



1 DECEMBER 2024

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SFA ANIMAL FIBRE STANDARD



SFA Animal Fibre Standard Terms of Reference

Justification and scope

The first of its kind, created in 2017, the SFA Cashmere Standard covered the biggest market share for certified cashmere. Global in scope, it is the only standard that aims to improve goat welfare, safeguard biodiversity and land, promote decent work and enhance fibre quality through an effective management system and assured chain of custody. It is needed to truly represent producer voices through the strength of our herder relationships and heritage.

What is cashmere?

Cashmere is a fibre harvested from specific breeds of goat. Communities have used cashmere to make yarn, textiles and clothing for generations.

Today, the sustainability of the cashmere industry is under threat. Political transitions and international demand for this luxury fibre have prompted dramatic increases in goat numbers. Coupled with changing land use practices and climate change, this has led to overgrazed and degraded pastures that are less able to support both domestic livestock and native wildlife.

Faced with unstable markets and rising economic hardship, herders are forced to give up their nomadic lifestyle and migrate to the cities, where job prospects are limited. If given the choice, many of these 'stewards of the rangeland' would continue to live in the countryside and continue the herding tradition, living close to nature and their animals.

Growing consumer awareness and industry regulation means that brands and retailers are under pressure to demonstrate responsible sourcing in their supply chains. The SFA offers a holistic and globally-recognized standard that addresses the key sustainability and welfare issues related to cashmere production and provides assurance for 'responsibly-produced cashmere'.

In December 2024 the SFA Cashmere Standard v1.0 was replaced with the [SFA Animal Fibre Standard](#) following an extensive revision and multi-stakeholder consultation throughout 2022-2024. You can learn more about the revision process and the comments received [here](#).

Geographic scope: Global


Operations scope: Primary producers of cashmere, including producer co-operatives and any other group certificate formats.




Expected social, environmental and economic outcomes

The SFA aims to minimise the environmental impact of cashmere, safeguard livelihoods and ensure high animal welfare standards. We work with the end-to-end supply chain, connecting livestock herders to brands and retailers in the global fashion industry. The SFA Animal Fibre Standard outlines five global principles for responsible cashmere production. The specific requirements can be found in the [SFA Animal Fibre Standard](#).


Figure 1: The SFA Animal Fibre Standards five global principles for responsible animal fibre production.


Principle	Definition and desired outcomes	
<p>Effective management</p> 	<p>An effective management system is the backbone that enables herders to achieve the other global principles of animal welfare, biodiversity and land use, fibre quality improvement and decent work. A management system is coordinated by the head of the producer organisation and includes the policies, processes and procedures used by herders to ensure that they can fulfil all the tasks required to meet the requirements of the SFA Animal Fibre Standard and the SFA Chain of Custody, and to enable continuous improvement in herding practices. The management system also plays a vital role in safeguarding the credibility of the SFA’s group assurance model, which involves auditing a selection of households from a herder organization.</p>	
	<p>The desired outcomes are that:</p>	
	Section 3	The extent and governance of an operation covered by any ‘SFA Certified’ scope certificate is clearly defined.
	Section 4	The workforce is competent and well-trained and competent in the production of cashmere and mitigating associated sustainability and welfare risks
	Section 5	There is a culture of using and discarding hazards safely.
	Section 6	Producers are capable of collecting and reporting complete and accurate data and information about their activities to the SFA. Management indicators ensure that progress against fibre production criteria is monitored and assessed, and that field-level data is accurately maintained and systematically reported.
	Section 7	An inclusive, efficient approach to more sustainable cashmere production through continuous improvement, with the potential to reach a large number of producers globally and enable transformational change.
	Section 7	Natural resources are protected and enhanced through a collaborative Rangeland Management Plan (RMP).
	Section 8	Resources and land is only used with respect towards other users, especially indigenous communities.





