

AIJN Guidance Document on Sustainability Definitions and Standards

INTRODUCTION:

AIJN:

Since its creation in 1962, [AIJN](#) – the European Fruit Juices and Nectars Association – has been dedicated to defending and promoting the interests of the entire fruit juice and nectar supply chain, from raw material producers to the bottlers of juices and nectars. Its missions are to engage with EU institutions and relevant stakeholders to ensure a thriving and sustainable future for the fruit juice industry, but also **to drive the sector forward on common matters such as product quality and sustainability**.

This document:

This guidance document is part of [AIJN's European Sustainability Strategy](#), adopted in April 2025, which focusses on the **sustainable sourcing and processing of the fruits and vegetables used for the production of juices**.

This document is a resource for **any sustainability and/or quality managers, or any individual in charge of standards, procurement and compliance within a juice company**. The National juice associations, members of AIJN, are highly encouraged to share this document with their membership.

AIM AND USE OF THIS DOCUMENT:

Sustainability actions must be taken at the private, business and public levels. To support the European producers of juices and nectars, this guidance document aims is to **streamline** sustainability definitions and standards within the sector. This will become a **benchmark** for companies in, and importing to, Europe, whether they are at the start of their sustainability journey or already on their way.

European companies are required to comply with existing national and European legislation. This guidance document does not replace any obligations, nor does it promote a single methodology to incorporate sustainability within a company. It is **reference for the whole sector**, but **AIJN recommends its members to refer to it in order to mainstream sustainability and harmonise**

practices. As AIJN actively monitors changes in legislation and sustainability standardisation, this document will be updated accordingly.

Finally, this document is **additional and complementary to the work of the following platforms:** the **Sustainable Juice Covenant (SJC)** and the **Sustainable Juice Platform (SJP)**. These platforms are dedicated to promoting sustainability within the European fruit juice sector and have been active participants in the drafting of this document.

- **Should an AIJN member wish to explore common actions regarding sustainability, they are highly encouraged to contact the representatives of these platforms.**



SCOPE OF THIS DOCUMENT:

As stated above, this document focusses on the **sustainable sourcing of the fruits and vegetables used for the production of juices.**

The products in scope of this document are:

- ◆ The products defined within the EU Fruit Juice Directive¹ which include a.o. fruit juices, reconstituted fruit juices and fruit nectars.
- ◆ The raw materials and ingredients, including by-products, of agricultural origin used for the manufacturing of the above products which include a.o. restored natural fruit flavour (either from the name fruit) and for the specific production of nectars, sugar.
- ◆ Vegetable juices as defined by AIJN's internal guidelines²
- ◆ Smoothies as defined by the British Soft Drinks Association³

AIJN recognises that in line with the EU Fruit Juice Directive, **certain ingredients of non-agricultural origin and certain processing aids may be added** to the products above. These include, but are not limited to, vitamins, minerals, enzymes and, for nectars only, sweeteners. Sustainability guidelines for these products do not yet exist. While AIJN may introduce such guidelines in the future, it already encourages members to strive to source products as sustainably as possible.

¹ Directive 2001/112/EC, available [here](#). Modifications from the 2024 revision available [here](#).

² See definition within AIJN's 2021 Guideline for Vegetable Juices and Nectars, available to AIJN members or on demand.

³ BSDA "fruit juice pamphlet", 2016. Available [here](#).



SECTORAL COMMON DEFINITIONS REGARDING SUSTAINABILITY

As the term “sustainability” is used often and can have different understandings, the European juice sector has developed a common definition to tailor it for the industry. AIJN understands the following:

◆ Sustainability:

Sustainability is defined as “*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”⁴. For the juices and nectars industry, this is understood as **undertaking a responsible and sustainable production of the products in the scope of this guideline, while ensuring a viable and long-term industry**. This includes ensuring that human rights are respected across the value chain, and material resources are sourced and used in an environmentally responsible manner, by all actors within the value chain.

