



24 JUNE 2026

# STATEMENT OF INTENT

REVIEW OF SFA ASSURANCE & CERTIFICATION MANUAL



# WHY A REVISED MANUAL?

SUSTAINABLE FIBRE ALLIANCE

## Background

The [SFA Assurance & Certification Manual](#) (ACM) defines the rules that SFA Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) must follow when performing assurance and certification services for the SFA standards system. It provides clarity on how the SFA standards system works, aiming to earn trust and build credibility for 'SFA Certified' fibre. The ACM was last updated as part of the review of the [SFA Animal Fibre Standard](#) (AFS), which concluded in 2024. More information on that review can be found [here](#).

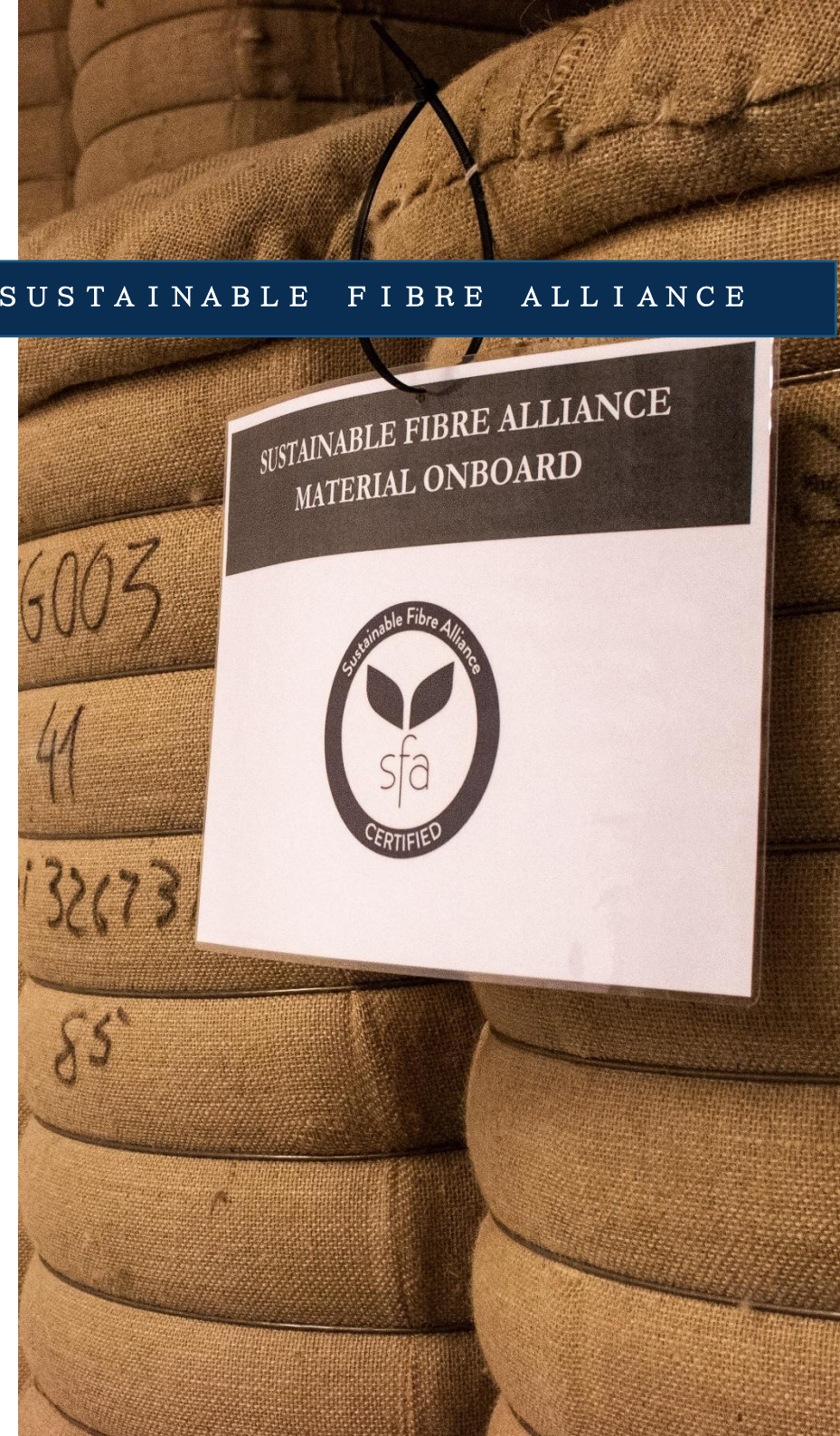
## Providing clarity on certification

Recent internal SFA Monitoring & Evaluation uncovered situations where ineligible fibre was sold as 'SFA Certified'. A central part of the solution to that issue involves revising the ACM to clarify how the start and end dates of SFA certificates shall be set and provide explicit instructions for what should occur when the eligibility of any particular batch of 'SFA Certified' fibre is questioned.

A derogation has already been issued to mitigate the issues during the period in which this review is being completed. Information on the derogation and our approach to preventing these issues from recurring can be found [here](#).

## Way forward

The derogation was published in January 2026. Over the next six months, the SFA will consult stakeholders on any necessary changes to the ACM. A revised version, if required, is planned for late -2026, though publication may be delayed if further consultation is needed.



