



# GROUP CERTIFICATION FOR PESTICIDE-FREE AGRICULTURE & FOODS



## What?

- ✓ A certification to guarantee that the crops produced by a Group of producers are cultivated, processed, and handled without the use of synthetic chemical pesticides, are not contaminated with any unwanted chemicals, and are GMO-free.
- ✓ It is based on the Internal Control System (ICS) for pesticide-free agriculture and foods operated by the Group/NGO/Development Agency (DA), which ensures that 1) all the farmers enrolled in the Group voluntarily followed pesticide-free production and storage practices and 2) aggregation, storage, processing and handling were undertaken by the Group/NGO/DA without the use or contamination of pesticides and unwanted chemicals, and commingling with conventional products.
- ✓ Group Certification is offered by N+3F after verifying the effective implementation of the ICS run by the Group/NGO/DA.

## Why?

To access a growing market for pesticide-free foods, both domestic and international.

## Who can avail?

Any NGO. Farmers' Organisations of various types (Cooperatives, FPOs, etc.) and DA which have been working with a group of farmers practicing any kind of pesticide-free agriculture like Non-pesticidal Management of Agriculture (NPM), organic agriculture, natural farming, etc., or default pesticide-free agriculture.

## Advantages

- ▶ **Lower cost:** The cost of certification is considerably lower than other certification options.
- ▶ **Sufficient volumes:** Group certification offers the necessary volumes of pesticide-free foods sought out by buyers in a specific location, which in turn helps the small farmers get better prices.
- ▶ **Improve implementation rigour:** Having ICS aids in the improvement of the quality and performance of the Pesticide-Free Agriculture Programme.
- ▶ **Effective participation of the farming community:** ICS offers ample space for farmers and their groups to participate in its design and implementation and thereby express their leadership and contribute to the greater good.

# Prerequisites of Group Certification

- ✔ A **programme to promote pesticide-free agriculture** to ensure that all farmers and their groups understand the contextually relevant pesticide-free production methods and the applicable standards/protocols, and are given support to adopt them on their farms.
  - ✔ **Group of farmers:** There needs to be a Group or Farmers' Organisation constituted by farmers voluntarily practicing robust pesticide-free agriculture, hailing from a limited geographical area, and actively taking up collective interventions. The Group needs to have 500 or more farmers for effective operations, with 200 being the minimum.
  - ✔ **Operator:** The Group or Farmers' Organisation that is registered as a formal entity or the NGO promoting the group serves as the 'operator', an agency responsible for the implementation of a pesticide-free agriculture programme and ICS.
  - ✔ **Implementation of ICS by the Operator** by engaging a Programme Coordinator and field staff.
  - ✔ **Written procedures:** The Operator needs to have developed in partnership with the Group and have in writing i) the Package of Practices for Pesticide-Free Agriculture, ii) the risks associated with the focus crops, iii) the Internal Standards/Protocols to be followed to address the risks, iv) possible non-conformities and corrective actions, and v) how the ICS implementation will be organized in terms of staff, their roles, operational procedures in a crop season, systems for monitoring and documentation, etc.
  - ✔ **Centralized post-harvest/marketing operations:** The Operator shall run centralized aggregation, storage, cleaning, grading, processing, and marketing operations.
  - ✔ **Functional monitoring and documentation system:** There needs to be a proper data collection system for tracking farmers' actual practices and collective post-harvest activities by the Operator as well as proper maintenance of records for all the ICS activities.
  - ✔ **Internal inspection of all the enrolled farmers:** To be done in a systematic way every season by the Operator. Provisional Approved Farmers List and Non-conformities Report to be prepared before the inspection by the External Certification Body.
- ✔ **An internal inspection of the post-harvest operations and a quality audit of the ICS** shall be done before the inspection by the External Certification Body.

## Required Documents

- Pesticide-free agriculture Package of Practices adopted for the crops for which certification is sought.
- Internal Standards/Protocols followed during production and post-harvest operations.
- Sample internal inspection checklist.
- Provisional Approved Farmers List (PAFL) with details of the farmers who have followed pesticide-free agriculture practices, their location, cultivated area, and quantity that can be sourced from them.
- Non-Conformities (NC) report with details of deviated farmers, deviations, and corrective action.

## Fee

The fee for Group Certification will cover the fee for inspection, report preparation and certification fee, and the actual cost of travel, boarding, and lodging for external inspectors. If product testing is involved, the actual expenses for the same need to be borne by the Operator. It is to be noted that the per-farmer cost will come down significantly with an increase in the number of farmers in the Group.

**Besides Group Certification, N+3F also offers support for setting up ICS. Farmers' Organisations, NGOs and DAs interested in Group Certification can contact!**

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