

ROC™ Framework Revision

Draft for public consultation

This draft was created based on the Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework version 4.1, considering feedback received during the ROC™ Framework Revision Initial Survey and a gap analysis conducted by the Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA), in accordance with its Standards Setting Procedures and Governance Bodies.

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Consultation Period ends May 15, 2026.



Foreword: ROC™ Framework Revision

Introduction

The Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC™) Framework defines the core requirements that underpin the Regenerative Organic Certified® program and serves as the foundation for the Regenerative Organic Alliance's mission to advance regenerative organic agriculture globally. Built on the integrated pillars of Soil Health and Land Management, Animal Welfare, and Social Fairness, the Framework establishes a shared and credible understanding of what regenerative organic agriculture means in practice.

Since its initial release, the ROC™ Framework has been implemented across diverse geographies, production systems, and supply chains. Through this implementation, as well as through evolving scientific knowledge, regulatory developments, market expectations, and stakeholder feedback, opportunities have emerged to strengthen clarity, consistency, and applicability while preserving the program's ambition and integrity. This draft reflects the next step in that evolution and is being released for public consultation to ensure the Framework remains robust, relevant, and fit for purpose.

Public consultation process

Public consultation is a central element of the ROC™ Framework Revision and reflects the Regenerative Organic Alliance's commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and stakeholder engagement. The consultation provides an opportunity for interested parties to review the proposed revisions and contribute insights based on practical experience, technical expertise, and regional or sector-specific perspectives.

The public consultation will open in February 2026, following the publication of this draft. Stakeholders will be invited to submit feedback through structured surveys and facilitated discussion mechanisms designed to capture both general comments and detailed, technical input.

Engagement is encouraged from farmers and ranchers, certification bodies, brands, civil society organizations, researchers, policymakers, auditors, and other stakeholders committed to advancing regenerative organic agriculture. All feedback received during the consultation period will be reviewed and considered as part of the finalization process, in accordance with ROA's standard-setting procedures, before the revised Framework is approved and published.

Thank you very much for your support on reading this document and for sharing your valuable feedback.

For any inquiries or questions regarding the ROC™ Framework Revision, please contact standards@regenorganic.org. Updates and information regarding the ROC™ Framework Revision can be found at <https://regenorganic.org/roc-framework-revision/>.

Table of Contents

Foreword: ROC™ Framework Revision	2
I. Introduction	4
a. Program Management	5
b. Framework Scope, Objectives, and Terms and Definitions	5
i. Scope	5
ii. Objectives.....	6
iii. ROC™ Framework Terms and Definitions	6
II. Leveraging & Advancing Existing Standards.....	7
a. Baseline Requirement: USDA Organic or International Equivalent	7
b. Other Applicable Certifications	7
III. Certification Scope & Structure	8
a. Scope	8
b. Structure.....	8
c. Levels of Regenerative Organic Certified®	8
d. Operation size definitions	9
IV. SoilHealth&LandManagement	10
Standards for Soil Health & LandManagement.....	10
V. Animal Welfare	20
Standards for Animal Welfare.....	20
VI. Farmer & Worker Fairness.....	31
Standards for Farmer and Worker Fairness	31
VII. Appendix.....	47
A-1 Glossary of Key Terms: Please refer to the Terms & Definitions main document.....	47
A-2. Living Wage Calculation and Definitions	47

I. Introduction

As agricultural practices continue to evolve, it is imperative that approaches to land management and associated processes are focused on contributing to the health of ecosystems, including human communities. Regenerative Organic Certified® builds upon and furthers the near 100-year legacy of organic movement visionaries like J. I. Rodale, Lady Eve Balfour, Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Sir Albert Howard, and the knowledge of generations of diverse, holistic producers—including native and Indigenous Peoples—that they channeled for inspiration and direction.

The goal of Regenerative Organic Certified® is to promote holistic agriculture practices in an all-encompassing certification that:

- Increases soil organic matter over time and sequesters carbon below and above ground, which could be a tool to mitigate climate change;
- Improves animal welfare; and
- Provides economic stability and fairness for farmers, ranchers, and workers.

Regenerative Organic Certified® consists of three pillars: Soil Health & Land Management, Animal Welfare, and Farmer & Worker Fairness. Regenerative Organic Certified® has three levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each requires a different number and scope of regenerative organic practices used. See Section III Certification Scope & Structure for a full description.

Regenerative practices are described in the ROA Terms & Definitions document, referenced in Appendix A-1. These include important practices and definitions that are referred to and built upon in the guidelines for each module. For chemical and transitional producers, familiarity with these practices and definitions can serve as the first step in incorporating regenerative practices into their operation prior to officially applying for Regenerative Organic Certified®.