Principle	Definition and desired outcomes	
<p data-bbox="286 280 450 308">Decent work</p> 	<p data-bbox="555 280 2022 501">The sustainability of animal fibre production encompasses not only environmental but also social considerations. The concept of 'decent work' was developed by the International Labour Organisation, the UN agency on work and employment, to describe work that provides opportunities for women and men to work productively in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The SFA have focused this aspect of their standard on fair hiring practices and working conditions, equality in wages, protecting traditional communities, preventing child labour and promoting health and safety. Gender equality and human rights feature prominently through this principle, ensuring that women receive equal pay and play an active role in cooperative decision-making, and that workers are respected and treated fairly.</p>	
	<p data-bbox="555 537 920 564">The desired outcomes are that:</p>	
	<p data-bbox="589 601 703 628">Section 9</p>	<p data-bbox="763 601 2022 660">There are good practices regarding fair hiring, which are free of discrimination and intimidation and directly combat risk factors for forced labour.</p>
	<p data-bbox="589 697 703 724">Section 9</p>	<p data-bbox="763 697 2022 756">Children are protected from exploitation, not engaged in dangerous work, and able to participate fully in formal education.</p>
	<p data-bbox="589 793 703 820">Section 9</p>	<p data-bbox="763 793 2000 820">Workers are treated fairly and respectfully, and environments are harmonious, motivating and productive.</p>
	<p data-bbox="589 857 703 884">Section 9</p>	<p data-bbox="763 857 2022 916">Workers receive payment in a transparent and consistent manner that is non-discriminatory and provides for appropriate rest and leave for the worker.</p>
	<p data-bbox="589 952 703 979">Section 10</p>	<p data-bbox="763 952 1644 979">The health of workers is not negatively impacted by their work environment.</p>



Principle	Definition and desired outcomes	
<p data-bbox="232 280 499 344">Biodiversity and land use</p> 	<p data-bbox="557 280 2018 501">The adoption of SFA Animal Fibre Standard by herders and their communities will help reduce the negative impacts of cashmere production on the natural resources of rangelands. The criteria are focused on understanding the value of natural resources and how to protect them, and managing grazing in a way that maintains soils health, prevents degradation of pasture and minimises conflict with wildlife. Other criteria address the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and natural habitats, including non-lethal predator control, the management of water resources and minimising the introduction of hazardous materials. All of these elements are addressed through a Rangeland Management Plan that supports traditional herding practices, is integrated with local administrative land use planning and includes monitoring and evaluation.</p>	
	<p data-bbox="557 536 920 560">The desired outcomes are that:</p>	
	Section 11	Land use is within limits that the land being used can sustain.
	Section 12	Grazing management maintains soil health, prevents degradation of pasture and minimises competition with wildlife.
	Section 12	Biodiversity and natural habitats are conserved and enhanced.
	Section 12	Water resources are managed to optimise the quality and availability of water for people, livestock and wildlife.
	Section 13	Producers minimise the introduction of hazardous materials into the rangeland environment.

Principle	Definition and desired outcomes	
Animal welfare 	Maintaining a healthy herd is crucial to cashmere producers' way of life and future prosperity. Through the global principle of ensuring animal welfare, the SFA draws on traditional knowledge and internally recognised best practice to ensure fibre-producing animal health and well-being. In their revised standard, the SFA has shifted from the five freedoms model to five domains model of animal welfare: (1) nutrition, (2) physical environment, (3) health, (4) behavioural interactions and (5) mental state. This is to ensure that the standard encourages positive experiences and emotional states for fibre-producing animals, as well as minimising suffering and discomfort as much as possible.	
	The desired outcomes are that:	
	Section 14	Fibre-producing animals are handled and treated humanely in a manner that does not cause pain and is appropriate to the status of the animal and their specific needs.
	Section 14	Fibre-producing animals experience positive social interactions with the environment, other animals and humans to maintain psychological well-being.
	Section 14	Fibre-producing animals are given adequate rest.
	Section 15	Fibre harvesting methods are appropriate to the production setting and weather conditions.
	Section 15	Fibre harvesting methods minimise discomfort and risk of injury.
	Section 16	Fibre-producing animals have access to adequate nutrition and forage.
	Section 16	Fibre-producing animals have access to sufficient, clean and fresh water.
	Section 16	Feeding equipment is kept clean and uncontaminated.
	Section 16	Fibre-producing animals have daily access to long fibre.
	Section 17	Fibre-producing animals are routinely monitored for signs of sickness, disease, injury or abnormal behaviour and immediate action taken when a problem is identified.
	Section 17	Injurious husbandry procedures are limited to strict welfare needs.



