



THE FARMER-OWNED PROJECT

CERTIFIED FARMER-OWNED CERTIFICATION STANDARD

Version 3.4 / 2026 / Updated October 10, 2026

Owned and maintained by The Farmer-Owned Project, Inc. ("The Farmer-Owned Project").

FARMEROWNEDPROJECT.ORG/STANDARD

Our primary outcome is *making Farmer-Owned food the first choice for all* and enabling the shift of food dollars back to the people that produce it.

This Standard is the anchor of the Certified Farmer-Owned program. Every other document in the program refers back to it. It is written to be read by farmers and shoppers, not only by lawyers, and to apply anywhere in the world.

CONTENTS

	Terms and Definitions	6	What Applicants Submit
1	What This Standard Certifies	7	How Certification Decisions Are Made
2	How This Standard Works	8	Keeping Certification
3	Who Can Apply	9	Other Certifications
4	The Ownership Standard	10	Administration and Amendments
5	The Active Farmer		

Terms and Definitions

Active Farmer means a natural person who satisfies Section 5.1.

Agricultural Products means food, fiber, livestock, crops, or other products resulting from agricultural production, and goods made primarily therefrom, including processed foods, beverages, animal feed and pet food, live plants and seeds, natural fibers and textiles, dietary and nutritional supplements, and soaps, candles, and personal care products made primarily from agricultural materials.

Annual Attestation means a short yearly confirmation by a Certified Entity that there has been no Material Change to its ownership, control, or approved Brands, and that it continues to meet this Standard.

Appeals and Disputes Process means the published procedure, maintained by the Standards Council, under which an Applicant or Certified Entity may challenge a certification decision or an enforcement action.

Applicant means a Business applying for certification under this Standard.

Beneficial Owner means a natural person who holds Economic Ownership of a Business in their own right, directly or through any intermediate entity, trust, nominee, option, convertible instrument, or similar arrangement. A person does not become a Beneficial Owner by holding an office, title, employment, or management role.

Brand means a name, trademark, or other source identifier that a Business owns or controls and uses to market Agricultural Products.

Business means the legal entity whose ownership and control are evaluated under this Standard.

Certification means the formal confirmation, issued by the Certification Body, that a Business meets the Certified Farmer-Owned Standard. A Certification may be suspended or revoked under Section 8.

Certification and Mark License Agreement means the agreement between The Farmer-Owned Project and a Certified Entity granting authorization to use the Mark and setting the terms of that use.

Certified Entity means a Business that holds a current certification under this Standard.

Certification Body means the independent third party authorized by The Farmer-Owned Project to evaluate Applicants, make and issue certification decisions, and monitor Certified Entities.

Confidentiality and Data Handling Policy means the published policy governing how application materials and other confidential information are collected, held, shared, and retained.

Control means the present authority to direct the Material Decisions of a Business.

Controlling Ownership has the meaning stated in Section 4.

Cooperative means a business jointly owned and governed by its members. Whether a Cooperative qualifies is determined under Section 4.

Desk Audit means a structured review of an Applicant's submitted documentation against this Standard.

Economic Ownership means the right to receive distributions and residual value from a Business, calculated on a fully diluted and as-converted basis.

Family Member means an Active Farmer's spouse or domestic partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or a trust or estate established primarily for one or more such persons.

Majority Ownership has the meaning stated in Section 4.

Mark means the Certified Farmer-Owned certification mark and associated seal authorized by The Farmer-Owned Project.

Material Amendment means an amendment that the Standards Council designates as materially changing an eligibility requirement or the substance of the certification claim.

Material Change means a change that may affect eligibility, including a change in ownership, Voting Power, governance rights, Material Decisions, Brand ownership or control, or the identity or status of an Active Farmer.

Material Decisions means decisions concerning governing-body appointments, annual budgets, material financing, executive leadership, strategy, Brand ownership and licensing, material operations, mergers, sales, dissolutions, and amendments to governing documents.

