

INC CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

REGULATIONS & REQUIREMENTS



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1. INTRODUCTION

The **INC Certification Program** has been established to provide a unified framework for sustainable production within the nut and dried fruit industry. It delivers a standardized approach to sustainability across the supply chain, from growers to processors and manufacturers, and global trade specialists.

Based on existing certification systems, international guidelines, industry best practices, and input from global experts, the program defines standards tailored to three operator categories:

- Growers
- Processors and Manufacturers
- Global Trade Specialists

The program integrates world-class sustainability practices with quantifiable criteria to assess performance outcomes, and covers a wide range of products, including tree nuts, peanuts, and dried fruits.

Audits will be conducted by independent, authorized bodies. Companies that achieve certification will be entitled to use the official INC trademark.

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The content of this document is provided for informational purposes only and is not binding. The terms and conditions governing the relationship between the INC and the applicant are set out in the Certification Contract.

2. COMPANY ELIGIBILITY & CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

To be eligible for certification, companies must be members of the INC and involved in the cultivation, processing, manufacturing, trade or marketing of at least one nut or dried fruit. They must be directly involved in these processes, and not in providing indirect services (i.e. machinery companies, consultants, or advisors are not eligible).

The Program focuses on reducing the risks and impacts identified for three operator categories: 1. Growers, 2. Processors and Manufacturers, and 3. Global Trade Specialists. To this end, three sets of standards have been developed.

Certain criteria, particularly those related to compliance with national or international regulations, are designated as **mandatory**. For each category, a **minimum score** must be met to achieve certification, reflecting a balance across all audited categories. After the assessment, a final score is calculated and companies are classified into one of three levels. Companies seeking to be certified as Processors, Manufacturers and/or Global Trade Specialists are not required to source from certified Growers.

The audit is conducted by an independent auditing entity and may involve interviews, observation, and document review.

The applicant, the audited company, and the INC Member must be the same legal entity.

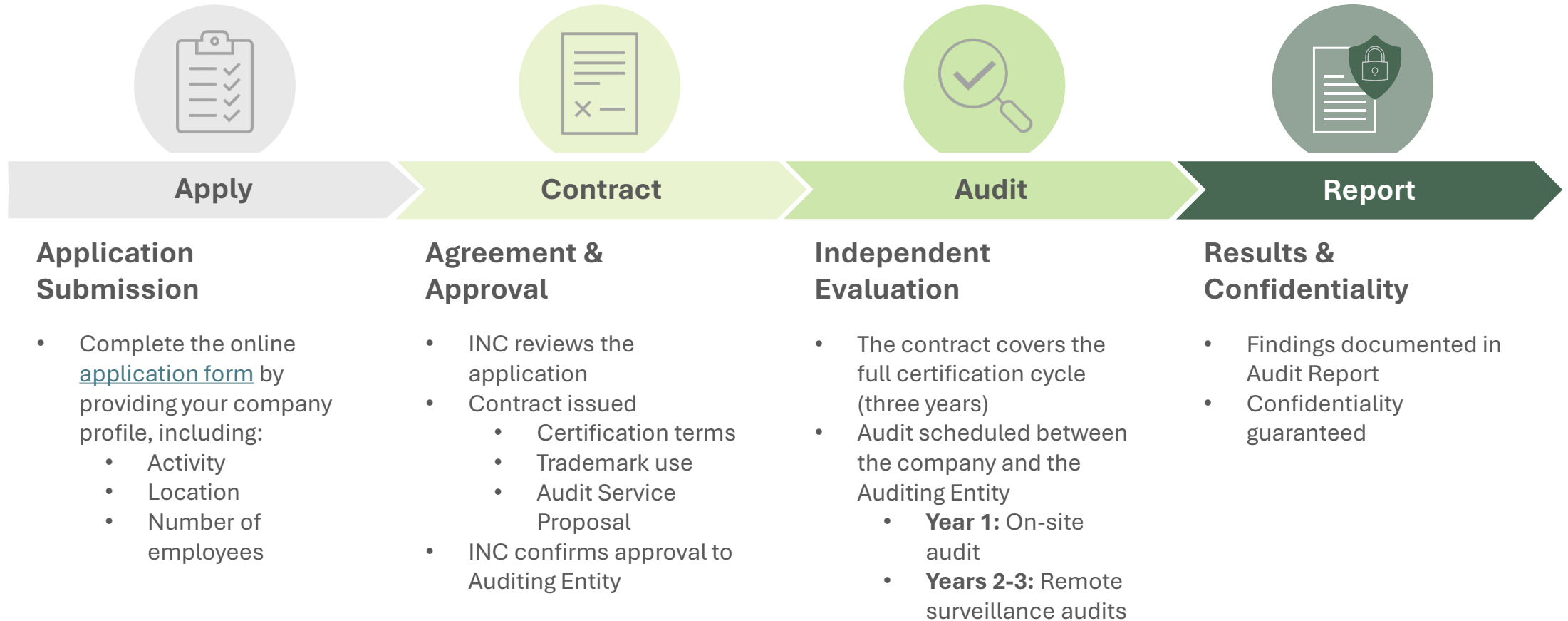
2. COMPANY ELIGIBILITY & CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