This definition is in line with the internationally used and recognised United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).⁵ They are an integral part of AIJN’s definition and approach to sustainability.



Furthermore, where permitted by the rules and governance of certain certification schemes, **AIJN recognises the use of mass balance as a sustainable methodology when calculating the sustainability of sourced products, as it is defined by the Sustainable Juice Covenant (SJC)**. This is because today, where batches of juice are consolidated and blended, it is not feasible/economically viable to segregate specific juice volumes across the supply chain. The mass balance approach is defined as the possibility “*for the physical mixing of batches, both from sustainable and non-sustainable sources. This allows to not physically segregate each received batch. However, the bookkeeping of sustainability characteristics needs to be kept separate, and the total mass sold as sustainable cannot exceed the total received sustainable mass*”. The minimum volume to achieve mass balance is set at 50%. It is up to each company’s discretion to go above. **For more information on mass balance definition, guideline, and calculation methodology, please contact the [SJC](#).**

◆ Sustainable sourcing of raw materials:

The sector considers fruits and vegetables as “sustainably sourced” when they are cultivated according to sustainable farming practices and when all upstream tiers are certified or verified through an independent 3rd party audit. These practices should use adequate and recognised standards which include environmental and social parameters. The standards AIJN recommends are detailed below.

⁴ United Nations Brundtland Commission, “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future”, available [here](#).

⁵ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): available [here](#)



For information, AIJN wishes to **avoid any unintended consequences on smallholding farmers** and so, clarifies that the recommendations within this document do not intend to marginalise farmers based on their landholding, access to finance or education, culture, location or any other characteristic.

◆ **Sustainable processing:**

The sector considers within the definition of “processing” the juicing and blending of fruits and/or vegetables into juices, nectars, smoothies or purées, as well as their subsequent bottling. These practices are considered sustainable if they use adequate and recognised standards which include environmental and social parameters. The standards AIJN recommends are detailed below.



SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS RECOMMENDED BY AIJN:

The standards, certifications and/or verifications that AIJN recommends below were chosen with certain criteria in mind. They have to take into account environmental as well as social considerations, have an international scope, and be widely used by actors within the juice sector, in order to provide the assurances for the minimum sustainability parameters to adopt.

Primary production / farming level:

The FSA: The Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform (SAI Platform) and its Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA):

Founded in 2002, the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform (SAI Platform) is a global non-profit organisation transforming the global food and beverage industry to source and produce more sustainably. By fostering industry alignment and driving collaborative action among its 190 members, SAI Platform pioneers practical solutions to shared challenges, ensuring a sustainable future for agriculture. One such collaborative endeavour, has led to the creation of the Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA). The strength of this verification scheme is that it can be applied to any crop, anywhere in the world, with any farming system. It is designed to specifically support farmers, in tracking and improving their sustainability performance and reduce the time and expenses spent on multiple assessments and assurances from their clients.



The FSA identifies 11 essential topics when addressing sustainability at farm level:

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| ◆ Farm Management & Community | ◆ Nutrient Management | ◆ Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Emissions |
| ◆ Plant Material Selection & Propagation | ◆ Crop Protection | ◆ Labour Conditions |
| ◆ Soil Management | ◆ Waste Management | ◆ Integrated Pest Management |
| | ◆ Water Management | |
| | ◆ Biodiversity | |

In line with AIJN's definitions of sustainability and sustainable sourcing, AIJN **recommends to its members to adhere to a minimum of FSA Bronze Level, or any other scheme benchmarked as FSA Bronze Level Equivalent*, with independent 3rd party verification that meets the FSA minimum verification requirements.** When possible, AIJN encourages its members to go beyond the minimum FSA Bronze level.

* The FSA operates a comprehensive benchmarking programme which provides a common reference point by which other sustainability schemes are assessed. The FSA Benchmarking Results can be publicly accessed on the [SAI Platform website](#). The results list over 200 different schemes, categorised by scheme type, crop, and region. A basket of standards that may be used to reach the desired level can also be found.



