

Red River Foods

Guide to Sustainability Certifications

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Introduction

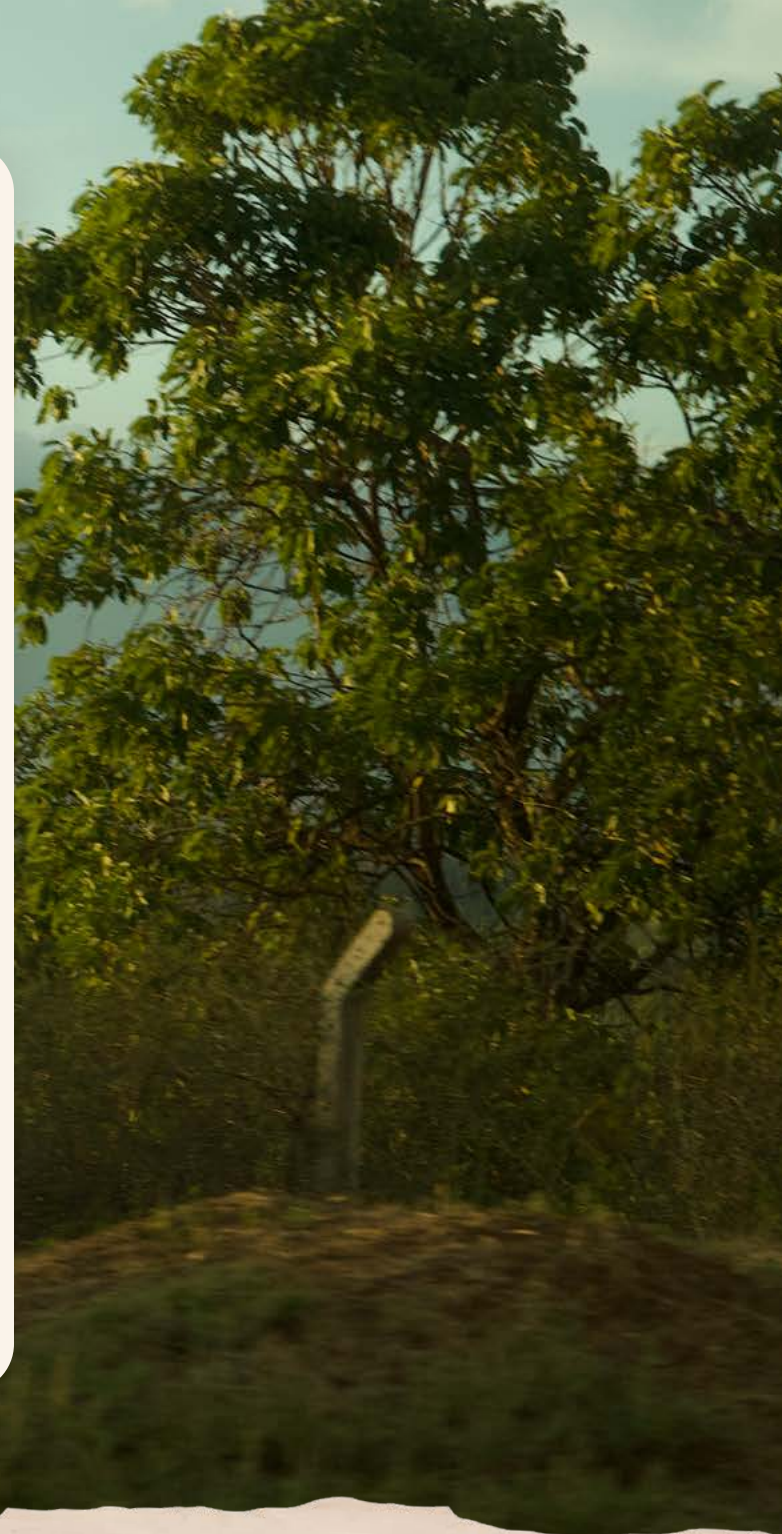
For many consumers today, sustainability is a key factor when making food purchasing decisions. Increasingly, shoppers are prioritizing brands that behave in demonstrably ethical and environmentally responsible ways. To meet this growing demand, a variety of sustainability certifications have become available for food products. In this ebook, we break down several key certifications, examining what they mean and how producers can benefit from obtaining them. With this information, consumers can better understand their food labels, and food producers can make better informed decisions about the ingredients they source.



The Purpose of Sustainability Certifications

Producing food for the earth's more than 8 billion inhabitants takes a significant toll on the environment, contributing to deforestation, water pollution, greenhouse gasses, and loss of biodiversity. Additionally, unethical labor practices such as low wages and dangerous working conditions perpetuate poverty and social inequality. Sustainability certifications help to alleviate these issues by establishing rigorous standards for food producers. By meeting these standards, producers demonstrate their commitment to ethical business practices, environmental stewardship, and social equity.