# WHAT IS BEING CONSIDERED?

## Stable & secure 'SFA Certified' fibre

Situations may arise where the eligibility of 'SFA Certified' fibre is called into question. The ACM currently provides no instruction as to what should happen in these circumstances. This creates uncertainty for those who have bought and/or sold that fibre and presents logistical challenges for CABs and the SFA to resolve these situations on a case-by-case basis. The SFA maintains that the logistical and legal challenges associated with decertifying 'SFA Certified' fibre make it unfeasible except in the most egregious cases. The SFA considers that decertifying fibre unfairly penalises purchasers who acquired it in good faith and who have not engaged in any wrongdoing. Therefore, as part of this review, the SFA are considering a clause that directs CABs to never decertify fibre. The consequences for failure to meet SFA standards will still result in review, suspension or removal of entities' scope certificates, depending on the seriousness of the breach. The buyers of such fibre will need to be informed of the circumstances, which is a reputational risk for the seller.

## Defining the start & end of certificates

The SFA's Monitoring & Evaluation activities have revealed that issue dates have been set inconsistently for some production-level certificates. This has created confusion as to when some entities are eligible to produce and sell 'SFA Certified' fibre. The ACM does not explicitly state how issue dates shall be set, which this review will seek to remedy.

Furthermore, the ACM currently does not specify when the start date should be set for certificates, allowing CABs to determine the start date at their discretion. This has led to inconsistencies in the way start dates are applied. As part of this review, the ACM will define the valid period of producers' CoC certificates to harvest years, for example, an AFS certificate is linked to harvest years, with each certificate lasting for a maximum of three harvests, starting with the harvest observed during the assessment. SFA CoC certificates would still only last for one year/harvest.



# MORE CONSIDERATIONS

## Sampling

We have adjusted the rules for sampling, accordingly, meaning that while 100% of entities are still audited, it is now a flat 10% random sample of sites that are independently assessed.

We are considering if CABs should be required to provide a sampling rationale. The SFA would provide specific indicators to ensure representativeness, such as:

- Risk-based selection: CBs adjusting the sample based on contextual and compliance risks - higher risk = greater the sample or Sample selection priorities higher risk sites, and rotation of sites.
- Geographic and site rotation: Ensure different regions and sites are covered within a certification cycle - example - minimum threshold of unique sites to be achieved within a cycle.
- Diverse profiles: Selecting sites based on specific SFA metrics - for example, production output, size, etc. - Site with a specific metric are samples with priority.

## Force majeure

The SFA are considering implementing a force majeure clause, which would exempt producer entities from meeting some or all the requirements of the AFS during extreme weather events, such as a Mongolian harsh winter, known as dzud. In doing so, the SFA would be making an explicit decision to prioritise producer livelihoods over other requirements, recognising that (a) such events are entirely beyond producers' control, and (b) declining livelihoods pose an existential risk to the [SFA Theory of Change](#), as the programme cannot function without producers. The key elements of this discussion will focus on (a) defining 'force majeure' and determining who decides when it applies, and (b) identifying which specific AFS requirements, if any, should be exempted during a force majeure.



## Other considerations

- Include a requirement for CABs to submit their sampling plan to the SFA.
- Consider any company with turnover more than £1m being made to operate as a separate entity, not as a site.
- Consider limiting the quantity of fibre an entity can sell if they have only had a remote audit.
- Consider the amount of fibre handled as a threshold for what counts as a medium risk entity.
- Introduce a procedure for addressing previously certified entities when CAB has major non-conformances or Critical Breach identified. Proposal to make all certified entities high risk requiring annual audits.



# FAQS

## How long would we have to prepare?

We will give CABs three months to update their systems to account for any changes, with the expectation that they will implement the changes at subsequent assessments. We do not expect that any of the proposed changes would affect the day-to-day business practices of certificate holders.

## What isn't changing?

The scope will remain global and continue to focus on animal welfare, effective management, decent work, and protection of the environment.

## How are decisions made?

Decisions are made by the SFA Standard System Improvement Committee (SSIC), based on recommendations made by the SFA Secretariat. The SFA Board retains the right to veto decisions made by the SSIC. All decisions are announced and justified through the SFA website and communications.

For more information, see the [SFA Standard Setting Procedure](#).

## Contact and comments

We welcome and encourage feedback at all stages of this process. Please send any questions/comments regarding this statement of intent through our [Open Consultation Portal](#), noting that all feedback will be anonymised and published online.



# FORWARD PLAN

## Development

### Consultation on intent and draft revised standard (if any)

We seek fairness and inclusiveness through consultation. Our goal is for all stakeholders to provide feedback and be heard. In this, we aim to secure strategic insight, build consensus and earn credibility.

To this end, stakeholders will have until **24 July 2026** to comment on this statement of intent, which they can do through our [Open Consultation Portal](#). Following this, a draft revised ACM will be developed and made available for public consultation over a 60-day period running from mid to late-2026. We will especially seek input from CABs to ensure that any new ACM is credible and works in practice. Special focus will be towards overcoming language barriers to receive feedback from traditionally underrepresented stakeholders.

### Publication

We aim to complete this review before the end of December 2026. By that time, stakeholders can expect any new ACM with all supporting guidance, summaries and training materials, and a document that outlines the feedback we received from stakeholders and how it was considered. Translations of key documents will follow.

### Effective dates and transition timelines

CABs will be given three months after publication to become familiar with the new ACM and update their systems. From this date (the 'effective' date), all new assessments will need to be against the new ACM, or they will not be able to result in a new SFA Chain of Custody certificate. Since scope certificates last for at most three years, we would expect all old scope certificates to have expired by April 2030, meaning that all entities will have to be certified against the new ACM by this time. If the scope of the Standard expands to include more processors in the value chain, these entities will be given three years from the effective date to become certified.