STANDARDS		
Growers	Processors & Manufacturers	Global Trade Specialists
Product-specific, three-tier standard tailored to the characteristics of each product’s cultivation system. This standard covers the following topics: soil management, water footprint, efficient irrigation, biodiversity, product carbon footprint, agricultural inputs, human and labor rights, workplace safety, and governance.	Three-tier standard applicable across processing and manufacturing operations. The topics covered are water management, biodiversity, industrial inputs, carbon footprint, waste management, human and labor rights, occupational safety, local communities, responsible sourcing, and governance.	Three-tier standard with a particular focus on governance and operational responsibility, and responsible sourcing. The topics covered are governance and strategy, business integrity, carbon footprint, procurement, responsible sourcing, compliance and ethics, human and labor rights, and environmental impact.

All documentation related to the standards is publicly available on the INC Sustainability Institute [website](#).

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.1. Application and Evaluation Process



3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.2. Audit and Certification Guidelines for Multi-Site, Multi-Activity, and Multi-Product Applicants

Multi-site companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Applicants with multiple farms or processing/manufacturing facilities (sites) shall be subject to inspection of a representative subset of productive sites only. Non-productive facilities (e.g., warehouses) are excluded.First certification cycle (3 years): $\sqrt{\text{Total sites}}$, rounded upSubsequent cycles:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Onsite: $0.8 \times \sqrt{\text{Total sites}}$, rounded upRemote: $0.6 \times \sqrt{\text{Total sites}}$, rounded upThe applicant's head office will always be audited.Audit report is delivered to INC within 15 business days. INC notifies the applicant of the certification decision within a further 15 business days.
Multi-product applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Growers seeking certification for two or more products will undergo a single audit incorporating the relevant product-specific criteria.
Multiple activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If a company seeks certification for more than one activity, whether as a grower, processor, manufacturer, and/or global trade specialist, it shall submit a separate application for each activity.Companies that carry out multiple activities (growing, processing, manufacturing, trading) are not required to seek certification for all of them.
Holdings & groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Certification applies only to the company engaged in the business operations related to nuts and/or dried fruits.

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.3. Certification Contract

The **Certification Contract** is a legally binding contract between the INC and the applicant that defines the certification rights and obligations, and the terms and conditions governing the use of the official INC trademark.

By signing the contract, the INC commits to granting certification upon successful completion of the audit. In return, the applicant agrees to undergo the audit process and to use the trademark strictly in accordance with the established conditions.

Purpose & Safeguards

- Ensure the consistent application of the *Regulations & Requirements*
- Protect intellectual property rights and trademark use
- Guarantee confidentiality
- Safeguard certification integrity
- Cover the full certification cycle

COMPANY COMMITMENTS

- Grant authorized auditors access to facilities
- Provide all relevant information & documents
- Accept the *Complaints & Appeals Procedure*
- Use the trademark as approved

INC COMMITMENTS

- Provide an Audit Service Proposal
- Maintain strict confidentiality of audit information
- Evaluate results and respond on time
- Grant access to official INC trademark
- Terminate the contract if the applicant engages in dishonest, misleading, or disreputable practices, or upon cessation of INC Membership

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.4. Certification Cycle and Sanctions

The INC Certification uses a **three-year certification cycle**. It begins with an on-site audit in the first year, followed by remote surveillance audits in the second and third years. As the owner of the Program, the INC holds the authority to grant certifications, modify their scope, suspend them, or withdraw them entirely.

Suspensions under these conditions may be temporary if the company implements corrective actions within a reasonable timeframe. However, repeated or unresolved violations may lead to permanent revocation of the certification.

The following conditions may result in **immediate suspension**:

- Misuse of the trademark/logo associated with the certification.
- Breach of the Certification Contract, including failure to meet basic requirements, submission of false information, or refusal to grant auditors access to facilities as scheduled.
- Non-compliance with standards, such as detection of violations of mandatory criteria.
- Failure to report significant operational changes that may impact audit results during the certification cycle.
- Regulatory non-compliance, including violations of national or international laws, involvement in fraudulent activities, or ethical violations.
- Interference in the audit process, for example, intimidation or coercion of audit personnel, or destruction/manipulation of relevant documents.
- Falsification or manipulation of documents or records, including traceability data, purchase records, or internal evaluations.
- Failure to pay the certification fee, which will result in suspension until the outstanding amount is settled.

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.5. Issuance of the Certificate

Upon finalization of the audit, the Auditing Entity will provide an Audit Report to the INC for its final evaluation. If the company is approved for certification, the INC will issue a digital certificate indicating the level achieved by the audited company. This certificate will include the company name, activity, issuance and expiration dates, auditing entity, and the score or level obtained.

If the applicant does not reach the overall minimum score, the company may take corrective actions and specific failed criteria may be re-evaluated within three months of the date of notification. Additional audit costs may be incurred.