Sustainability certifications help ensure products are sourced, processed, and distributed in ways that are sustainable for the earth as well as for the workers involved in creating them. As consumers become more conscious of the ethical and ecological consequences of the products they purchase, companies that go the extra mile to care for the environment and ensure fair labor practices can garner trust and enhance brand loyalty as well as gain access to expanded markets.





Why Sustainability Certifications Matter for Food Producers

A Competitive Edge

Sustainability certifications give food producers a competitive edge by providing impartial verification that a company's sourcing and production practices meet specified ethical and environmental standards. A [large 2021 study](#) found that 88% of consumers surveyed reported prioritizing purchases from companies that engage in ethical sourcing practices, and 83% were willing to pay more for those products. Younger respondents seemed to be driving this growing trend: nearly two thirds of 18 to 24-year-old respondents said they would stop buying from a company that is accused of sourcing products from unethical suppliers, and 62% of respondents aged 25 to 34 said it's important to know the origins of products they buy. As consumers demand more transparency throughout the supply chain, third-party stamps of approval demonstrate brands' commitment to equity and environmental stewardship.

Market Access & Legal Compliance

Certifications also play a crucial role in regulatory compliance and global trade facilitation. Demonstrating compliance with sustainability standards can help businesses meet evolving regulatory requirements and avoid potential legal risks and penalties. Some certifications are recognized internationally and can facilitate access to certain markets, and [large retailers and distributors](#) are increasingly prioritizing suppliers that adhere to sustainability standards, providing important opportunities for food producers that want to expand their reach.



A More Resilient Food Supply

Crucially, sustainability certifications help build long-term resilience into the global food supply. Environmentally responsible farming techniques help conserve soil and water, enhance soil fertility, and reduce reliance on synthetic inputs. Ethical labor standards support a more stable and motivated workforce. Together, these practices help build a stronger, safer, and more stable food supply chain.





Overview of Sustainability Certifications

Overview of Sustainability Certifications

Sustainability certifications cover several aspects of food production and distribution, including trade, farming practices, product sourcing, environmental conservation, and food safety. Certifications like those described below help ensure food products meet consumers' expectations in these diverse areas.



Fair Trade

Fair trade certifications focus on fair trade relationships, healthy working conditions, and community development in food-producing areas. These certifications make products more attractive to the growing consumer base that prioritizes ethical sourcing, enhances brand reputation, and provides access to international and domestic [markets that require ethical sourcing verification](#).



Fairtrade International

[Fairtrade International](#) is among the most recognized fair trade certification organizations in the world. It ensures farmers and workers receive fair compensation, work in safe conditions, and benefit from social development programs. It protects them from market volatility by setting minimum price thresholds for certified products. Additionally, certified producers receive Fairtrade Premiums—additional payments that farmers and workers can invest in community or business projects of their choice.



Fair Trade USA

[Fair Trade USA](#) operates much like Fairtrade International but with a focus on the U.S. market. It guarantees minimum payment thresholds for food producers, ensures safe and healthy working conditions, and requires environmental stewardship. Similarly to Fairtrade International's Fairtrade Premiums, Fair Trade USA collects additional payments from companies for its Community Development Funds, which farmers and workers can invest in projects that meet their communities' greatest needs, such as water, education, housing, and healthcare.

Organic

Even in the face of [rising food prices](#), growing numbers of consumers are willing to pay a premium for organic products. This trend shows no sign of abating, making certification a valuable investment for businesses in the 21st century.



USDA Organic

The [USDA Organic Certification](#) signals that foods are produced using practices that promote ecological balance, protect soil and water quality, and preserve biodiversity. These include use of organic fertilizers and eco-friendly pest control for crops as well as free roaming space and avoidance of antibiotics and hormones for livestock. USDA Organic certified packaged goods must be traceable from farm to shelf and free of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and artificial ingredients.



EU Organic

[EU Organic certification](#) signifies food produced with a focus on natural processes and environmental care. Crops are grown with minimal synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, while livestock are raised with high welfare standards, including ample space and limited antibiotic use. The distinctive green leaf logo ensures products are traceable, GMO-free, and largely free of artificial additives.



Regenerative Organic

More and more people are waking up to the fact that today's industrial agriculture is unsustainable. As industry leaders seek ways to rebuild and support healthy ecosystems, regenerative organic farming techniques like composting, crop rotation, rotational grazing, limiting tillage, and use of vegetative covers are gaining a great deal of interest. Such practices support soil health, biodiversity, and soil fertility while aiding carbon sequestration and optimizing water usage.

