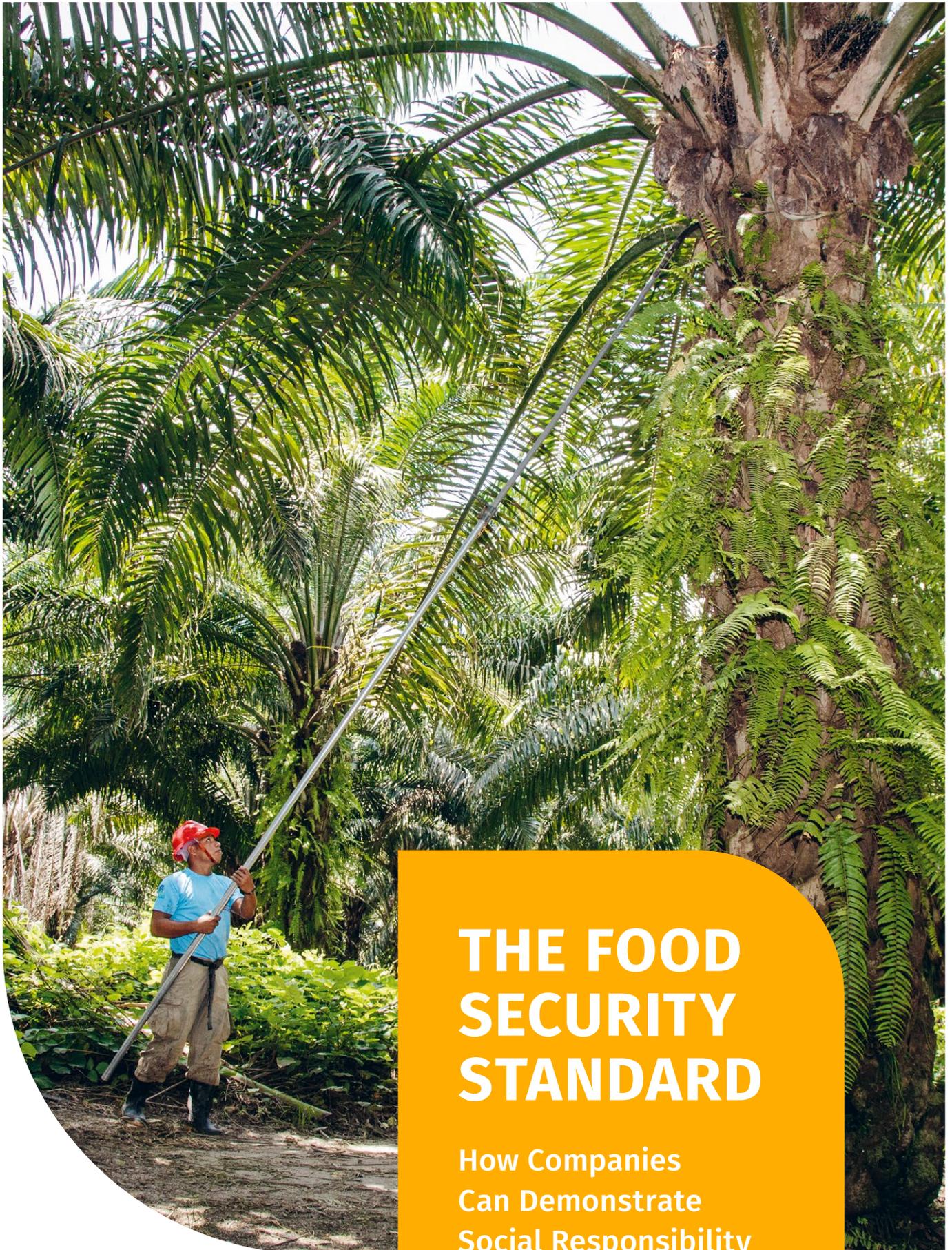




FSS
FOOD SECURITY
STANDARD

RESPECTING THE
HUMAN RIGHT TO FOOD



THE FOOD SECURITY STANDARD

How Companies
Can Demonstrate
Social Responsibility

Why do we need a Food Security Standard?

