

# Sustainable Agriculture Standard SAS ACCREDITATION for CERTIFICATION BODY CB – TECHNICAL GUIDELINE MANUAL

Version 1.1

Issued by: Global Sustainability Impact  
Foundation

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## 1. Introduction

This Certification Body (CB) Guideline Manual is developed under the **SAS Standard** to ensure uniform, credible, transparent, and technically robust certification services for SAS Eco and SAS Natural programs. This manual is aligned with:

- ISO/IEC 17065:2012 (Requirements for product/process certification bodies)
- SAS-specific sustainability, biodiversity, ecological and MRL-related requirements

**Purpose:** To guide Certification Bodies on accreditation, operations, competency, certification processes, documentation, reporting, and impartiality.

**Applicability:** Mandatory for all CBs seeking accreditation under the SAS program.

## 2. SAS Key Terminologies – Glossary

Term	Definition
Certification	Certification under the Sustainable Agriculture Standard (SAS) is the formal, third-party validation that a Client (Farmer, Group, Trader, or Processor) complies with all applicable SAS requirements, including sustainability practices, traceability, food safety, legal compliance, and system management standards.
Accreditation	Formal recognition that a Certification Body is competent to conduct SAS certification.
Surveillance	Periodic monitoring audits conducted after certification to ensure continued compliance.
CAR (Corrective Action Request)	A CAR is a formal request raised by the Auditor when a Non-Conformity (NC) is identified during an SAS audit. It is a mechanism to ensure compliance with SAS requirements and continuous improvement. It requires the entity to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the root cause of the NC</li> <li>• Implement corrective and preventive actions</li> <li>• Submit evidence in SAS Edge within the defined timeline</li> </ul> <p>The Technical Reviewer verifies and validates the CAR closure before certification is granted</p>
CAPA (Corrective and Preventive Action)	Actions submitted by the operator to correct and prevent recurrence of Non Compliances.
Scope Certificate	An official document issued by the Certification Body defining the products, activities, and operations covered under SAS certification for an entity. It includes entity type, certified products, activities, validity, and QR-based traceability.
Auditor	Qualified professional who conducts farm, group, processor, or trader audits under SAS.
Technical Reviewer	Independent expert who verifies audit findings and CAPA before

	certification decision.
Impartiality	Principle ensuring decisions are free from bias, influence, or conflict of interest.
Non-Conformity (NC)	Any deviation from SAS requirements found during an audit.
Major NC	Significant violation affecting certification integrity or product authenticity.
Minor NC	Correctable issue without immediate risk to certification integrity.
Traceability	The ability to track a product from the farm to the final buyer, ensuring that all SAS claims about sustainability and certification can be verified and audited.
Mass Balance	Mass Balance is a system used to track the quantity of certified products through the supply chain, ensuring that the total input of certified material matches the output, even if physical mixing with non-certified material occurs.

Farmer Group	A collective of individual farmers organized as a single certified entity under SAS, ensuring all members comply with sustainability standards and maintain traceable records.
Witness Audit	Live audit observed by SAS Authority to evaluate the Certification Body's performance.
Sampling Lot	Defined harvest quantity used for residue or quality sampling.
Chain of Custody (CoC)	Documented trail tracking sample movement from field to laboratory.
MRL (Maximum Residue Limit)	Highest residue level allowed under SAS Natural requirements.
Buffer Zone	Protective no-chemical zone separating certified and non-certified fields.
Biodiversity Elements	Natural ecological features required under SAS Natural (trees, insects, water bodies).
Client/ Entity	A Client or Entity refers to a Farmer, Farmer Group, Trader, or Processor certified under SAS. They are responsible for complying with

	sustainability, traceability, and system management requirements and are eligible to produce, process, or trade SAS-certified products.
Accreditation Cycle	The Accreditation Cycle is the scheduled period during which a Certification Body (CB) maintains its formal accreditation with an accreditation body. It encompasses initial assessment, periodic surveillance, and renewal evaluations to ensure the CB consistently demonstrates competence, impartiality, and compliance with applicable international standards.
Multi-Site Client/Entity	An organization certified under SAS that manages several locations or units under a unified management system, ensuring all sites consistently meet SAS requirements. A single SAS certificate applies to all sites.
Scheme Owner	The Scheme Owner is the organization responsible for

	developing, maintaining, and managing the sustainability standard, including all rules, guidelines, and certification requirements. Global Sustainability Impact Foundation (GSIF) is the scheme owner of SAS.
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### **3. SAS Governance and Accreditation Framework**

#### **3.1 Overview**

The **SAS Accreditation Authority** is responsible for ensuring that Certification Bodies (CBs) operate in a manner that is competent, impartial, transparent, and compliant with SAS standards and international best practices.

