



FIELD TO MARKET CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACCELERATOR PROJECT ASSURANCE PRINCIPLES

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VERSION HISTORY

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Background

The Field to Market Continuous Improvement Accelerator Process-Based Standard sets out the Principles & Requirements that are applicable to all Field to Market Continuous Improvement Projects. It also represents the requirements against which projects can pursue sustainability claims and verification, if desired. Field to Market prioritizes transparency in the level of verification of reports that appear on the Field to Market Project Directory instead of forcing Projects to use third-party verification across the board. Transparency allows Projects the flexibility to determine the level of investment that they want to commit to the verification of their project results. The chosen level of verification will be indicated by a badge on the Project Results Page. **Note that the only circumstance where Field to Market requires third-party verification is when projects seek an Impact Claim.** See the Impact Claim Verification Protocol for more information.

What is the scope of verification of compliance with the Continuous Improvement Accelerator Process-Based Standard?

Field to Market Staff is responsible for reviewing Project Registration data when it is submitted. This is an important step in determining that the project has met the registration requirements for the Continuous Improvement Accelerator Process-Based Standard for the desired project type. Beyond these initial steps, the desired level of verification of annual progress and results is determined by the Accelerator Project Sponsors where projects can choose between first-, second-, and third-party verification. The only circumstance where Field to Market explicitly requires third-party verification is when projects seek an Impact Claim.

First-, Second-, and Third-Party Verification for Projects

First-Party Verified

These are Projects where the assessment of progress is performed by the person or organization that is being assessed for progress. Examples include self- assessments, internal audits, or Project Growers entering data directly into the Fieldprint Platform without technical assistance. Numerous quality control mechanisms have been implemented within the Fieldprint Platform to support a high level of data accuracy, but there may still be some room for user error. Projects assume the risk that information is inaccurate. For Incubation Projects which are not required to utilize the Fieldprint Platform, Projects should ensure that they have implemented sound record keeping for growers, acres, and progress against objectives.

Second-Party Verified

These are Projects where the assessment of progress is performed by a contracted party which has a user interest in the outcome of the assessment. In this case there is more objectivity than first-party verification, but because there is a relationship between the party conducting the assessment and the party that the assessment is for, there is still the potential for a conflict of interest. In the context of

Field to Market this can be a contracted technical service provider, contracted Qualified Data Management Partner, NGO Project Administrator or other entity that is being contracted and paid by a Project Sponsor to manage a Project. The risk of inaccurate data collection is lower than first-party verification, but Projects should still be able to respond to external stakeholders regarding the quality assurance processes in place to ensure the accuracy of results reported on the Project Directory. For Incubation Projects which are not required to utilize the Fieldprint Platform, Projects should ensure that their contractors have implemented sound record keeping for growers, acres, and progress against objectives and can provide evidence of these processes if requested.

Third-Party Verified

These are Projects for which the assessment of progress is performed by an entity that is independent and free from conflicts of interest, having no vested interest in the outcome of the reported results. In the context of Field to Market this would include letters of audit findings issued by an independent party. Field to Market only requires third-party verification for Projects that file Impact Claims, but Projects may also opt for third-party verification to cover the risk associated with other types of claims. For Projects that are reporting against adoption objectives, third party verification can take different forms, ranging from having growers show USDA-NRCS practice certification, or other certificates or letters of completion, to designing an independent audit to verify adoption in the field. Projects choosing this status must be prepared to show documentation in the event of external stakeholder inquiries to support their “Third-Party Verified” status.

General Assurance Principles

When followed, the principles outlined below improve the accuracy of project reporting:

- Projects are managed utilizing a documented management system that accurately accounts for growers, acres, and actions taken to promote continuous improvement.
- Projects maintain records of grower participation and actions that are taken when working with growers. This record keeping assists with accuracy of reporting.
- Projects have considered the risks associated with the claims that they would like to make and are willing to be transparent with stakeholders regarding the Project management systems being utilized.
- Projects are transparent when utilizing sampling to increase the reach of their impact.
- Projects utilizing a third-party verifier keep records of the outcomes of the verification results.

What are the risks associated with the claims I want to make?

Many organizations undergo internal audits which may be conducted by staff, or by external second- or third-party auditors. Organizations may choose to include Field to Market Projects within the scope of

their internal audits as a safeguard for ensuring the accuracy of the information that is being collected and reported. It is also important to think through the types of claims that an organization would like to make about the Projects that they are investing in and decide what level of risk they are comfortable with assuming for those claims.

Participation Claims

These claims are related to the number of growers participating in a Project, and the number of acres associated with the project. For Projects that utilize the Fieldprint Platform, there is a reliable source of data that can support reported values that are registered in a project, and track changes over time when data is entered annually. For Incubation Projects which are not required to utilize the Fieldprint Platform, not having suitable alternative systems for tracking this information, or not being open to sharing methods used to track this information, could lead to criticism from stakeholders.

Adoption Claims

These claims are related to the number of growers who have adopted practices or technologies promoted by a Project. When Projects make these types of claims they are signaling that they have taken actions that have science-based evidence of enabling improvement. If projects do not have appropriate systems in place to track adoption, and do so incorrectly as a result, they could be criticized by stakeholders.

Impact Claims

Impact Claims, or statements of realized improvements in metric outcomes over time, are the highest form of claim. For this reason, Field to Market requires a third-party verification of the process utilized to collect, store and analyze the underlying data inputs and results. Any discrepancies or problems associated with the process would be identified before the Project publicizes the claim, avoiding potential accusations of greenwashing or misrepresentation of results.