Pathway means the labeled route by which a Business qualifies under Section 4, recorded on the certification record.

Producer Group means an association or group of farming operations that markets or represents its members' Agricultural Products, other than a Cooperative. Whether a Producer Group qualifies is determined under Section 4.

Program Guidance means published administrative guidance approved by the Standards Council to implement this Standard, and issued on an interim basis by The Farmer-Owned Project until the Standards Council is seated.

Qualifying Ownership Group means the Beneficial Owners whose ownership is counted together to satisfy the ownership requirement of Section 4. It comprises one or more Active Farmers and, where 5.4 applies, Family Members connected to the same farming operation. For a Cooperative or Producer Group, the Qualifying Ownership Group is its farmer-members.

Re-audit means a full re-verification of a Certified Entity's ownership and control, equivalent in scope to the initial review, conducted on the cycle stated in Section 8.

Spot Audit means an unscheduled review of a Certified Entity to confirm ongoing compliance.

Standard means this anchor document, The Certified Farmer-Owned Standard, that defines what the program certifies and who qualifies. All other documents refer back to it.

Standards Council means the farmer-majority body that approves the Program Guidance, resolves questions this Standard does not answer, and oversees consistent application of this Standard.

Trademark and Mark Usage Guide means the published guide governing the form, placement, and permitted use of the Mark.

Voting Power means the power to vote on or consent to the election of a governing body and Material Decisions, including power held through contractual or other governance rights.

01 What This Standard Certifies

Certified Farmer-Owned certifies one thing: the Business behind the Brand is verifiably owned and controlled by farmer(s).

It certifies the ownership and control of the Business behind the Brand. It does not certify the product itself. A farmer-owned Business may sell what it grows, what it does not grow, or both. What this means for a shopper: Certified Farmer-Owned means the business behind the product is owned and run by the farmers behind it. That is the whole of the claim.

This Standard does not certify any of the following:

- How the food is grown
- Where the food or its ingredients come from
- Ingredient provenance or the makeup of any product
- Animal welfare, environmental practice, food safety, organic status, nutritional quality, or government approval

Keeping the claim narrow is deliberate. It is what makes the Mark honest and clear to verify. We certify ownership as it is the part a shopper cannot check and no other seal reports. It decides who a business answers to and where its profits go.

02 How This Standard Works

2.1 The Farmer-Owned Project. The Farmer-Owned Project owns and maintains this Standard and the Mark. It is an independent nonprofit organization that sets and administers the Certified Farmer-Owned certification program.

2.2 The Standards Council. A Standards Council, with a farmer majority, approves the Program Guidance, resolves questions this Standard does not answer, and oversees consistent application of this Standard. The Council may clarify administrative requirements through the Program Guidance but may not change an eligibility requirement or the substance of the certification claim without amending this Standard. The Standards Council is a body established by and acting on behalf of The Farmer-Owned Project, which retains ultimate control over the Standard and the Mark.

2.3 The Certification Body. A third-party Certification Body reviews applications, verifies ownership and control, conducts audits, and makes certification decisions under written authority from The Farmer-Owned Project. The Certification Body issues certifications within that written authority. Until a Certification Body is appointed, The Farmer-Owned Project performs the functions of the Certification Body under this Standard. No sponsor, marketplace, retailer, or distributor may perform those functions.

2.4 Separation of Roles. These three bodies are deliberately separated so that no commercial interest can bend the Mark. The Standards Council, run by a farmer majority, holds the final word on what this Standard means, how it applies to a given business, and on appeals. The Certification Body operates independently, carrying out reviews and applying the published Standard to each Applicant. The Farmer-Owned Project owns the Mark and administers the program. No sponsor, marketplace, retailer, distributor, or other private interest may control certification decisions, appeals, suspensions, revocations, enforcement, or the meaning of the Mark.