The Accreditation Authority monitors:

- Certification Body's performance:** Effectiveness in conducting audits and certification.
- Competence:** Knowledge and skills of auditors and staff.
- Impartiality:** Conflict of interest management to ensure fair certification decisions.

- **Compliance:** Adherence to SAS requirements, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and accreditation criteria.

This framework ensures credibility of the SAS certification system and maintains trust among stakeholders.

### 3.2 SAS Accreditation Authority Structure

The SAS Accreditation Authority operates through the following functional units:

#### a. Accreditation Committee

- Evaluates Certification Body eligibility for accreditation.
- Reviews all submitted documentation, legal compliance, organizational structure, and systems.
- Grants, suspends, or withdraws accreditation based on performance and compliance.

#### b. Technical Panel

- Assesses Certification Body **technical competencies** of personnel, auditors, and management systems.
- Reviews auditor qualifications, training records, and adherence to audit protocols.

- Evaluates Certification Body capacity to implement SAS standards across various Client types (Farmer, Group, Trader, and Processor).

#### **c. Compliance & Oversight Committee**

- Conducts annual surveillance and monitoring of accredited Certification body's.
- Reviews Certification Body audit reports, non-conformity handling, and CAPA implementation.
- Ensures impartiality, transparency, and corrective action effectiveness.

#### **d. SAS Edge Database Team**

- Approves Certification Body use of SAS Edge software for audit data management.
- Monitors data integrity, traceability, and reporting of certification activities.
- Validates that all Certification Body-generated certificates, CARs, and audit reports are correctly uploaded and accessible.

### **3.3 Accreditation Process**

#### **Step 1: Application Submission**

The Certification Body submits the following documents for accreditation consideration:

- Legal registration and business licenses
- Organization details and organogram
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for certification processes
- Auditor and staff personnel files, qualifications, and training records
- IT systems and data management protocols for SAS Edge

## **Step 2: Initial Review**

- Completeness and compliance of the application are assessed.
- Verification that all Standard Operating Procedures, personnel qualifications, and management systems meet SAS requirements.

## **Step 3: On-site Assessment**

- **Staff competence evaluation:** Auditor and technical personnel skills, knowledge, and training.
- **Standard Operating Procedure implementation check:** Review of documented procedures for audit and certification activities.
- **Facility assessment:** Physical infrastructure, offices, storage, and audit preparation facilities.
- **IT systems review:** SAS Edge integration, data management, and traceability controls.

## Step 4: Witness Assessment

- Observation of Certification Body auditors conducting real audits in the field.
- Evaluation of audit methodology, evidence collection, reporting, and non-conformity handling.
- Ensures Certification body's audits align with SAS standard requirements.

## Step 5: Decision & Accreditation Grant

- Accreditation Committee reviews assessment reports and Technical Panel recommendations.
- Decision options: Accreditation granted, conditional approval, or rejection.
- Accredited CB receives formal accreditation certificate and authorization to conduct SAS certifications.

## Step 6: Accreditation Cycle

- SAS accreditation is valid for three (3) years.
- Annual surveillance assessments are conducted to verify:
  - CB compliance with SAS standards and procedures
  - Auditor competence and impartiality
  - Corrective actions for any non-conformities
  - SAS Edge system integrity and reporting accuracy
- **Full reassessment** occurs at the end of the 3-year cycle for renewal.

## **Step 7: Suspension / Withdrawal**

Accreditation may be **suspended or withdrawn** for:

- Violations of SAS rules or unethical practices
- Inaccurate or biased certification decisions
- Failure to implement corrective actions or maintain audit quality
- Mismanagement of SAS Edge data

Suspension is temporary and requires corrective actions; withdrawal is permanent, and the CB loses the right to certify SAS operators.

## **3.4 Monitoring & Surveillance System for CBs**

The SAS Accreditation Authority ensures continuous monitoring through:

- **Annual surveillance audits:** On-site and remote checks of CB operations, staff, and certifications issued
- **Audit report reviews:** Checking NC classification, CAR handling, CAPA implementation, and closure
- **SAS Edge oversight:** Monitoring certification data, traceability records, and QR code verification
- **Stakeholder feedback:** Complaints, appeals, and feedback from farmers, groups, traders, processors, and buyers

- **Risk-based assessments:** Focusing on CBs with previous non-conformities or high-risk sectors

This continuous monitoring system ensures that SAS-accredited CBs remain competent, impartial, and reliable, maintaining the credibility of the SAS certification program.

