

Leading Harvest Program Information

This document provides information for all potential applicants requesting certification to the Leading Harvest Farmland/Pasture and Livestock Program.

1. Initial and continuing certification activity

a. Application Process

If you wish to obtain certification to the Leading Harvest program, please submit the Leading Harvest Application Form to ACO. A Client Services or Certification team member will contact you for an initial discussion, to determine:

- Where your production units/facilities are located.
- If you are currently or have previously been certified by another certifying body and if certification has previously been suspended/withdrawn.
- Any other relevant information.
- Your preparedness for audit.

You are also required to enter into a Certification Agreement with ACO, which outlines your responsibilities and requirements as described in the Leading Harvest Land Management Program.

b. Fees

Applicable fees for certification can be found on the Leading Harvest Application Form.

c. Audit Cycle

The Leading Harvest program is defined by 3-year audit cycles. After a successful initial audit, a Certificate is issued with a 3-year expiry. Surveillance audits are required annually to ensure continued conformance to the program and a Recertification audit is required in the final year of the cycle.

d. Initial Audits

Initial audits are conducted in two parts:

Stage 1 – ‘Say what you do’ - conducted at the management headquarters/office. Stage 1 is used to determine your readiness for Stage 2 by reviewing documented information, site conditions, regulatory compliance, management system scope, and internal audit processes, while also planning Stage 2 in detail.

Stage 2 – ‘Do what you say’ - conducted on-farm to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of your management system, including compliance with standard requirements, performance monitoring, operational controls, internal audits, and management responsibilities.

There is no set period between Stage 1 and 2 audits.

An experienced auditor (or audit team, depending on the complexity of the audit) is assigned to perform both audits. The auditor will contact you to make arrangements for this audit including the timing, associated fees, and travel costs. They may also request further information about your operation as required.

e. Surveillance Audits

Annual surveillance audits are required to maintain certification to the Leading Harvest Program. Surveillance audits only require a Stage 2 component. Again, our office and the assigned auditor will contact you to make the necessary arrangements.

f. Recertification Audits

These occur after every two Surveillance audits. Recertification audits must occur before the certification expiry date and may require both Stage 1 and 2 audit components.

g. Addressing nonconformities

Major nonconformity – must be addressed within 30 days of post-audit review. Failure to address within this period may result in suspension and failure to rectify the suspension within 6 months of the audit will result in refusal/withdrawal of certification.

Minor nonconformity – must be addressed within 12 months of the audit. Implementation will be verified at the next audit.

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h. Granting Certification

Once an audit has been successfully completed, and the associated fees have been paid, your operation will be granted certification to the Leading Harvest Program. If you wish to display the Leading Harvest logo on your marketing material, you will be required to provide a copy of your Summary Audit report to Leading Harvest.

i. Refusing Certification

If an audit has not been completed successfully, your operation will not be granted certification to the Leading Harvest program.

j. Maintaining Certification.

To maintain certification to the Leading Harvest program you must:

- Successfully complete all surveillance and re-certification audits of your operation.
- Pay the applicable fees.
- Ensure that you abide by the requirements of the Leading Harvest Standard.

k. Expanding or reducing the scope of Certification

The scope of your certification can be reduced or expanded by written application to ACO.

l. Renewing Certification

Your certification is renewed tri-annually upon successful completion of the re-certification audit.

m. Suspension of Certification

Your certification may be suspended if:

- There is a breach of the Standard by your operation.
- There is a breach of the Certification Agreement
- Your account is in arrears i.e., non-payment of accounts.
- You do not proceed with the required onsite audit/s.

n. Withdrawing Certification

You can voluntarily withdraw from certification at any time upon written application to ACO.

2. Requirements of the Leading Harvest Standard

The requirement for Leading Harvest certification can be found at: [Our Standards - Leading Harvest](#).

3. Certified operator's requirements

As a certified operator you will be required to:

- Comply with all certification requirements.
- Make necessary arrangements for the conduct of audits, including examination of documentation and access to all processes, areas, records, and personnel during all audits.
- Make provisions for observers where required.
- Ensure that only approved logos are used when referring to your certification in communication of any kind.
- Ensure that any certification mark or logo is not applied to laboratory test, calibration or inspection reports or certificates.

4. Appeals procedure.

At all times, as a certified operator you have the right to appeal any certification decisions made by ACO Certification Ltd. Appeals must be submitted in writing to ACO within 30 days to info@aco.net.au.

An appeals committee will meet and deliberate on your appeal with all relevant documentation relating to the decision. The appeals committee will then deliberate and decide to sustain or deny the appeal and communicate this to relevant parties accordingly.

5. Complaints procedure

Should you have any concerns or complaints, please refer to ACO website at www.aco.net.au for details regarding submission of complaints to ACO.

6. Substitution of indicators

Any requests to substitute or modify indicators in the Leading Harvest Australia Farmland Management Standard must be based on a thorough analysis along with adequate justification. This request should be submitted to ACO in writing, who will then review the request and advise you of the outcome accordingly.