



# Project Plan: Agricultural Production Standard Major Revision (Updated May 2024)

Fair Trade USA™

## Introduction

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Fair Trade USA™ has long been a driver of sustainable livelihoods, social responsibility, and community development through the application of robust and credible social and economic standards that support farms, fisheries, and factories in a transition towards improved social welfare and environmental sustainability. Since 1998, fair trade producers in more than 60 countries have earned over \$1 billion in Community Development Funds, which they have used to address their communities' greatest needs: often clean water, education, healthcare, and environmental protection.

A cornerstone to this success has been Fair Trade USA's Agricultural Production Standard (APS), which defines the requirements for agricultural producers or groups of producers to obtain Fair Trade USA certification. This document summarizes the objectives, project activities, and decision-making process for the Major Revision of the APS. This project will be carried out according to Fair Trade USA's [Standards Development & Revision Procedure](#) and the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems.

## Scope

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The APS applies to agricultural production systems worldwide that produce and sell Fair Trade Certified™ commodities. The scope of a Certificate can cover a single entity (for instance a farm) or a group of entities, which could be of mixed sizes and/or owned and controlled by multiple parties, such as a cooperative collectively owned by multiple small producers, or an exporter buying from independent farms.

This project will directly affect our APS 1.2.0, in addition to all guidance and policies associated with the standard. As part of the Major Revision described in this document, we will be updating all binding and guidance documents regarding compliance with the APS. All Certificate Holders certified against the APS and associated brand partners will be directly involved in this process, as well as representatives from various agricultural industries and other key stakeholders, including but not limited to workers, traders, non-profit organizations, academics, and governmental institutions.



## Background and Rationale

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Since its inception, the fair trade movement has opened the doors of economic progress for millions of producers. Within the global community of voluntary sustainability systems, Fair Trade USA has become known as a consistent advocate for expansion into underserved markets. By continually innovating its own approach, Fair Trade USA has stretched the coverage of the movement's umbrella over an increasingly broad and diverse group of workers, farmers, and fishers that were previously excluded from the benefits of fair trade.

Despite these advances and innovations, Fair Trade Certified products continue to represent a miniscule fraction of total global production. To expand Fair Trade USA's impact in global agriculture from niche to norm, our organization is leveraging stakeholder feedback to create a more attractive value proposition to producers and market partners, streamline the certification, and improve the quality of life for farmers and agricultural workers.

Fair Trade USA will implement select innovations throughout our entire Agriculture Program and codify them through the APS Major Revision process.

Additionally, it is considered best practice in standards-setting and certification to conduct a standard Major Revision at least every five years to ensure that an organization's standards are up-to-date and drive desired impact. Fair Trade USA's [Standards Development & Revision Procedure](#) reflects this best practice and prompts this Major Revision of the APS (first published in 2017).

## Intended Outcomes of the Standard

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The APS takes a stepwise approach to improving the livelihoods of farmers and workers by improving working conditions and supporting their economic development. Fair Trade Premium, Fair Trade Committees, and Needs Assessments are mechanisms by which farmers and workers are empowered to identify and address their challenges. The requirements of the APS aim to improve working conditions and access to services and ensure fair wages for individuals who are part of the program. Furthermore, through requirements pertaining to environmental health and safety, the standard aims to ensure production practices do not harm workers and surrounding communities.

The primary goal of Fair Trade USA is to enable sustainable livelihoods for the workers, farmers, and fishermen who grow, catch, and produce the goods that consumers purchase. The APS focuses on social, economic, and environmental progress, as well as healthy working conditions that support farmers and workers around the world.

For more information, please see the current APS and [Fair Trade USA's Theory of Change](#), available on our website.

## Goals and Objectives of this Revision

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The main goals of this revision are:

1. Improve the program's value proposition for producers and workers by redefining the approach to continuous improvement to make the program more accessible and incentivize longer-term improvements.
2. Increase alignment with other Fair Trade USA standards, as well as other external sustainability standards to strengthen impact, drive efficiencies, and fully incorporate new Fair Trade piloted sub-programs (i.e., dairy, aquaculture) into the APS.

The specific objectives of the revision are:

1. Strengthen the APS's link to the desired impact outcomes by clearly defining the outcome indicators relevant to the main sections of the standard.
2. Define strong, clear minimum compliance requirements complemented by a performance scoring system.
3. Enhance efficiency of the Fair Trade USA Agriculture program by reorganizing and simplifying normative documentation.