For information, new schemes can be benchmarked against the FSA at any time. **AIJN encourages companies to apply to SAI Platform to benchmark an alternative standard, either together as FSA users, or via the channels of the SJP and/or SJC.**

Fruit processing / blending / bottling level:

Reminder: as per AIJN's definition of sustainable processing, both environmental and social standards should be used and followed by companies.

Social processing standards:

Currently, internationally harmonised standards are more developed regarding the social aspects within industry value chains. A variety of internationally recognised, long-standing and widely used standards exist, and AIJN recommends the below.

SSCI: the Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative's Benchmark

Formerly known as the GSCP (Global Social Compliance Programme), it was renamed **SSCI** in 2021. The SSCI's mission is to provide clear guidance to buyers and suppliers on which third-party auditing, monitoring and certification schemes cover key sustainability requirements and apply relevant governance and verification. To achieve this, the SSCI developed a **social compliance benchmark** for schemes covering various activities, including those in the Manufacturing & Processing sector.

Each scheme is benchmarked against the **SSCI Benchmark Criteria**, which cover the following topics:

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| ◆ Management Systems | ◆ Health and Safety | ◆ No Discrimination, |
| ◆ Compliance with National Legislation | ◆ Freedom of Association and Effective Recognition of the Right to Collective Bargaining | Harassment or Abuse |
| ◆ No Forced, Bonded and Prison Labour | | ◆ Wages, Benefits and Terms of Employment |
| ◆ No Child Labour | ◆ Building and Fire Safety | ◆ Working Hours |
| | | ◆ Grievance Mechanisms |

In line with AIJN's definitions of sustainability and sustainable processing, AIJN **recommends to its members to use the standards benchmarked against the SSCI criteria when based on independent 3rd party auditing**. All schemes currently benchmarked, and those currently undergoing benchmarking, are available [here](#).

For information, the [Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit](#) (SMETA) 4 Pillar audit standard, as well as Amfori's BSCI standard ([Business Social Compliance Initiative](#)) are **currently undergoing SSCI's benchmarking and AIJN recommends them as well**.

On top of this, although it is currently not being benchmarked by SSCI, **AIJN can also recommend using the [SAI: Social Accountability International: Standard SA8000](#)**. This covers fair and decent



conditions for workers and also includes a certification scheme. It is included in the basket of standards of the Sustainable Juice Covenant (SJC).

Environmental processing standards:

Regarding environmental standards, **as they are still in development, no long-standing harmonised or benchmarked set of standards exist yet**. Nonetheless, AIJN lists below some of the internationally recognised standards available today:

- ◆ [ISO Standard 14001](#) on Environmental management systems. Soon to be replaced by ISO/DIS 14001.
- ◆ [ISO Standard 14044](#) on Environmental management, life cycle assessment.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

In this section, AIJN shares information on relevant initiatives and platforms for the sector, to further support members and to further drive sustainability.

For instance, AIJN would like to share that the European Brands Association – AIM – sponsors the platform **AIM-Progress** which is global forum comprised of leading fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies and suppliers collaborating on responsible sourcing.

- ◆ One of their focus areas is “Mutual recognition, convergence and sharing”, meaning that the platform aims to share and converge practices between suppliers and brands. One of these tools to do so is their **public methodology for the mutual recognition of audits between companies**. Publicly available [here](#), this methodology aims to reduce the number and the cost of audits.
- ◆ Furthermore, AIM-Progress has developed its own **AIM-Progress Responsible Sourcing Journey (RSJ)**. It provides a blueprint and capability building guide to help member companies put in place a robust responsible sourcing program and accelerate the development and implementation of responsible environment and business ethics. It is accessible [here](#).

Finally, for information, if a company wishes to be more involved and access additional tools, they would need to become members of AIM. Please feel free to contact AIJN for any additional information as well.