Food security is a human right. Hunger and malnutrition persist in many countries of the Global South producing agricultural commodities for global markets. The Food Security Standard helps companies involved in such agricultural production chains to fulfil their social responsibilities.

The right to adequate food is enshrined in article 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also included in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the UN Social Covenant for short) which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966.

In 2004, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) adopted the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security. These guidelines urge the member states of the United Nations to increase their efforts in the fight against hunger. Food security is also promoted by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015. These include SDG 2, which aims to “end hunger [and] achieve food security and improved nutrition”, and SDG 12, which calls on countries to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Civil society and the private sector are also urged to play their parts.

There are still some 800 million people going hungry throughout the world, and around two billion people are malnourished. The situation is getting even worse due to the effects of climate change as well as of disasters and conflicts. This makes it all the more urgent to fulfil the obligations set out in international agreements.

In numerous countries where the food and nutritional situations are serious or critical, agricultural commodities are being cultivated to supply the global market. Consumers and civil society are increasingly demanding that the supply chains for these products become fairer and more sustainable, and the worlds of politics and business are responding to such calls to an ever greater extent.

What is food security?

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”
FAO, 2004

Companies can use a variety of sustainability standards to demonstrate that their supply chains take social and environmental considerations into account. However, none of these standards adequately deals with the question of whether agricultural production by farming operations in the Global South is compatible with the human right to food owed to farm labourers, small-scale farmers, and people living in neighbouring communities. The Food Security Standard fills this gap: As a new component in existing sustainability standards and certification systems, it offers a way to thoroughly assess and verify compliance with the right to food.

“Many farm workers and small-scale farmers who grow food and agricultural goods for export to Europe are going hungry and their human rights are being violated. The FSS ensures the food security of farmers and workers while protecting nearby communities from the negative effects of export production.”

— Tina Beuchelt, Centre for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn

“Countries have a duty to fulfil human rights. For their part, companies have a responsibility not to violate human rights. FSS helps companies fulfil farmers’ and farm workers’ right to food and thereby practise social responsibility from the very first point in the supply chain.”

— Rafaël Schneider, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe

“Agricultural products are only sustainable if, alongside social and environmental considerations, the food security of those cultivating them are also ensured. Everyone involved in the supply chain must assume this responsibility.”

— Liliana Gamba, WWF Germany

The Food Security Standard in Detail

The Food Security Standard contains field-tested, quantifiable criteria that can be integrated into existing sustainability standards and are applicable in a wide variety of contexts, enabling local food security to be depicted in a comprehensive manner.

The Food Security Standard (FSS) is suitable for all agricultural products, covering food and feed items as well as biomass used for fuel, in cosmetics, or in the chemicals industry. It consists of five pillars, 17 principles, 35 criteria, and 93 indicators. This composition reflects the wide range of considerations that affect the right to adequate food. To ensure that people are always able to access sufficient food, factors like appropriate wages and acceptable working conditions are just as important as basic education, basic healthcare, and the rule of law. The same applies to access to safe water and to the sustainable use of natural resources.

As part of the FSS audit process, 35 criteria have to be verified through observation, documentation, and interviews with key stakeholders. For example, auditors ask employees of agricultural operations as well as farm workers and small-scale farmers: Do the workers/farmers have enough to eat all through the year? Are the wages appropriate, and are they paid on time? Do mothers have the opportunity to breastfeed during working hours? Is the water supply of neighbouring communities being protected? In addition, teachers, doctors, and healthcare workers, as well as representatives from authorities and non-governmental organisations active in the company's operating environment, are asked to share their assessments. Taken together, their answers provide a comprehensive account of the local food and living situation.

THE FIVE PILLARS AND 17 PRINCIPLES OF THE FSS

STABILITY

1. Apply good governance and respect the rule of law
2. Respect national food security and development strategies
3. Mitigate natural and human-made disaster risks

ACCESS

4. Ensure market access and contribute to local development
5. Safeguard long-term farm profitability and fair business conduct
6. Respect labour rights and ensure good working conditions
7. Provide training and capacity building
8. Offer social safety nets

AVAILABILITY

9. Respect land rights
10. Respect water rights and ensure that water quality and availability are maintained or improved
11. Implement sustainable agricultural practices

UTILIZATION

12. Provide a setting for the safe utilization of food
13. Guarantee good nutrition

CROSS CUTTING ELEMENTS

14. Provide complaint and grievance mechanisms
15. Respect women's rights and ensure gender equity
16. Raise awareness for nutrition and support child education
17. Assess and monitor local food security

“A practical tool to help fulfil the human right to food”

Dr. Eva Ursula Müller, director-general for Forest, Sustainability and Renewable Resources at the German Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture (BMEL).
BMEL provided financial support for the development of the Food Security Standard.