2.5 Jurisdiction Neutrality. This Standard is jurisdiction-neutral and is intended to apply in any country, subject to applicable law. Where a specific national law, agency, or document is named anywhere in the program, it is offered as an example of acceptable evidence, never as a requirement. Applicants outside the United States may meet this Standard using equivalent documentation from their own jurisdictions. Questions concerning documentation or evidence are referred to the Standards Council and, where appropriate, addressed in the Program Guidance.

03 Who Can Apply

3.1 Eligibility. Any Business that sells Agricultural Products and satisfies the ownership and control requirements in Section 4 may apply. A Business qualifies whether it sells directly to shoppers, through retail or e-commerce, to food service or wholesale, or to other businesses, and whether it sells its Agricultural Products raw, live, minimally processed, or as value-added products.

3.2 Scope of the Mark. Certification attaches to the Farmer-Owned Business. Authorization to use the Mark is limited to the approved Brands identified in the Certified Entity's certification record upon acceptance of the Certification and Mark License Agreement. The Mark attaches to the Business and extends to the products it sells under those Brands as permitted by the Certification and Mark License and the Trademark and Mark Usage Guide. Certification does not attach to an ingredient or product as it moves down the supply chain. A Certified Farmer-Owned supplier does not pass any Mark rights to a buyer, Brand owner, private-label customer, or co-packer that uses its output. If that organization wants to carry the Mark, it must be separately certified in its own right.

3.3 Multiple Brands and Affiliated Entities. A Certified Entity may carry the Mark on any Brand it owns or controls that is identified in its certification record, including Brands operated under a trading name or DBA. Adding a Brand owned by the Certified Entity does not require a new certification or a new review of ownership; the Certified Entity reports the addition, the Certification Body confirms the relationship, and the Brand is added to the record.

Where a Brand is owned by a separate legal entity, that entity must satisfy this Standard in its own right. Where its ownership and control derive from a Certified Entity, the Certification Body may rely on the certified parent's existing evidence and verify only the ownership chain and any ownership or control that differs. The Program Guidance sets the method and the evidence required.

3.4 Eligible Entity Types. Eligible entity types include, in any jurisdiction:

- Sole proprietor or individual farmer
- Partnership
- Limited liability company or incorporated company
- Cooperative or Producer Group
- Any equivalent legal form recognized in the Applicant's jurisdiction

3.5 No Commercial Preconditions. The Farmer-Owned Project will certify any Business that meets this Standard, without regard to its commercial relationships, sales channels, or affiliations with any retailer, marketplace or distributor.

3.6 No Size Limits. There is no revenue cap and no minimum size. A single-family farm and a large Farmer-Owned company are equally eligible, provided each meets the ownership criteria in Section 4. The Standards Council may publish size-related guidance over time, but size itself is never a barrier to entry.

04 The Ownership Standard

This is the heart of the program. To be certified, a Business must be Farmer-Owned in substance. One or more Active Farmers must own and control the Business as set out below, and no non-farming person may hold the power to override them on its Material Decisions. Ownership is always required; a person who holds only a title or an operating role, with no ownership, does not qualify. Ownership and control are evaluated through every direct and indirect ownership layer, including parent companies, holding companies, trusts, nominees, options, convertible securities, preferred interests, contractual rights, and similar arrangements. Any of the paths below qualifies.

4.1 Path A, Majority Ownership. One or more Active Farmers hold more than 50% of both the Economic Ownership and the Voting Power of the Business. A voting majority carries control; the farmer-owners may engage managers or officers to run day-to-day operations without affecting qualification under this path.

4.2 Path B, Controlling Ownership. One or more Active Farmers Control the Business's Material Decisions while holding less than a majority of its Economic Ownership. Those Active Farmers must be Beneficial Owners holding a substantial stake, not less than the minimum published in the Program Guidance. Because less ownership backs it, control under this path is tested more strictly: no non-farming person may hold the unilateral authority to override the Active Farmers, and no non-farming person may hold a larger ownership stake coupled with override power. Control without Beneficial Ownership does not satisfy this path. The method for confirming the minimum stake is set in the Program Guidance.