Principle	Definition and desired outcomes	
Animal welfare (continued) 	Section 17	Mutilation of fibre-producing animals is prevented.
	Section 18	Slaughter and euthanasia is conducted in a safe and humane manner that minimises pain and distress prior to death.
	Section 19/20	Fibre-producing animals have enough space to live their lives.
	Section 19/20	Fibre-producing animals have safe and comfortable shelter/housing/pens free from discomfort/injury.
	Section 21	Transportation avoids distress, illness and injury.
	Section 22	Fibre-producing animals are not exposed to hazardous materials.
	Section 23	Breeding addresses welfare suitability for the type of environment in which the fibre-producing animals live.
	Section 24	Kidding is safe, hygienic and calm.
	Section 24	Kids receive appropriate care and nutrition from when they are born.
	Section 25	Other working animals are treated humanely.
Fibre quality 	The SFA recognise that the ongoing decline in the quality of cashmere fibre is one of the key threats to the global cashmere sector. To address this concern, they have included fibre quality improvement as a key principle in the SFA Animal Fibre Standard. Rather than establishing a base quality grade that must be achieved to meet this principle, the focus is on promoting the adoption of practices that are aimed at producing the best quality fibre possible and improving fibre quality over time, namely selective breeding and the post-harvest management of fibre. If producers can improve their fibre quality, this will help them secure price premiums and maintain the reputation of cashmere as a luxury product. The desired outcome of this criteria is that over time there is a marked improvement in the average fibre quality of SFA Certified fibre.	
	The desired outcome is that:	
	Section 26	Over time there is a marked improvement in the average fibre quality of SFA certified fibre.

Governance

The SFA is a registered charity in England and Wales (Registered Charity Number 1165742), henceforth called the SFA Secretariat (or just, the Secretariat).

The process for standards development is detailed in the [SFA Standard Setting Procedure](#), which is based on the [ISEAL Standard Setting Code of Good Practice](#).

The next review of the SFA Animal Fibre Standard will begin no later than in 2029.

Certification, accreditation and claims

The SFA aims for compliance with the ISEAL codes of good practice at the earliest opportunity. Assurance is done following an third-party assurance model where certification is done by an accredited independent conformity assessment body with no ties to the SFA or the entity being assessed.

The rules for making and substantiating claims regarding SFA certification and 'SFA Certified' products are found in the [SFA Chain of Custody Standard](#).

In summary, in order for a product to be considered 'SFA Certified' it needs to have been produced in compliance with the [SFA Animal Fibre Standard](#), primary processed in compliance with the [SFA Clean Fibre Processing Standard](#) and only traded/handled in compliance with the [SFA Chain of Custody Standard](#).

Risk assessment

The SFA has made an assessment of risks in implementing the standard, that is, identification of factors that may negatively affect the ability to achieve its outcomes, and of potential unintended consequences from its implementation. Also, possible corrective actions to mitigate the risks have been identified, that will partly fall under standard development and partly on implementation and other programmes. They can be summarized as follows:

Risk	Corrective action
Certification of animal fibre cannot save rangelands that are used (and sometimes abused) by a range of actors over which they have no control.	The SFA is investigating how the SFA Animal Fibre Standard fits within potential landscape and/or jurisdictional approaches to certifying rangelands.
Lack of incentives for small-scale producers to invest in and implement the standard leads to a skew in certification towards larger operations.	The SFA funnels its charitable resources towards targeted capacity building training and certification fee support.
Standard contains too many topics / requirements - difficult to focus and provide quality	Standard consists of limited number of minimum criteria with focus on biophysical requirements
Insufficient access to inputs (e.g. vaccines and/or pain relief) for remote herders.	Make sure the compliance with minimum criteria is based on factors that can be controlled by entities seeking certification.
Requirement forces western values and approaches replace otherwise effective traditional practices.	Ensure that requirements are focused on outcomes rather than being prescriptive of particular approaches and/or technologies.

Stakeholder map

The stakeholder map for the SFA covers the traditional producers of cashmere, those bodies responsible for the governance of cashmere production, the participants in the cashmere value chains and a wide range of actors aiming to better understand rangelands and influence the policies that governs cashmere production (Table 1).

Table 1: Stakeholders for the SFA Animal Fibres Standard.

Traditional users	
Recreational users	Those with a lifestyle interest in rangelands.
Rangeland residents	Those who live on rangelands. Includes indigenous peoples.
Administrators	
Governance and/or management	Leadership/administration for the governance of cashmere production and/or rangelands and/or the people who live/work there.
Standard setters	Involved with developing, coordinating, promulgating, revising, interpreting, or otherwise producing technical standards.
Conformity assessment and/or accreditation organisations	Involvement with certifying third parties against an official standard and/or testing or other activities that determine whether a process, product, or service complies with the requirements of a specification, technical standard, contract, or regulation.
Cashmere value chains	
Production	Involved with the production and harvest of cashmere.
Processing and manufacturing	Involved with processing and transformation of raw cashmere to final products for consumption.
Traders, brand and retailers	Involved with the trading of cashmere.
Policy informers and influencers	
Academia	Those with an intellectual/theoretical interest in cashmere production and processing.
Non-governmental organisations	Those dedicated to effecting change according to their objectives, including but not limited to, environmental NGOs and industry lobby groups.