## 4. Accreditation Requirements

This section defines the mandatory eligibility and capability requirements for Certification Bodies seeking accreditation under the SAS Scheme governed by GSIF. These requirements ensure that all accredited CBs operate with legal validity, technical competence, impartiality, and robust management systems consistent with ISO/IEC 17065 and SAS-specific expectations.

### 4.1 Legal Requirements

Certification Bodies must demonstrate full legal and operational legitimacy before applying for accreditation. The following are mandatory:

#### a. Legal Requirements

- The organization must be a registered legal entity in its country of operation.
- Must hold and maintain:

- **Active PAN**
- **Valid GST registration** (where applicable)
- **Certificate of Incorporation** or Registration Certificate

## **b. Financial & Banking Compliance**

- A **valid and active bank account** in the accredited entity's name.
- Evidence of financial stability may be requested during assessment (e.g., audited financial statements).

## **c. Legally Binding Certification Agreements**

- Standardized **Certification Agreement templates** must be:
  - Legally enforceable
  - Aligned with SAS certification rules
  - Covering rights, obligations, sanctions, suspension/withdrawal, and dispute mechanisms
- Agreements must be retained as part of CB documentation.

## **4.2 Infrastructure Requirements**

Certification Bodies must maintain adequate physical and digital infrastructure to ensure secure, efficient, and compliant certification operations.

## a. Physical Office Infrastructure

- A designated office premises with:
  - Secure, lockable document storage
  - Confidential meeting space for conducting technical reviews
  - Access-controlled environment for handling sensitive data

## b. IT & Data Management Systems

CBs must maintain a robust IT system that ensures data integrity and security, including:

- **Role-Based Access Control (RBAC):**  
Ensures only authorized personnel can access specific modules or certification data.
- **Comprehensive Audit Logs:**  
Automatic recording of all user activity, data edits, approvals, and certification decisions.
- **Daily Data Backup (every 24 hours):**  
Backups stored on secure local or cloud environments.
- **Full Integration with SAS Edge:**  
System must support:
  - Uploading and maintaining operator data
  - Farm/field-level evidence
  - Audit reports, photos, GPS records
  - Certification decisions and workflow entries

## 4.3 Human Resource Requirements

CBs must employ competent, trained, and independent personnel. Competence must be documented and updated regularly.

### a. Lead Auditors

- Must be trained in **SAS Eco** and/or **SAS Natural** Standards (as applicable).
- Minimum competence:
  - Experience in **agriculture and allied sciences**
  - Demonstrated skills in sustainability auditing
  - Ability to lead audit teams, conduct risk assessments, and prepare audit reports.

### b. Auditors

- Competence in:
  - Agricultural production systems
  - Organic/natural farming practices
  - Biodiversity conservation
  - MRL standards (where applicable)
- Must demonstrate knowledge of field inspection techniques and SAS audit protocols.

### c. Technical Reviewers

- Must **not** be involved in the audit they review.
- Competence in certification rules, audit evaluation, risk assessment, and non-conformity classification.

## **d. Certification Decision Makers**

- Must be **independent** from audit and review functions.
- Responsible for impartial and evidence-based certification decisions.

## **e. Impartiality Committee**

- Includes at least one **external expert**.
- Reviews impartiality risks annually.
- Ensures CB operations remain free from conflict of interest.

## **4.4 Documentation Requirements**

Certification Bodies must maintain a structured, accessible document control system aligned with ISO/IEC 17065.

### **Mandatory Documents Include:**

#### ***a. Quality Management System (QMS)***

- A **Quality Manual** (aligned with ISO 17065) covering CB governance, processes, impartiality safeguards, and operational procedures.

#### ***b. SOPs***

- Detailed SOPs must exist for all certification processes, including:

- Application intake
- Audit planning & execution
- Technical review
- Certification decisions
- Complaints, appeals, disputes
- Non-conformity & CAPA
- Data entry and record retention
- Use of SAS Edge

#### *c. Internal Audit Reports*

- Annual internal audits assessing conformance with SAS and ISO 17065 requirements.

#### *d. Management Review Reports*

- Evidence of top management evaluation of:
  - Competence
  - Complaints
  - Impartiality risks
  - Internal audit findings
  - Resource requirements

#### *e. Impartiality Safeguards*

- Documented procedures to identify, analyze, mitigate, and monitor impartiality risks.

## **4.5 Technical Capability Requirements**

CBs must demonstrate technical competence specific to SAS Eco and SAS Natural.