Certificates will be issued with a validity of three years, subject to favorable outcomes of the two remote surveillance audits within the cycle. The list of certified companies can be found at the INC Sustainability Institute [website](#).

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.6. Trademark Use

The certified company may publicly display the certificate or use it for defined purposes. Along with the certificate, INC will provide a digital package with different versions of the certification logo. The logo may be used in the following ways:

- Packaging for B2B operations, excluding end-consumer products
- Marketing materials, both digital and printed
- Websites and social media platforms
- Internal and external communications, in both physical and digital formats
- Any other permitted use detailed in the Certification Contract

(insert logo here)

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.7. Auditing Entities

Auditing Entities are independent companies specializing in conformity assessment, with a strong reputation and expertise in evaluating agricultural and industrial standards. They must be explicitly authorized by the INC through a formal agreement. Auditors must demonstrate knowledge in the following areas.

	GROWERS	PROCESSORS, MANUFACTURERS, & TRADERS
Sustainability knowledge	Understanding of environmental, social, and economic sustainability principles relevant to agriculture.	Understanding of energy efficiency, waste reduction, carbon footprint, and responsible sourcing.
Labor rights and safety competence	Knowledge of labor rights and workplace safety standards within agricultural supply chains.	Knowledge of labor rights and workplace safety standards in industrial contexts.
Auditing skills	Experience conducting field audits and assessing compliance with sustainability criteria specific to agricultural operations.	Experience in factory audits, with a focus on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria, and the ability to evaluate sustainability management systems and traceability mechanisms.
Training and certification	Specialized training in sustainability auditing (e.g., ISO Lead Auditor for sustainability standards).	Formal training in sustainability auditing for industrial and manufacturing environments; certification as an auditor under recognized sustainability frameworks.
Independence and objectivity	No financial or personal ties to the farm(s) being audited; full commitment to impartial evaluation and reporting.	No conflicts of interest with the audited company; ability to deliver impartial and credible assessments.

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.8. Declaration of Impartiality, Independence, and Confidentiality

The INC reaffirms its commitment to impartiality, independence, and confidentiality in certifying sustainable practices within the production and trade of nuts and dried fruits. Audits are conducted by independent, authorized bodies, ensuring the certification process remains free of bias, influence, or preference. The participation of applicants or certified companies within the INC does not compromise objectivity, as strict measures are in place to separate governance and operational decisions from certification activities. Evaluations based on Audit Reports rely solely on defined standards and criteria, without consideration of financial, hierarchical, or relational aspects.

The INC also maintains a robust commitment to confidentiality. All sensitive, strategic, or proprietary information collected during the certification process will be securely managed and used solely in anonymized form to support the periodic review and improvement of the standards. Only aggregated and anonymized audit results may be shared in external communications to illustrate the industry-wide progress in sustainability practices.

3. CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE CERTIFICATION

3.9. Complaints and Appeals Procedure

This procedure establishes a clear and systematic process for receiving, reviewing, and resolving complaints and appeals related to certification decisions or activities, ensuring fairness, transparency, and timely resolution.

Any individual or organization may submit a complaint or appeal in writing to the INC via email. Submissions must include a detailed description of the matter, relevant dates, supporting evidence, the requested resolution, and contact details.

The INC will investigate by reviewing all relevant documents, communications, and procedures and, if necessary, interviewing the parties involved. Decisions will be based solely on evidence and in accordance with the applicable certification standards. A formal response, including the decision and its justification, will be provided within 60 calendar days of the initial submission (this period may be extended if additional information is required). If the claimant disagrees with the outcome, they may escalate the matter to an independent mediator within 10 business days of receiving the response. Details of the escalation process will be included in the decision notification.

All complaints and appeals will be treated as confidential, with access strictly limited to relevant personnel. Records of all complaints, appeals, and resolutions will be kept for a minimum of three years for audit and continuous improvement purposes.

4. DOCUMENT CONTROL PROCEDURE

This procedure establishes the method for managing all documents related to the INC Certification Program to ensure their consistency, traceability, and integrity throughout their entire lifecycle. It applies to all controlled documents within the certification framework, including Application Forms, Standards, Audit Reports, Certification Contracts, etc. The INC is the legal entity responsible for managing, retaining, and storing all documents, including those containing confidential or sensitive information.

Standards:

- All Standards follow the INC-approved template, including title, identification code, version, date, and approval record.
- Standards are publicly available in the INC Sustainability Institute website; however, weight and scoring of each criterion are only shared when a formal Application Form is submitted and accepted.
- Each document must include a revision history, and only the most recent versions are distributed to authorized personnel.
- Standards are reviewed at least every three years to incorporate technological advances, scientific findings, and legislative changes, ensuring they reflect best available sustainability practices.

Applications and Audit Reports:

- Applications Forms and Audit Reports are kept for a minimum of five years after becoming obsolete.

Certification Contracts and Audit Service Proposals:

- Certification Contracts and Audit Service Proposals are kept for a minimum of five years after becoming obsolete.

5. CONTACT

If you have any questions regarding these Regulations & Requirements, please don't hesitate to contact the INC at: sustainability@nutfruit.org