Dr. Müller, why does your ministry support the Food Security Standard?

We see sustainability standards and voluntary certification systems for agricultural products as practical tools to fulfil the human right to food and to reach Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Food security is also a key component in the German government’s bioeconomy strategy. However, I would like to underline that a private certification can in no way replace the obligation of a state to secure its citizens’ right to food. We know that sustainability certificates are particularly important for export crops like coffee, tea, cotton, and palm oil, but we also encourage national governments to integrate the criteria developed for such certificates into their own food policies.

Is it counterproductive to promote an industry that requires greater use of biomass when the goal is to achieve food security?

Not necessarily. It is a fact that the shift away from fossil fuels and towards a bio-based economy is causing international demand for agricultural commodities to rise. This can influence food security in biomass-producing countries, for example when agricultural production for export and food production for local consumption compete for scarce resources like land and water. However, there are also synergistic effects, as FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) has demonstrated in multiple countries. This includes cases in which low-demanding crops are permanently cultivated on erosion-prone or degraded soils, enabling those areas to remain arable and in use. To the extent necessary for ensuring food security, the bio-economy strategies of the EU and the German government prioritise the production of food over any type of biomass.

So is this where the Food Security Standard comes into play?

Yes, exactly. The EU has passed laws that set out environmental regulations for biomass production, particularly for biofuels. To prove that they are meeting these requirements, producers use certification systems that satisfy statutory sustainability standards, verifying compliance at the producer level. However, since these systems have so far focussed primarily on environmental issues, they need to be supplemented to address food security specifically.

What do you see as the Food Security Standard’s key strength?

We know that international standards and guidelines, such as the right to food or the FAO’s voluntary guidelines on tenure, are fairly abstract for companies and farmers to grasp. We therefore urgently need tools that help them to put these principles into practice and to check their implementation thoroughly. The Food Security Standard is one such tool.

Would a legal obligation not be better?

Most countries have ratified the human rights conventions and passed national legislation to comply with them. However, gaps remain in terms of practical implementation. By adopting the National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights (NAP), the German government has made it clear that German companies are also responsible for compliance with human rights within their supply chains. It expects companies to voluntarily exercise due care and diligence. In the NAP, the German government promises to consider taking further steps if implementation is inadequate, including through legislation and by expanding the circle of auditable companies.



Tested and Approved

Major sustainability initiatives and certification systems like the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), the Rainforest Alliance, ISCC, and Cotton made in Africa have tested how to integrate the Food Security Standard into their systems in different countries and in a variety of food insecurity situations. Agricultural producers and certification bodies have conducted pilot audits to evaluate the benefits of the standard and to assess how it can tie in with their regular working processes. In short, the standard has been fully tested and approved.

“FSS criteria are verifiable and practical.”

Michael Kitetu is a lead auditor and scheme manager for Starbucks C.A.F.É and COCOA Practices Verification Programs at AfriCert Limited in Kenya. He conducted FSS pilot audits of small-scale farmers in Zambia and Kenya, inspecting their compliance with the standards laid down by Cotton made in Africa and the Rainforest Alliance. The following report reflects his personal opinion.



“One thing that I like about the Food Security Standard is the objectivity with which it measures the availability of food to small-scale farmers. Many people in Europe are not aware of the living conditions of farmers in the countries where their food is produced. Take, for example, my homeland of Kenya. The food security situation there is categorised as serious, and the majority of farmers cannot produce enough nutritious food to meet their own needs. Lacking direct access to markets, they sell their goods to brokers, receiving only a fraction of the price their products fetch on the market. So I am strongly in favour of supply chains ensuring that the farmers have enough food — not just in sufficient quantities but also of a high quality.