### **a. SAS Standard Knowledge**

- **SAS Eco:** Understanding of sustainable agriculture, soil health, input management, water use efficiency, biodiversity, and carbon practices.
- **SAS Natural:**  
In-depth knowledge of:
  - Natural input use
  - Biodiversity protection
  - Ecological balance
  - MRL thresholds and compliance requirements (Codex-based)

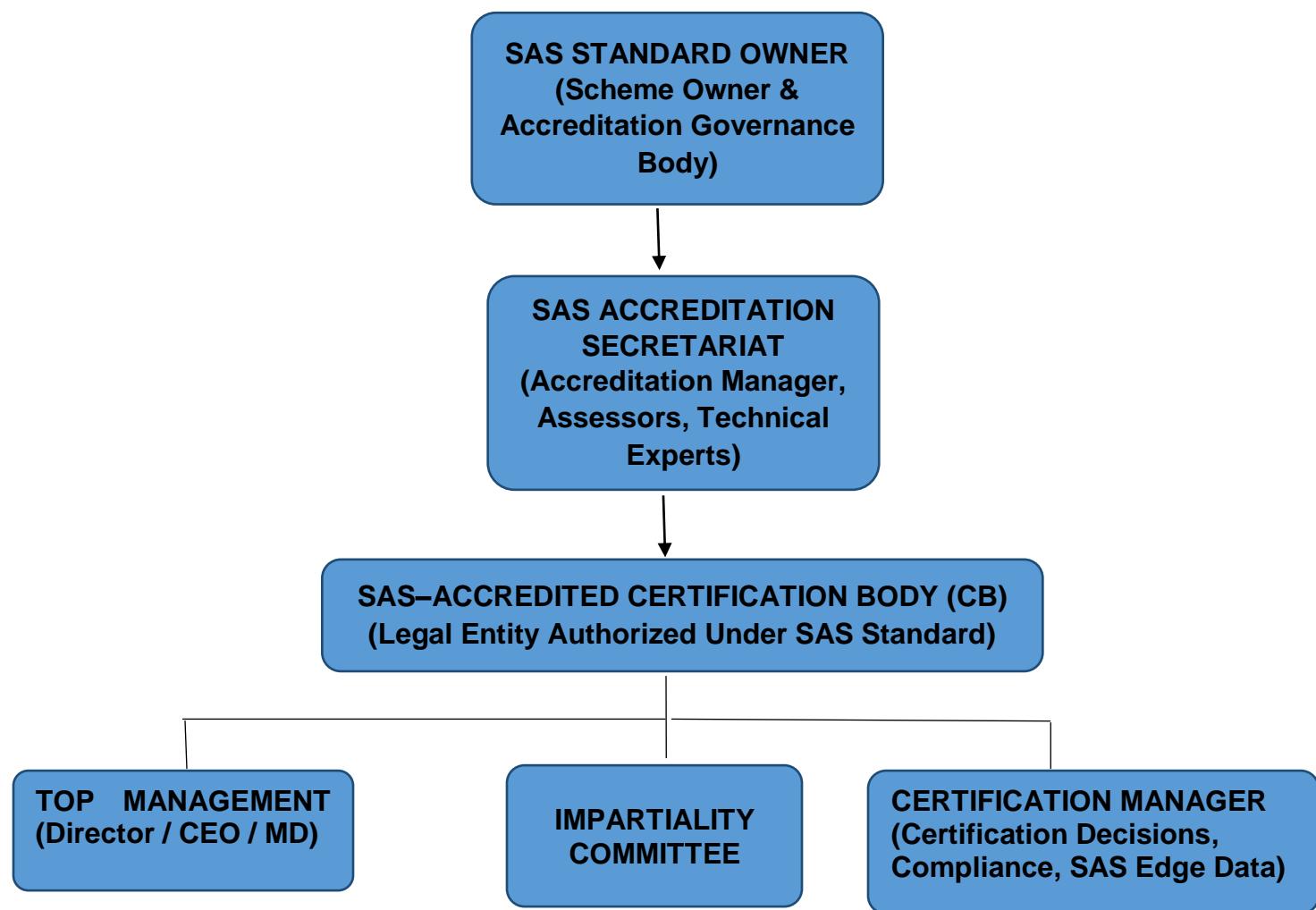
### **b. Traceability & Mass Balance**

- Ability to verify farm-level and supply-chain traceability.
- Capability to assess or validate mass balance in trader/processor systems (if applicable to the certification scope).

