

PRINCIPLE 4:

Biodiversity conservation, effective environmental management and environmental services

Deforestation is a relevant cause of climate change and of the loss of natural habitats leading to biodiversity loss, and loss of ecosystem services. This Principle seeks to eradicate the clearing of high conservation values areas (HCV) for agriculture. Through implementing this Principle, businesses will protect ecosystems and adhere to governmental and international regulations.

4.1

Land use conversion and forest conservation

4.1.1

Levels I and III

CORE - For certification under this Standard, high conservation value areas (HCV 1 to 6 - please refer to the definition in Section III) must not have been cleared or converted into agricultural areas, or used for industrial or other commercial purposes, after 31 December 2008, in particular the following: a) natural forest; b) native grasslands; c) wetlands; d) swamps; e) peatlands; f) savannahs, g) steep slopes; h) floodplains; i) riparian vegetation.

Guidance: Satellite images and/or aerial photography shall be used to demonstrate compliance with this requirement. Satellite images used for the purpose of assessment of potential deforestation should have adequate resolution. Geolocation of the plot of land is necessary and geo-coordinates shall be provided for the areas under certification, if the commodity is exported to countries requiring such information. For plots of land larger than 4 hectares, the geographical location shall be provided using polygons, meaning sufficient latitude and longitude points to describe the perimeter of each plot of land, if the commodity is exported to countries requiring such information.

In the case of deforestation in disagreement with this indicator and that occurred between 1st January 2009 and 31 December 2020, an organisation must have taken effective action to restore the area and/or provide adequate compensation for the lost ecosystems and its values in order to be eventually certified. Prior to applying for certification, the organisation must submit to the ProTerra Secretariat detailed information on the actions taken and the results achieved. The ProTerra Foundation will evaluate the information provided and confirm or deny the organisation's eligibility to apply for ProTerra certification. Details of the ProTerra evaluation process can be found in the ProTerra Procedure for Compensation and Restoration.

Deforestation shall be avoided on the entire farm area and not just the area where agricultural activities take place.

In the case of smallholders that are part of the supply chain of industrial processors, the implementation of this indicator shall be supported by the processor.

This indicator is not to be used to justify or offset new deforestation. Rather, it addresses situations where restoration or compensation is necessary to remedy past deforestation contributing, in this way, to sustainable development and to the reintegration of organisations into a sustainable food and feed supply chain.

4.1.2

Levels I
and III

CORE - Certified organisations shall adhere to governmental regulations and international conventions that pose additional restrictions, including stricter cut-off dates, on the conversion of land for agricultural or other commercial purposes. No agricultural commodity produced or used by a certified organisation shall be produced on land that has been illegally converted.

Guidance: In the case of smallholders that are part of the supply chain of industrial processors, the implementation of this indicator shall be supported by the processor.

4.2

Maintenance and enrichment of biodiversity

4.2.1

Levels I
and III

CORE - Certified organisations shall identify, maintain and protect with the involvement of external experts, valuable biodiversity areas, riparian vegetation, vegetation around flood plains, steep slopes, hills and wetlands as well as maintain any legally preserved areas within their perimeter. If necessary, certified organisations shall restore such areas. A biodiversity management plan shall be prepared.

Guidance: If restoration is not possible or feasible, legally approved compensatory measures should be implemented.

The width or area of vegetation shall be sufficient to maintain and foster the continued survival of the natural biodiversity of the area and to prevent erosion. As far as possible large agricultural developments (industrial level) shall support and encourage the identification and maintenance of valuable biodiversity outside its farmed areas.

Not applicable to independently certified smallholders. In the case of smallholders that are part of the supply chain of industrial processors, the implementation of this indicator shall be supported by the processor.

4.2.2

Level I

CORE - Certified organisations shall protect rare, threatened or endangered wildlife species on their land and shall not gather, hunt or fish wild species or products from their natural habitat. Gathering, hunting and fishing shall only occur when permitted by law and shall be done in a manner that assures those species will continue to flourish in their natural habitat, as well as other species that normally depend on the gathered/hunted or fished species.

4.2.3

Level I

CORE - The introduction of invasive species and new pests shall be avoided, and past introductions (prior to first certification), shall be controlled and monitored. Any relevant pest outbreak shall be reported to the authorities.

Guidance: In the case of smallholders that are part of the supply chain of industrial processors, the implementation of this indicator shall be supported by the processor.

4.3

Social and environmental impact assessment and management plan

4.3.1

Levels I
and III

Certified organisations shall perform a comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of its activities to identify potentially harmful or damaging impacts and risks and establish a Management Plan to address these where necessary. Impacts and risks shall be reassessed in the case of expansions and relevance modification of activities. The Management Plan shall also include actions to maintain and maximise biodiversity within and surrounding the operation, which shall be monitored regularly and updated as necessary. External experts shall be involved. Certified organisations are required to make summaries of their management plans and ESIA publicly available on their website.

Guidance: The ESIA must be commensurate with the scale of the operation and infrastructure. It must take into account the sustainability of the environment, wildlife and endangered species, and the social impacts on the local population including indigenous people and traditional land users, where relevant. Guidance from government, academia or other recognised experts should be sought, as applicable, to complete the ESIA. Where existing, national regulations related to such assessment must be complied with. A definition of ESIA is provided under Terms and Definitions.

This indicator is not applicable to agricultural operations of smallholders independently certified. In the case of smallholders that are part of the supply chain of industrial processors, the implementation of this indicator shall be supported by the processor.

4.3.2

Levels I
and III

CORE - Farms shall maintain and safeguard native vegetation existing on their land, in order to protect and provide habitat for wild species. A map of the farm shall be available, showing the native vegetation as well as a plan to protect and restore native vegetation where necessary.

Guidance: In the case of smallholders that are part of the supply chain of industrial processors, the implementation of this indicator shall be supported by the processor.

PRINCIPLE 5: No use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

There is still a scientific debate about whether genetic engineering is harmless for animal and human health, as proponents of GMOs claim. However, the use of GMOs has led to changes in farming practices that have resulted in less crop diversity and to an increase in herbicide-resistant weeds, leading to increased use of pesticides, with all the associated side effects (pollution of aquifers, detrimental effects on workers' health, loss of micro-biodiversity). It has also increased costs for producers. Many consumers and producers are concerned about GMO ingredients and want to make informed choices about where their food comes from. This includes understanding the social and environmental footprint of their choices.

This Principle aims to ensure that GMOs are not present in certified organisations.

The applicability of this Principle is determined by assessing risks of GMO presence, contamination or use. The auditor should refer to Appendix A for risk assessment. If risk is non-existent this Principle is not applicable.

Organisations must also follow the ProTerra Guidance on GMO testing and sampling as part of this Principle.