From a technical standpoint, it is not hard to integrate the Food Security Standard into audits. It is important that this is done by someone who has experience in auditing combined processes, because the Food Security Standard is complementing an existing standard. Time is also a key factor. Evaluating all the FSS criteria requires more hours of work, raising the cost of certification.

When introducing any standard, gaining acceptance is a challenge. For example, one producer asked me: “So you want me to make sure that our employees and suppliers have enough to eat. That’s doable, but how is our business going to thrive?” His stance is understandable. The cost can present an obstacle to implementing the Food Security Standard, especially in situations of severe food insecurity. This makes it critical for us to familiarise national governments in food-insecure countries with the FSS so that they can develop and implement their national policies and food security strategies accordingly.

Producers who implement the Food Security Standard need a guarantee that they will be able to sell their products in the market at a higher price, given that their costs also rise. Fluctuating market prices can present a big problem. Trading companies and buyers in industrialised countries are also responsible for ensuring fair prices. In any case, it is good that the FSS criteria differentiate between the specific contexts of small-scale farmers and large operations.

From an auditing standpoint, the FSS criteria are designed to be verifiable and practical. In hunger-stricken regions, it is certainly not possible to implement everything overnight. In general, however, the difficulties would not outweigh the benefits of the standard because, in the long run, it helps producers, farmers, and farm labourers.”

AfriCert

AfriCert conducts audits for sustainability standards such as Global G.A.P, Rainforest Alliance, and UTZ Certified as well as verifications for Cotton made in Africa and Starbucks C.A.F.É. (Coffee And Farmer Equity) Practices. The organisation has 60 employees and is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Learn more at: www.africertlimited.co.ke

“A company can only be successful if its growth benefits local communities”

Lely Antelo Melgar is a member of the management team at the Bolivian sugar producer Aguaí, where she has responsibility for sustainability standards compliance. The company has implemented the Food Security Standard as part of its ISCC certification.



“Since Aguaí was founded, it has been our goal to conquer the most challenging markets. We wanted to offer products that meet the highest international standards. ISCC’s support in implementing sustainability measures helped us gain access to these markets. By participating in the pilot audit, we also got to know the everyday realities experienced by the people who cultivate and harvest sugarcane for us. This gave us the information we needed to make the best possible improvements.

There are several advantages being a company that operates sustainably and has certification. Firstly, from a business perspective, it has easier access to new markets; in our case, we would not have been able to serve certain international markets, especially in the alcohol sector, without our certification. Secondly, from a social perspective, it works together with local actors and communities to implement tried-and-trusted, environmentally friendly measures. Finally, from a personnel perspective, belonging to a company that is recognised as sustainable is gratifying for employees.

We began producing certified raw materials together with a group of producers who were up for the challenge of working in accordance with ISCC guidelines. By the way, their decision had nothing to do with the size of their operations or volume of output; it was about adopting good business practices that would reduce their costs in the long run.

At Aguaí, we have an agricultural division and a head office that provide year-round advice — on technical issues as well as on standards and regulations — to our sugarcane suppliers. We offer them training in new technologies, on improving cultivation techniques, on sustainable biomass production, and on best practices. We also work closely with the community and with local authorities, so that together we can come up with solutions — not only to meet challenges but also to promote neighbourly relationships and local development. We also want to develop ideas for public-private partnerships that can then be expanded to other parts of the country. We are convinced that fostering the growth of a company on its own is not enough. A company can only be successful in the long term if its growth benefits local communities and if it helps protect local natural resources.

Of course, the path to sustainability is littered with obstacles. The greatest obstacle might be in getting the message across that certification will actually benefit each participating company. If a company wants to implement the Food Security Standard, I would recommend that it starts by formulating clear goals. Only then can it begin implementing certification in a strategic manner to achieve associated commercial and social benefits in the short or long term, both for the company itself and for the region as a whole.

We expect both demand for products sourced from sustainably operating companies and corporate advocacy for food security to rise exponentially in Latin America, as it has in Europe.”