### **c. Sampling Procedures**

- Competence in:
  - Risk-based sampling
  - Field sample collection
  - Laboratory coordination
  - Managing test reports and interpreting results

## 5. Certification Body Organogram



**TECHNICAL REVIEWER**  
(Eco & Natural Schemes)  
Audit Review, NC Closure

**CERTIFICATION OFFICER**  
(Certificates, Docs,  
Application Management)

**LEAD AUDITORS / AUDITORS**  
(Farm Audits, Processor Audits,  
Field Verification)

**FINANCE / ACCOUNTS**  
PERSON(Invoicing, Audit Fee  
Management, Payment Tracking,  
CB Financial Records)

## 6. Personnel Requirements & Competence

### 6.1 Top Management (CEO/Director)

- Graduate in agriculture/environment/food science OR any discipline with 10+ years management experience.
- Demonstrated understanding of certification systems.
- Understanding of ISO 17065 and ISO 17011 requirements.

#### Competence:

- Risk management
- Impartiality oversight
- Policy approval
- Oversight of financial independence

## 6.2 Certification Manager

### Minimum Qualification

- Graduate in Agri/Agri Business/ Food Technology/ Forestry/Environment  
OR
- Any graduate with 5 plusyears of experiencein certification schemes (sustainability or organic standards).

### Competence Requirements

- Understand SAS Eco & Natural Standards
- Able to review audit findings, NCs, and CAPAs
- Knowledge of MRL requirements (for SAS Natural)
- Familiarity with SAS Eco Standards.
- Good documentation review skills
- Knowledge of ISO 17065 certification cycle

### Responsibilities:

- Certification decision-making
- Ensuring impartiality
- Approval of Scope Certificates
- Ensuring traceability in certification files

## 6.3 Technical Reviewer

### Minimum Qualification

- Must be Graduate in Agriculture/Environment/Biotechnology/Food Safety or allied sciences.
- 2 plus years of experience in quality/auditing/technical evaluation

## Competency Requirements

- Risk assessment skills
- Understanding of farm & processor assessments
- Ability to assess MRL risks, biodiversity indicators
- Proficient in interpreting SAS Eco/Natural compliance criteria
- Strong technical writing & evaluation skills

## Role Competence

- Review sampling plans
- Verify auditor competence
- Ensure NC classification and closure adequacy

## 6.4 Quality Manager / QMS Head

### Qualification

- Graduate in any field
- Trained in ISO 17065 QMS
- Lead Auditor trained in ISO 19011 (preferred)

### Competence

- QMS documentation & version control
- Internal audit planning
- Handling corrective actions
- Conducting annual internal audits
- Maintaining training records, logs, SOPs

## 6.5 Lead Auditor / Audit Team Leader

### Mandatory Qualification

- Graduate in Agriculture / Forestry / Horticulture / Environment / Food Technology
- Trained on SAS Standards
- Trained in ISO 19011 auditing techniques

### Experience

- 2 plus years of experience in field audits (organic, natural farming, sustainability, food safety)
- Must have completed 5 audits as co-auditor before leading audits

### Competence Requirements

- Understanding of SAS Eco & SAS Natural
- Farmer Group verification for group audits
- Farm & processing audit skills
- Sampling competence
- NC formulation

- Opening & closing meeting competency

## Scheme-Specific Competency

### SAS Natural:

- Understanding SAS Natural principles & bio-inputs
- Farmer Group system evaluation

### SAS Eco:

- Knowledge of natural inputs, biodiversity conservation
- Understanding MRLs and testing requirements

## 6.6 Field Auditor (Farm/Group/Processor)

### Qualification

- Diploma/Graduate in Agriculture or related fields
- Trained in SAS Farm Audit Checklist
- Trained in sampling SOPs

### Competence

- Farm visit techniques
- Cross-checking records (farm diary, input register)
- Processor facility verification
- Interview skills
- GPS mapping
- Understanding of MRL sampling requirements
- Estimating farm yields

## Special Competence

- Minimum 10 audit-days per year to maintain active status

## 6.7 Sampling Officer

### Qualification

- Graduate in Chemistry/Agriculture/Food Science

### Competence

- Sampling SOP knowledge
- Proper use of sampling tools
- Chain of custody documentation
- Sample homogenization & packing
- Lab communication
- Understanding of SAS Natural MRL tables

## 6.8 Certification Officer / Administrator

### Qualification

- Graduate in any discipline
- Computer proficiency
- Familiar with SAS Traceability system (SAS Edge)

### Competence

- File compilation
- Documentation verification
- Certificate preparation
- Communication with operators
- Records management