4.3 Path C, Cooperative and Producer Group Ownership. A Cooperative or Producer Group qualifies where its voting membership is restricted to Active Farmers and to farming operations owned or controlled by Active Farmers, and those farmer-members hold controlling governance authority over the Cooperative, including the authority to elect its board, such that no non-farming person or bloc can override them. Economic Ownership held by farmer-members counts collectively and satisfies the ownership requirement of this Section. Routine changes in Cooperative membership are not a Material Change; a change in the Cooperative's governance, voting class, or control is. Independent directors elected or appointed by the farmer-members are permitted and do not affect qualification. The Certification Body confirms farmer control from the Cooperative's governing documents. Methods, including proportionate verification for large Cooperatives and the treatment of weighted or district-based voting, are set in the Program Guidance. In this Path and in Section 6, references to a Cooperative apply equally to a Producer Group.

4.4 Ownership and Control. Ownership and control must be established in substance, not paperwork. Outside investment in Farmer-Owned Businesses is realistic and permitted. What the Mark guarantees is that no non-farming investor, partner, parent company, lender, or other person holds the power to overrule the farmer-owners on the Material Decisions that define the Business, its representation, or its operations. Customary minority-investor protections do not defeat qualification unless they give a non-farming person affirmative control over ordinary-course operations, strategy, governance, or the Brand.

4.5 Application of Ownership Tests. The Standards Council may publish methods for calculating Economic Ownership and Voting Power across different entity types and governance structures. The Program Guidance may clarify the application of this Section but may not change its substance or permit

arrangements that defeat it. If form and substance conflict, the Standards Council applies the substance of the ownership and control arrangement.

05 The Active Farmer

5.1 Definition. An Active Farmer is a natural person who is actively farming: materially participating in the production of agricultural goods through hands-on farming work, day-to-day agricultural decision-making, or both, rather than holding a passive or purely financial connection to a farm. The person must have engaged in that activity during the preceding 12 months, except that the Certification Body may recognize a beginning farmer, a seasonal production cycle, a temporary disability or leave, or an orderly intergenerational transition under the Program Guidance.

5.2 Basis and Scope. This definition draws on the United States Department of Agriculture's concept of a farm operator, the person who runs the farm and makes the day-to-day management decisions, as that concept stands as of September 2026, used as a widely recognized starting point. It is then deliberately broadened so the test does not depend on jurisdiction, residency, farm size, land ownership, tax status, or the legal form of the farming operation. The United States definition is a reference, not a ceiling: an Applicant who does not meet the United States definition may still qualify under the legal definition of a farmer in the Applicant's own jurisdiction, consistent with the jurisdiction-neutral design of this Standard. Land ownership is not required; a farmer who actively farms leased or rented land qualifies. Off-farm income does not disqualify an Active Farmer.

5.3 Active Farmer Participation. At least one Beneficial Owner within the Qualifying Ownership Group must be an Active Farmer, as defined above. An Active Farmer must participate in a farming operation but need not own it. Methods for assessing material participation, including the treatment of an owner who files as a farmer on a passive basis, are set in the Program Guidance.

5.4 Family and Group Aggregation. Beneficial Ownership held by Family Members connected to the same farming operation counts collectively toward the ownership requirement, whether or not each individual owner independently satisfies the Active Farmer test, provided at least one Active Farmer within the Qualifying Ownership Group satisfies 5.3. Interests held outside the Qualifying Ownership Group do not count toward farmer ownership. A family farm does not lose its identity because ownership is shared across a household or across generations.

5.5 Acceptable Evidence. An Applicant may establish active farming with any one, or a combination, of the following. This list is illustrative, not exhaustive, and is not specific to any single country:

- Agricultural income documentation from the Applicant's jurisdiction. Examples: United States IRS Schedule F; United Kingdom HMRC self-assessment farming pages (SA103); Canada CRA T2042 Statement of Farming Activities; Australia primary-producer tax reporting; or the equivalent farm-income filing used elsewhere.