## Project Activities

We initiated the process of updating the APS with the goal of publishing APS 2.0 at the end of 2023. Outlined below are the adjusted timelines for the activities planned for the course of the project's lifecycle. Phases highlighted in yellow are the primary opportunities for participation by external stakeholders.

Step	Timeline	Description
<b>Internal Review (Completed)</b>	Q1 – Q3 2022	Conduct a detailed internal review of the current APS, including processing learnings from monitoring, implementing, and evaluating the standard since 2017. During this process, we will identify key issues and strategic questions on the direction of the Agriculture program. This phase includes research on key issues and consultation with internal stakeholders, including Fair Trade USA staff and field consultants. Analysis of audit report findings, non-compliances, and benchmark results will help to identify key issue areas.
<b>Pre-Consultation (Completed)</b>	Q3 – Q4 2022	Preliminary consultation with external stakeholders to inform approach to key issues and development of the first draft. Consultation methods will include an email announcement that the revision is beginning, preliminary surveys, and targeted interviews with key thought-partners.
<b>Develop first public draft of revised standard (Partially completed)</b>	Q1 – Q3 2023	Begin incorporating changes into the APS 2.0.0 draft, including structure and content.

<p><b>Update on goals and objectives of the revision (<i>Completed</i>)</b></p>	<p>Q4 2023 - Q1 2024</p> <p>The goals and objectives of this revision have been updated to include a stronger, outcome driven approach.</p>
<p><b>Develop first draft of revised standard</b></p>	<p>Q2 – Q4 2024</p> <p>Around this time, we will be engaging with the Standards Committee to present the draft and solicit their input on key issues. Depending on their recommendation, stakeholder-engagement activities may be considered as well.</p>
<p><b>Public consultation</b></p>	<p>Q1-Q2 2025</p> <p>The APS 2.0.0 draft is targeted to be published for public consultation mid Q1 to Q2 of 2025. The consultation will be open for two months. This public consultation is part of Fair Trade USA’s commitment to integrate stakeholder input and to follow consultation best practices laid out in the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems.</p> <p>During the public consultation phase, all stakeholders have an opportunity to participate and provide feedback on the draft APS. Consultation methods include an online public comment form, email announcement, and additional direct outreach activities to ensure participation by a diverse group of stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Analysis and revision of standard</b></p>	<p>Q2-Q3 2025</p> <p>The Standards team reviews the comments received during the public consultation phase and uses this feedback to inform final changes to the APS. They make recommendations to the Standards Committee regarding the content of the final standard.</p> <p>A summary of feedback from the consultation phase and how the feedback was incorporated will be created. If needed, further consultation will be held to address any pending topics.</p>
<p><b>Approval and publication</b></p>	<p>Q4 2025</p> <p>Fair Trade USA’s Standards Committee and Executive Team will approve the APS 2.0.0. The final version will be published on our website, along with the summary of feedback and response and transition plan and effective date, and an announcement will be sent to all relevant partners and participating stakeholders.</p>

## Summary of Changes Since Last Major Revision

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The APS has gone through two minor revisions, which were published in early 2019 and mid-2021. Below is a summary of the changes made during these minor revisions.

Date of Revision	Description of Change
February, 2019	Minor language changes and grammatical errors were fixed throughout the Standard.
July, 2021	In this minor revision, language was clarified, additional guidance was included where needed, terms were modified to improve the implementation of the APS, and minor grammatical errors were fixed throughout the standard. Additionally, the scope of the APS was expanded to apply to dairy products in the United States.

## Decision-making Process

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Fair Trade USA's Standards and Implementation Resources Team works with the Standards Committee to review stakeholder feedback, discuss core strategic issues, and ensure all Fair Trade USA standards' content is consistent with the organization's vision, strategy, theory of change, and impact goals.

The Standards Committee is responsible for approving final standard content. Once the standard's content has been approved, the Executive Team will review adherence to Fair Trade USA's Standards Development and Revision Procedure. The Executive Team's final approval closes the standard revision process.

## How to Get Involved

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The Standards Team at Fair Trade USA is leading this project, and we encourage you to comment on this Project Plan, the standard development and revision process and/or goals by emailing us at [standards@fairtradeusa.org](mailto:standards@fairtradeusa.org).

During this project, Fair Trade USA will hold opportunities to comment on the draft standard. There will be at least one public comment period. Please inform us if you would like to receive notice when the public comment period is open. Summary of the comments received and Fair Trade USA responses will be publicly shared. A revision website will be created where all stakeholders will be able to access updates and associated supporting materials.