## 6.9 Impartiality Committee (IC Members)

### Qualification

- External expert from NGO/Academia/Farmer representative
- Internal member not involved in certification decisions

### Competence Requirements

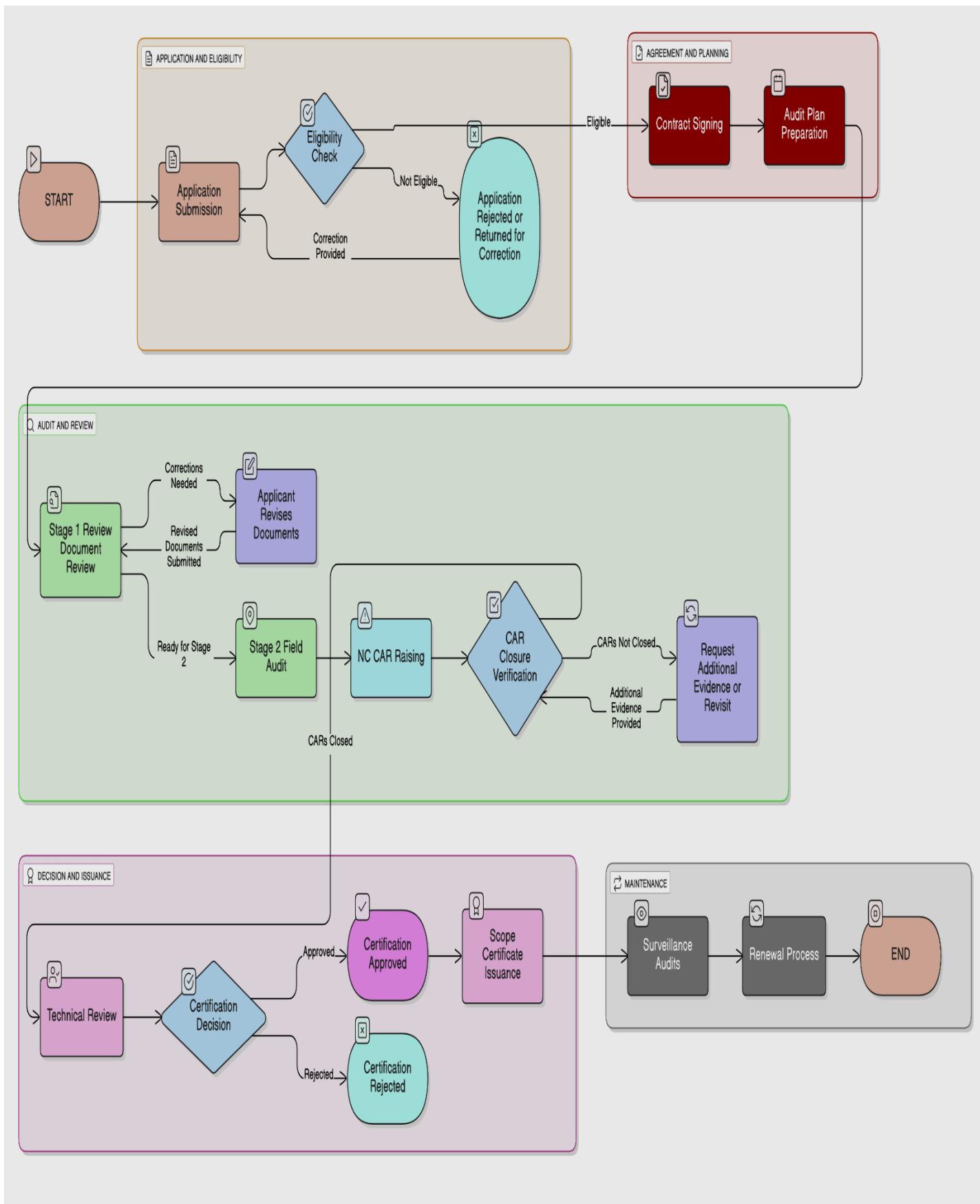
- Understanding of conflict of interest
- Risk assessment ability
- Knowledge of certification principles
- Familiarity with SAS impartiality policy

## 7. Certification Process under SAS-Accredited CB

### Workflow Overview

Application → Eligibility Check → Contract → Audit Plan  
→ Stage 1 Review →  
Stage 2 Field Audit → NC/CAR Raising → CAR Closure  
→ Technical Review →

Certification Decision → Scope Certificate Issuance →  
Surveillance → Renewal



## 7.1 Application & Registration

- Application form
- Land details, GIS coordinates
- Farmer list
- Processor/trader documents
- SAS Edge registration

## 7.2 Audit Planning

- Based on cropping season:
  - **Sowing Audit:** Within 30 days of sowing
  - **Pre-Harvest Audit:** Before harvest
  - **Harvest Audit:** At time of harvest with sampling of soil, water or produce.