- Farm or holding registration. Examples: a government-issued farm or holding number, an agricultural business license, or an entry in a land or holding registry.
- Cooperative or Producer Group membership records that show active production.
- Evidence of land operated (owned or leased) together with evidence of active production, such as sales records, buyer contracts, or harvest and livestock records.
- Other documentation that reasonably establishes active farming, accepted at the Certification Body's discretion and consistent with the Program Guidance.

The Certification Body accepts and validates jurisdiction-appropriate equivalents.

06 What Applicants Submit

6.1 Required Submissions. An Applicant provides:

- Entity information and legal structure.
- Ownership and governance documentation establishing Majority Ownership, Controlling Ownership, or Cooperative and Producer Group Ownership, including each direct and indirect ownership layer, and identifying each Beneficial Owner. Examples include an ownership or capitalization summary, governing documents, voting agreements, investor-rights agreements, options, convertible securities, trust records, Cooperative bylaws, and member rolls.
- Active Farmer evidence as described in Section 5.5.
- A list of the Brands that will carry the Mark, identifying for each whether it is owned by the Applicant, operated as a trading name or DBA of the Applicant, or owned by a separate affiliated entity. Identifying the Brands sets the scope of Mark authorization and does not convert certification into a product, ingredient, sourcing, or food-safety audit.
- A signed Applicant Declaration confirming that the submission is complete and accurate, identifying all Material Changes under consideration, and accepting the audit, reporting, and Mark-use requirements of the program.

6.2 Cooperatives and Producer Groups. A Cooperative or Producer Group provides the documentation above at the level of the Cooperative, together with:

- Governing documents, including bylaws, articles, and membership agreements, showing the voting membership class and the authority of farmer-members to elect the governing body.
- Membership requirements and admission criteria showing who may hold voting membership, sufficient for the Certification Body to confirm the voting class under Section 4.
- A current membership roll.
- A description of the Cooperative's own systems for verifying and monitoring member eligibility and compliance.

A Cooperative is not required to submit evidence for each member farm. The Certification Body reviews the Cooperative's governance, bylaws, membership requirements, and internal controls, and may rely on the Cooperative's own verification systems rather than duplicating review at the member level. The Certification Body retains the right to validate those controls through record review, sampling, membership records, production records, or other supporting documentation. Methods, including proportionate verification, are set in the Program Guidance.

6.3 Confidentiality. Ownership and financial documents are handled under the program's Confidentiality and Data Handling Policy. The Certification Body owns collection and secure handling of confidential documentation; The Farmer-Owned Project does not take custody of it. The Applicant authorizes necessary sharing among The Farmer-Owned Project, the Certification Body, professional advisers, service providers, and government authorities where required by law or necessary to administer or enforce the program.

07 How Certification Decisions Are Made

The Certification Body conducts a Desk Audit. A decision falls into one of four outcomes:

- **Approved.** The entity meets this Standard and is certified.
- **Conditionally Approved.** The entity meets this Standard subject to a specific condition stated in the decision. The entity is not certified and may not use the Mark until the condition is satisfied and the Certification Body confirms Approval. If the condition is not satisfied within the period stated in the decision, the application is Denied.
- **Deferred.** The Certification Body cannot yet decide because information is missing, incomplete, or unclear. The decision states what is required and the period for providing it. If it is not provided within that period, the application closes and may be resubmitted.
- **Denied.** The entity does not meet this Standard.

The certification record notes the Pathway under which the entity qualified. Where ownership or control documentation is ambiguous, the Certification Body may request additional documents or a structured interview to supplement the written record. An Applicant who receives a Denial, a Conditional Approval, or a Deferral has the right to a written explanation and an appeal under the Appeals and Disputes Process. An appeal must be reviewed by a person who did not make the initial decision and has no material conflict of interest.

