

Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework Revision

Terms of Reference

Revision Background

The Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework is a holistic standard that leverages USDA Organic as a baseline and adds robust, integrated criteria for soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness. It was developed to address the urgent need for a regenerative approach to agriculture that meets the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, rural community resilience, and animal welfare, while also responding to increasing consumer demand for trustworthy and high-integrity claims.

Since the launch of the ROC Framework, the agricultural landscape has continued to evolve. Field-level implementation, auditor and certifier feedback, operator requests for deviations, and the broader market context—including shifting regulations, climate urgency, and growing competition in the sustainability certification space—have all highlighted areas where clarification, refinement, or revision of the ROC Framework is needed.

This revision process aims to ensure the ROC Framework remains credible, implementable, and aligned with emerging best practices, including those outlined by ISEAL, Codex Alimentarius, and other relevant bodies.

Trends Driving the Framework Revision

- **Stakeholder Implementation Feedback:** Multiple rounds of implementation have generated data, deviation requests, and suggestions from certification bodies, auditors, farmers, and brands. This feedback indicates where the framework may be overly prescriptive, unclear, or in need of strengthening.
- **Evolving Regulatory Landscape:** With new sustainability-related regulations in the EU, US, and other key markets (e.g., the EU Green Claims Directive and Empowering Consumers Directive), the ROC Framework must align with these requirements to ensure continued credibility and market access.
- **Scientific Advances:** New data and scientific literature about regenerative agriculture, ecosystem services, and resilience in the face of extreme weather events must be considered to maintain the standard's leadership role.
- **Credibility of Claims:** Stakeholders increasingly demand rigorous, auditable, and verifiable claims. The framework must support high-integrity

communications while remaining accessible and equitable to farmers, especially smallholders and Indigenous communities.

Key Objectives

The objectives of the ROC Framework revision are to:

1. **Clarify and streamline** requirements across the three pillars: Soil Health, Animal Welfare, and Social Fairness, improving consistency and auditability.
2. **Incorporate stakeholder feedback**, including common deviation requests and audit findings, to improve implementability and reduce ambiguity.
3. **Ensure alignment with international norms**, including ISEAL requirements and relevant regulatory frameworks.
4. **Strengthen the science basis** and outcome-orientation of key criteria, particularly related to soil health, animal welfare and social fairness.
5. **Enable scaling without compromising integrity**, ensuring that certification remains rigorous but adaptable across diverse geographies and production systems.
6. **Improve coherence and usability** through better structure, graphics, and examples, and review the structure of the Bronze/Silver/Gold tiering.

Expected Outputs

The revision will result in:

- A revised and publicly available ROC Framework, including:
 - Core criteria and tiered structure
 - Clarified definitions and glossary
- Supporting materials, including:
 - Updated Program Manual
 - Updated Operations Manual for Certification Bodies
 - Audit checklists and guidance for interpretation

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is central to the revision process. It will involve:

- **Internal and External Rules Committees**, providing technical and strategic review at key milestones
- **Public consultations** through surveys, workshops, and webinars
- **Targeted interviews and focus groups** with key user groups (farmers, CBs, brands, auditors, NGOs)
- Engagement with specific topics (e.g., tropical systems, pasture-based livestock, certification in the Global South)

Revision Timeline and Process

The process is structured into nine key steps (July 2025 – December 2026):

1. **Planning & Scoping** (July 2025): Define scope, assemble team, map gaps and opportunities.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement** (Aug–Sept 2025): Outreach to collect early input and confirm revision priorities.
3. **Gap Analysis** (Sept–Oct 2025): Internal and expert analysis of feedback, deviation trends, ISEAL gaps.
4. **Drafting Revisions** (Oct–Nov 2025): Draft revised content and align with implementation realities.
5. **Consultation & Feedback** (Nov–Jan 2026): Public consultation on the proposed draft.
6. **Review & Revision** (Jan 2026–Mar 2026): Integrate feedback, final revisions.
7. **Approval** (April–Jun 2026): Final review and approval by the Rules Committees and ROA Board.
8. **Implementation** (Starting Jun 2026): Communication of timelines and steps to train certification bodies, release updated manuals and tools.

Governance and Roles

- **Internal Rules Committee (IRC)**: Provides internal oversight and ensures alignment with ROA strategy.
- **Executive Sponsor**: Ensures strategic alignment serves as an escalation body for key decisions.
- **External Subcommittees**: Provide pillar-specific support by drafting relevant sections, offering in-depth expertise, and assisting the IRC in reviewing critical and high-impact changes related to specific pillars. Validate technical changes and review standards

Further Information

For more information on the ROC Framework revision process, please contact:
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