## 7.3 Stage 1 Evaluation

- Desktop review of records
- Input purchase verification
- SAS Edge entries

## 7.4 Stage 2 Field Audit

- Physical inspection:
  - Field conditions
  - Buffer zones
  - Input storage
  - Biodiversity elements
- Interviews

- Documents verification
- Sampling (where required)

## 7.5 Audit Reporting

- Standard SAS format
- Evidence in photos, maps, signatures
- NC classification:
  - Major (system failure)
  - Minor (correctable)

## 7.6 Certification Review and Decision

- Independent review
- Final decision made after CAR closure
- Validity: 1 year

## 7.7 Scope Certificate Issuance

Includes:

- QR Code
- Operator details
- Product, variety, acreage, output estimate
- Validity period
- Certification category (Eco/Natural)

## 7.8 Surveillance

- Annual and unannounced audits
- Risk-based sampling

## 7.9 Renewal Certification

- Review of last cycle performance
- Updated farm list

## 7.10 Personnel Competence Maintenance Requirements

Every CB must ensure:

- 1. Annual Training:** SAS Standards, MRL updates, policy changes
- 2. Witness Assessments:**
  - Every auditor must be witnessed at least once every 2 years
- 3. Calibration Meetings:**
  - Internal auditor meetings at least once yearly
- 4. Refresher Training:**
  - For auditors inactive for 12 months
- 5. Competence Log:**
  - Maintained in personnel file
- 6. Yearly Performance Evaluation**
- 7. Sanction Process:**
  - Suspension of personnel for competence gaps

## 8. Non-Conformity, CAR, CAPA

- Root Cause Analysis Mandatory:** Every non-conformity (NC) identified during audits or inspections must be analyzed thoroughly to determine the

underlying cause rather than just addressing the immediate issue. This ensures systemic issues are resolved and prevents recurrence.

- **CAPA with Preventive Measures:** Corrective and Preventive Actions (CAPA) must be implemented for each NC. Corrective actions address the specific issue found, while preventive measures aim to eliminate the likelihood of the issue occurring in the future.
- **Verification through Evidence:** CAPA effectiveness must be verified through tangible evidence such as photographs, test results, updated procedures, or audit follow-up reports. This ensures that actions are implemented properly and are effective.
- **Closure in SAS Edge:** All NCs and associated CAPAs should be documented and formally closed in the SAS Edge system. Closure should only occur after verification evidence is reviewed and accepted by the certification body.

## 9. Impartiality & Conflict Management

- **Annual Impartiality Review:** Certification bodies must conduct a yearly review of impartiality to ensure decisions are unbiased. This includes evaluating auditors, management, and procedures for potential conflicts.
- **External Members Required:** The impartiality committee should include external members who are independent of the certification body's operations to provide unbiased oversight and perspective.
- **Conflict Declaration for Staff:** All staff involved in audits, certification decisions, or management must declare any conflicts of interest. Procedures must be in place to mitigate risks associated with such conflicts.

## 10. Use of SAS Edge

- **Live GPS-Tagged Photos:** Auditors must capture photographs during inspections or audits that are

geotagged in real time, providing proof of location and timing of the audit activity.

- **Audit Scheduling:**SAS Edge facilitates the scheduling of audits, ensuring proper planning, allocation of auditors, and adherence to required audit timelines.
- **Certificate Generation:**Certified operators receive digital certificates generated directly through SAS Edge, ensuring standardization, authenticity, and traceability.
- **QR-Based Traceability:**Certificates and relevant documents include QR codes, allowing stakeholders to instantly verify certification status and trace the certified products or operators in the supply chain.

## 11. Record Keeping & Security

- **7-Year Retention:**All audit records, certification documents, and supporting evidence must be retained for a minimum of seven years to comply with standards and for reference during surveillance or dispute resolution.

- **Cloud Backup in system with Encryption:** Data must be securely stored in encrypted cloud storage, ensuring protection against data loss, unauthorized access, and potential tampering.
- **Controlled Access:** Access to sensitive information is restricted based on roles and responsibilities. Staff should have access only to information necessary for their duties, ensuring confidentiality and data integrity.