[Regenerative Organic Certification \(ROC\)](#) encourages these types of farming practices, [empowering farmers to regenerate ecosystems](#) rather than deplete or merely sustain them. ROC goes beyond traditional organic certification by incorporating standards for land management, soil health, animal welfare, and fairness to farmers and farm workers. For this reason, food producers that obtain ROC certification broadcast a commitment to being part of the solution for our planet and all who live here.

“We believe that the future of agriculture depends on a balance between productivity and preservation. By fostering long-term partnerships with our growers and continually innovating in sustainable practices, we aim to create a positive impact that extends from the fields to the tables of consumers worldwide. Our goal is to build a more sustainable and equitable global food system, where every step of our supply chain contributes to the well-being of people and the planet.”

— Dan Phipps, CEO of Red River Foods



Kosher

Kosher certification is a critical designation for individuals adhering to Jewish dietary traditions. It requires verification by a rabbinic agency that all aspects of food production, including ingredients, derivatives, tools, and machinery, are free of non-kosher substances. While designed to serve the Jewish community, the kosher designation is recognized more widely as a sign of quality and integrity in food production.

The foundation of kosher dietary laws comes from Biblical sources that proscribe consumption of certain animals such as pig, catfish, and shellfish; require that animals be slaughtered in a particular manner; and forbid the mingling of meat and dairy products. Additionally, adherents must avoid leavened grains during the Passover holiday.

Because of these multi-layered standards, various kosher designations are available, including the following:

- **Kosher for Passover**
- **Meat**
- **Pareve (free of meat or dairy)**
- **Dairy**
- **Fish**

These designations make it easy for those observing Jewish traditions to appropriately separate foods so meals are kosher. Because they explicitly label meat, dairy, and fish, they are also useful for those who avoid or limit consumption of these ingredients. While foods with the pareve designation are free of both dairy and meat, it's important to understand that this is different from being vegan or vegetarian, as both eggs and fish are considered pareve.

Kosher certification provides food suppliers access to highly selective shoppers by not only supporting religious observances but also providing valuable dietary information. Kosher labels enhance food transparency and provide a trusted mark of quality for consumers across the globe.



Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

Palm oil is ubiquitous in the modern food supply. Because of its versatility and ease of production, it appears in [nearly half of all packaged products](#) on store shelves.

Unfortunately, palm oil production is also a major driver of deforestation in some of the world's most biologically diverse areas, posing added threats to already endangered species. Additionally, the palm oil industry produces large amounts of greenhouse gases and has a reputation for exploiting workers.

The World Wildlife Fund and the Malaysian Palm Oil Association founded the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in conjunction with major food companies to mitigate the negative effects of palm oil production.

The organization established standards to foster more environmentally and socially responsible practices in the

industry. RSPO certifies businesses across the supply chain, including palm oil growers, processors, traders, and consumer goods manufacturers.

RSPO certification ensures that palm oil is sourced sustainably, preventing deforestation and protecting biodiversity. The certification also includes strict labor rights provisions, ensuring decent living wages and safe conditions for workers. Food producers who display the RSPO certification label not only build trust and loyalty with consumers, but they also gain access to international markets like the EU, which enforces [sustainability requirements on palm oil](#) that is imported to or exported from the region.



Agents and Brokers

CERTIFICATED

BRCGS for Agents & Brokers

The Brand Reputation through Compliance Global Standard (BRCGS) was established in 1996 to create consistency in food safety standards around the globe and across supply chains.

The [BRCGS Agents and Brokers Certification](#) is the only standard recognized by the [Global Food Safety Initiative](#) that's designed for agents and brokers in the food supply chain. Its requirements ensure product safety, authenticity, quality, and legality for businesses that buy, sell or facilitate the trade of food and other consumer products. Certified products must be traceable throughout the supply chain, and certified businesses must conduct thorough hazard and risk assessments for the products in which they trade.

BRCGS Agents and Brokers Certification is recognized around the globe, helping certified businesses meet legal requirements and demonstrating their commitment to food safety. [Research](#) has demonstrated that businesses that follow BRCGS standards not only improve the safety of their food products but also experience increased sales, new customer acquisition, and access to larger markets.



Benefits of Sustainability Certifications for Food Producers

Sustainability certifications showcase brands' commitment to the highest standards of stewardship, ethics, and food safety. By providing third-party verification of such claims, certifications support companies' efforts to meet a variety of legal requirements and can also be essential keys to expanded markets. Certified businesses benefit from enhanced supply chain transparency, allowing them to track their products from source to consumer with confidence, minimizing the risk of fraud, contamination, and resulting penalties and consumer mistrust.

Sustainability certifications are more than just labels; they represent a commitment to ethical business practices, environmental conservation, and social responsibility. For food producers, obtaining certification is an investment in long-term success and a more sustainable global food system. Red River Foods is dedicated to sourcing sustainable ingredients and supporting food producers in achieving certification. Partner with Red River Foods today to elevate your brand and help build a more responsible and reliable food industry.