Aguaí

Aguaí is one of Bolivia’s six sugar factories. The company, founded in 2013, processes two million tonnes of sugarcane into sugar and alcohol every year. The sugar is primarily for the domestic market while the alcohol is for export. The company procures most of its raw material from large operations, but it is also supplied by small-scale farmers. The producers are bound together in a production cooperative, with several members holding shares in the factory as well. Around 75 percent of the sugarcane is certified as meeting International Sustainability & Carbon Certification (ISCC) criteria.

“If you take food security seriously, you need comprehensive certifications”

Dr. Jan Henke is the director of International Sustainability & Carbon Certification (ISCC). The Food Security Standard was tested by ISCC by conducting two certification audits under real-world conditions.



Dr. Henke, why did ISCC decide to include the Food Security Standard in its certification?

Food security is an important issue. To a certain extent, it has always been part of ISCC’s criteria. However, to my knowledge, no certification system has ever covered food security as comprehensively and as intricately as the FSS does. We are excited to have been part of its development from the very beginning and to have had the opportunity to test the FSS and implement it at ISCC.

What are the biggest differences compared with past ISCC certifications?

Social considerations such as basic labour standards or human rights are naturally already covered by existing standards. However, consultation with external actors and all the information collection related to food security undertaken in advance within a particular region or at a certain company — these activities were previously beyond the scope of certifications systems.

Does that not require enormous efforts from everyone involved?

If you take food security seriously, you have to take a comprehensive approach. The important thing right now is to generate demand on the corporate side as well. We need companies here in Germany that say: “When I buy agricultural products, I take food security into consideration”. On the other hand, we also need producers implementing such practices and suppliers offering their products to meet such demand. That is why it is now extremely important to raise awareness of the FSS.

What is your assessment of the level of corporate demand?

In the past, it was not possible to cover food security through certification so comprehensively. The criteria and indicators were only developed during the last couple of years, and the checklists and tools have just been completed. Now that the instrument is ready to be used, it is time to inform the companies and tell them, “Now it’s your turn”. Of course, they need to feel a sense of obligation for this to work, so NGOs have to keep applying pressure too. Political support is required as well, for example through laws governing supply chains...

Are you saying that you approve of the legislative approach?

Absolutely. We saw how it worked with biofuels: When a statutory obligation is imposed to implement such certification throughout the supply chain it gets done, because it is a prerequisite for companies to get access to the market. In the case of biofuels, price premiums were generated as well, making certification profitable for local producers too.

Coming back to FSS certification, what kinds of costs does it present to companies?

That varies from case to case and depends on the business environment. For example, in a food-insecure country with thousands of small-scale farmers, measures such as introducing a minimum wage would certainly present a challenge. For local companies, that would definitely require capital investment. When it comes to audits, the costs are manageable because the ISCC audit is only being extended to incorporate aspects of the FSS that it does not already cover. Even if the audit ends up taking one or two days longer, that should not be a hindrance to addressing such a crucial issue.

International Sustainability & Carbon Certification (ISCC)

International Sustainability & Carbon Certification (ISCC) is a multi-actor certification system that currently has 133 members drawn from the private sector and civil society. It deals with sustainability in the production of raw materials throughout the value chain. Areas of focus include: greenhouse gas reduction; the protection of air, soil, water, and biodiversity; and compliance with human, labour, and land rights. It also guarantees the traceability of raw materials.

ISCC is implemented by more than 30 certification bodies in over 100 countries. Since it was launched in 2014, more than 24,000 certificates have been awarded to over 3,800 entities.

Learn more at: www.iscc-system.org

The Food Security Standard ...

- helps protect the human right to adequate food;
- closes an existing gap in sustainability standards;
- helps companies fulfil their responsibilities with respect to food security;
- is applicable in a wide variety of contexts and to all agricultural products;
- contains field-tested and quantifiable criteria;
- can be integrated into existing sustainability standards; and
- has the support of respected certification systems.

Sustainability standards, certification systems and certification bodies that want to offer the Food Security Standard or integrate it into their existing set of criteria have access to a comprehensive manual, extensive training materials, and a variety of checklists and interview guidelines. These tools are tailored to the specific circumstances of small-scale farms, mid-sized operations, and plantations. They can also be used by companies to prepare for the implementation of FSS.

Feel free to get in touch!
We will be glad to advise you.
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IMPRINT

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