## 12. Complaints, Appeals & Disputes

- **Acknowledgement within 7 Days:** Any complaint or appeal received must be formally acknowledged within seven days, ensuring transparency and timely communication with stakeholders.
- **Investigation within 30 Days:** A thorough investigation of the complaint or dispute should be conducted within 30 days, involving fact-finding, review of documentation, and interviews as required.

- **Appeal Panel Independent of Decision Makers:** The panel handling appeals or disputes must be independent of those who made the original certification decisions, ensuring unbiased and fair resolution.

## 13. Reporting to SAS

- **Monthly Certification Summary:** Certification bodies must submit a monthly summary report to SAS detailing new certifications, renewals, and revocations.
- **NC Trends:** Non-conformity trends should be reported, including recurring issues, categories of NCs, and actions taken. This helps SAS monitor quality and systemic issues.
- **Sample Failure Reports:** Any product or process samples failing tests must be reported to SAS, including details of the failure, corrective actions taken, and follow-up verification.
- **Annual Performance Review:** Certification bodies must provide a comprehensive annual report to SAS

covering performance metrics, audit effectiveness, CAPA implementation, impartiality reviews, and overall compliance with SAS standards.

## Annexures

### Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

## SOP 01: Application & Contracting

**Objective:** To ensure uniform, transparent intake of certification applications.

### Steps:

1. Applicant submits application form with all the required documents.
2. CB conducts eligibility check (land records, legal docs, GIS, SAS category selection).
3. CB raises quotation → applicant signs contract.
4. CB registers operator in **SAS Edge**.
5. Application file created with unique ID.

**Records:** Application form, contract, fee receipt, SAS Edge entry log.

## SOP 02: Audit Planning

**Objective:** To prepare risk-based audits.

### Steps:

1. Determine operator type (Farmer/Group/Processor/Trader).
2. Identify crop seasons: Kharif/Rabi.
3. Schedule:
  - Sowing audit
  - Pre-harvest audit
  - Harvest audit
4. Assign auditor → conflict of interest check.
5. Prepare audit kit (forms, sampling bags, GPS tools).
6. Upload schedule to SAS Edge.

**Records:** Audit plan, COI declaration, communication logs.

## SOP 03: Field Audit (Farmer/Group/Processor/Trader)

**Objective:** To conduct an inspection verifying compliance with SAS Eco/ SAS Natural.

### Steps:

1. Opening meeting → explain audit scope.
2. Document review:
  - Farm diary
  - Input records
  - SAS Edge entries
  - Purchase/sales registers
3. Field verification:
  - Buffer zones
  - Crop stage
  - Biodiversity
  - Organic integrity or bio-inputs
4. Interviews with farmers/workers.
5. Processor audit checks (traceability, storage, hygiene flow).
6. Sampling (if required).
7. Closing meeting → NC communication.

**Records:** Audit report, attendance sheet, photos, and GPS data.

## SOP 04: Sampling Procedure

**Objective:** To ensure representative, tamper-proof samples.

### Steps:

1. Identify lot at harvest.
2. Prepare sterile sampling tools.
3. Collect minimum 1 kg sample from multiple points.
4. Homogenize → Split into 3 parts:
  - Test sample
  - Referee sample
  - CB retained sample
5. Seal with tamper-proof seal with signatures.
6. Fill Chain-of-Custody (CoC) form.
7. Send to SAS-approved laboratory.

**Records:** Sampling form, CoC, lab receipt.

## SOP 05: CAR/CAPA Management

**Objective:** Ensure timely closure of non-conformities.

### Steps:

1. Auditor issues NC with classification.
2. Operator submits CAR with:
  - Root cause
  - Corrective action
  - Preventive action (Natural/Eco specific)
3. Reviewer verifies evidence.
4. CB approves or rejects CAPA.
5. Close NC in SAS Edge.

**Records:** NC register, CAPA documents.

## SOP 06: Certification Review

**Objective:** Independent, evidence-based certification decision.

### Steps:

1. Reviewer completes technical review.
2. Certification decision committee reviews:
  - Audit report
  - CAR closure
  - Sampling results
  - Traceability checks
3. Approve / reject / defer.
4. Issue digitally signed Scope Certificate.

**Records:** Review sheet, decision log.

## SOP 07: Complaints, Appeals & Disputes Handling

**Objective:** To investigate and resolve issues impartially.

### Steps:

1. Register complaint.
2. Acknowledge within 7 days.
3. Investigate → site visit if required.
4. Resolve within 30 days.
5. Appeal panel reviews appeals.
6. Communicate decision.

**Records:** Complaint register, investigation report.