08 Keeping Certification

Certification runs on a three-year cycle: an initial audit, an Annual Attestation on the first and second anniversaries, and a full Re-audit on the third anniversary, which begins the cycle again.

8.1 Ongoing Requirements. A Certified Entity does each of the following:

- Completes an Annual Attestation on the first and second anniversaries of each certification cycle.
- Completes a full Re-audit on every third anniversary.
- Reports any Material Change within 60 days. Where the change could affect eligibility, the Certified Entity must report it before any further use of the Mark on newly produced packaging or marketing materials. A change of control triggers immediate re-verification.
- May be selected for a Spot Audit. Selection may be risk-based or random and may consider ownership complexity, prior conditions, complaints, unreported changes, or suspected misuse of the Mark. The Certification Body documents the basis and outcome of each Spot Audit.

8.2 Suspension and Revocation. The Farmer-Owned Project enforces this Standard and the terms on which the Mark is used. It may suspend (temporarily pause) or revoke (withdraw) certification and Mark authorization if a Certified Entity no longer meets this Standard, submits materially inaccurate information, fails to cooperate with an audit, fails to report a Material Change, or misuses the Mark. It may impose an immediate interim suspension where credible information indicates fraud, material consumer deception, unauthorized Mark use, or a material threat to the program's integrity. Except for an interim suspension, the Certified Entity receives written notice, a reasonable opportunity to respond, and any available corrective-action period. A Certified Entity may appeal a suspension or revocation under the Appeals and Disputes Process. When certification ends, the right to use the Mark ends. Digital uses must cease promptly, and existing inventory may be sold only during a written wind-down period authorized under the Certification and Mark License Agreement.

8.3 The Mark. The Trademark and Mark Usage Guide and the Certification and Mark License Agreement govern how the Mark looks, is used, and is enforced. Mark use is limited to approved Brands, packaging, and marketing materials and remains subject to applicable labeling law and required regulatory approval. A Certified Entity may not use the Mark or related language to imply certification of ingredients, sourcing, production methods, food safety, organic status, nutritional quality, environmental practices, animal welfare, or government approval.

09 Other Certifications

No other certification is required to qualify for Certified Farmer-Owned, and holding another certification does not, on its own, confer eligibility. An entity that already holds other certifications may have gathered documentation that makes its Certified Farmer-Owned submission simpler to complete. That is the only relationship. Certified Farmer-Owned stands on its own claim.

10 Administration and Amendments

10.1 Precedence. This Standard controls if it conflicts with the Program Guidance or an administrative procedure. The Certification and Mark License Agreement and Trademark and Mark Usage Guide control the form, placement, and permitted use of the Mark, but neither may expand the certification claim or eligibility criteria stated here.

10.2 Amendments. The Standards Council may amend this Standard after documenting the reason for the amendment and its expected effect on Applicants and Certified Entities. Each amendment must state its approval date, effective date, and transition period. The Farmer-Owned Project will give Certified Entities reasonable notice before a material amendment takes effect, except where immediate action is reasonably necessary to prevent deception, address legal requirements, or protect the integrity of the Mark.

10.3 Version Transition. Certification under an earlier version does not create a permanent right to that version. A Certified Entity continues under the version in effect at its last Desk Audit or Re-audit until its next Re-audit, unless the amendment states otherwise. Each amendment states whether it applies at the next Annual Attestation, at the next Re-audit, or on a stated date. A Material Amendment applies at the Certified Entity's next Annual Attestation or Re-audit, whichever comes first, and the Standards Council may direct that the next Annual Attestation be conducted as a Re-audit so that each Certified Entity is verified against the amended Standard within twelve months of its effective date.

10.4 Public Record. The Farmer-Owned Project maintains a public record of the current Standard, Program Guidance, effective dates, and certification status of each Certified Entity. Confidential application materials are not included in the public record.

Owned and maintained by The Farmer-Owned Project. Version 3.4, 2026.