops may have differences in management that must be considered in the scope of the metrics and benchmarks. This will be determined in consultation with the member requesting the crop; university, government, and industry experts; and the relevant grower organization. In addition, staff will work with technology partners to ensure appropriate representation of the crop in any relevant NRCS models that are utilized within the Fieldprint Platform.

STEP 2: Development of benchmarks for the crop.

Benchmarks will be developed by staff and contractors and account for any special circumstances identified in Step 1. Benchmark development will follow the latest revisions and methodology as described in the Benchmark Documentation available on the Member Portal and Benchmark Database website. Benchmarks will be developed in consultation with the member requesting the crop, university, government, and industry experts, as well as the relevant grower organization and will be peer-reviewed.

STEP 3: Integration of the crop into the code base of the Fieldprint Platform.

Staff will work with Fieldprint Platform development contractors to make any necessary modifications to metric scope; additional data requirements for metric calculation; and appropriate representation of the new crop in any NRCS models used in metric calculation. Developers will make the necessary adjustments to the metric calculation code; API services; online web interface; and results reporting documents and graphics (including benchmark scaling factors).

STEP 4: Pilot testing of the crop in the Fieldprint Platform and iteration with a pilot testing team.

Following initial incorporation into the Platform, staff and Platform developers will convene a small group of users (growers, Fieldprint Project Administrators, and others as appropriate) to test the new crop. The group will be asked to participate in webinars, test the online web interface and/or an API partner interface, and report their experience on data entry; general user experience; results presentation; and utility of the results. Additional testing will be done with all qualified data management partners to ensure accurate functionality of the API integration of the new crop.

STEP 5: Incorporation of the new crop into relevant Project Registration forms; Verification Claims forms and trainings; continuous improvement guidelines; and educational resources.

In parallel with pilot testing of the new crop technical elements, Field to Market staff will update reporting forms, calculation guides, trainings, and any educational materials as necessary to fully

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[1] Specific metric calculations, NRCS models, and benchmark methods will continue to evolve over time; therefore, exact calculation guides are not included in this document.

represent the new crop. Relevant standing committees and other experts may be requested to participate and assist in updating these materials.

STEP 6: Full deployment into the Supply Chain Sustainability Program.

Following successful pilot testing and incorporation of any relevant adjustments, the new crop will be deployed in a commercial setting to the Fieldprint Platform, including the online interface and all qualified data management partners, simultaneously. The benchmarks will also be deployed through the Benchmarks Database website. All relevant project administration, claims, calculation guides and educational resources will be deployed through the Field to Market Member Portal.

TIMELINE: The timeline for incorporating a new crop after it has been approved by Field to Market's Board of Directors will vary significantly. In general, we anticipate a timeline of no less than six months for new crop integration, after Board approval. Staff will provide the Board with a detailed estimate of time required at the time of consideration of any new crop requests.

Conclusion

Once approved and integrated, it will be the responsibility of Field to Market staff and standing committees to ensure modifications to metrics, benchmarks, claims and other program elements can be appropriately adopted by all crops. The new crop will also be included in the next version of the Field to Market National Indicators Report

This process will ensure the uniform application of metrics and benchmarks for a given crop, such that a grower will receive identical results from any interface into the Platform, whether it be through a qualified data management partner or through the online web interface. Organizations wishing to make measurement or impact claims can therefore be assured that any data entered into the program, regardless of data collection tool, has been processed through the metrics in a consistent fashion. Data aggregation and trends analysis will therefore be robust, replicable, and verifiable, ensuring continued compliance with ISEAL protocols.