This document includes an overview of the Regenerative Organic Certified® program and the formal criteria required to earn Regenerative Organic Certified®. This document is applicable to farming and livestock operations, transportation, slaughter, and certain processing facilities that produce food, fiber and botanicals. The complete requirements and certification rules for the Regenerative Organic Certified® program, including how compliance against the ROC™ Framework shall be assessed, are described in the Governing Documents. All governing documents, forms, worksheets, and other certification resources can be found at RegenOrganic.org/Resources.

a. Program Management

The Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA), a multi-stakeholder nonprofit organization, is the scheme owner responsible for maintaining and advancing the Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework. The ROA oversees the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of the ROC program requirements and guidelines, ensuring they reflect best practices in regenerative organic agriculture, social fairness, and animal welfare. In addition, ROA provides oversight of the application of the ROC Framework by Certification Bodies and other participating organizations, ensuring consistency, integrity, and credibility throughout the certification process.

Review subcommittees for Regenerative Organic Certified® are comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders—including farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers; auditors; social and animal welfare non-governmental organizations; veterinarians with farm-animal expertise; agricultural economists; environmental non-governmental organizations; certification and standards experts and qualified trade organizations; as well as retailers, food companies, and brands that support regenerative practices. These subcommittees play a key role in supporting the development, review, and continuous improvement of the Regenerative Organic Certified® standards.

Support for farm operations: Operators seeking clarification or support in understanding and implementing the Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework can contact the Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA) directly. While responsibility for compliance rests with operators and Certification Bodies (CB), ROA may provide program-level guidance and is continuously strengthening its infrastructure, tools, and support services to better assist farmers and other stakeholders in navigating ROC requirements. These efforts are intended to improve accessibility, consistency of interpretation, and effective implementation of the ROC Framework across diverse production systems and regions.

b. Framework Scope, Objectives, and Terms and Definitions

This section defines the scope, objectives, and key terms applicable to the Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework. It establishes the intended application, purpose, and standardized terminology used throughout this document.

i. Scope

This document defines the requirements for the Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework. It applies to all agricultural and processing operations seeking certification under the ROC program, including the production of food, fiber, and botanicals. This includes farming, ranching, livestock operations, transportation, slaughter, and certain processing facilities.

The ROC Framework is designed for global application and may be used by operations of varying sizes and scales that align with regenerative organic principles. Certification Bodies implementing the ROC Framework shall ensure that all requirements are applied consistently and that certification decisions are impartial, credible, and transparent.

All levels of Regenerative Organic Certified® require producers to be in compliance with local, provincial/state and national laws for animal welfare, labor rights, and land management. In addition, USDA organic requirements (or their international equivalents) are a baseline for Regenerative Organic Certified®; therefore, producers must comply with all geographically-appropriate organic certification requirements. No provision of this Framework or any element of the Regenerative Organic Certified® program shall be read or applied in a manner that is inconsistent with NOP requirements or policies. The highest requirement, whether local law or Regenerative Organic Certified®, applies for each of the sections in the standard.

The scope of this document also extends to the development, maintenance, and continual improvement of ROC criteria through collaboration with external reviewers, advisory groups, and other stakeholders.

ii. Objectives

The objectives of the ROC Framework are to:

- a) establish a clear, measurable, and credible standard for regenerative organic production;
- b) advance soil health, ecological restoration, and biodiversity;
- c) ensure fair and safe working conditions for farmers and workers;
- d) promote high standards of animal welfare;
- e) provide consistency, transparency, and accountability across certification bodies; and
- f) encourage continuous improvement and innovation in regenerative organic practices.

iii. ROC™ Framework Terms and Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

Where appropriate, terminology aligns with ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

- Shall — indicates a requirement; compliance is mandatory.
- Should — indicates a recommendation; compliance is advised but not mandatory.
- May — indicates permission or an allowed option.
- Can — indicates a statement of possibility or capability.
- Criterion (plural: Criteria) — a measurable element used to assess compliance with ROC requirements.
- Certification Body (CB) — an accredited organization authorized to conduct ROC audits and issue certifications.
- ROC-Approved Entity — any operation or contractor that has met ROC certification requirements for one or more program pillars.
- Pillar — one of the three core areas of ROC: Soil Health and Land Management, Animal Welfare, and Farmer and Worker Fairness.

Additional definitions are provided in the ROC Terms & Definitions main document.

II. Leveraging & Advancing Existing Standards

a. Baseline Requirement: USDA Organic or International Equivalent

To achieve Regenerative Organic Certified[®], an entity must first hold USDA organic certification or an international equivalent formally recognized by the National Organic Program (NOP).¹ Regenerative Organic Certified[®] adds criteria and builds off the NOP and equivalent standards.

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) maintains formal equivalency agreements with several international organic standards, allowing products certified under those systems to be recognized as meeting USDA Organic requirements. These equivalency arrangements are established to ensure that the organic certification systems in participating countries provide the same level of assurance and oversight as the NOP. Examples of such agreements include the European Union Organic Program, the Canadian Organic Regime, the Japanese Agricultural Standards (JAS) for Organic Products, and the Republic of Korea's Organic Regulations. Under these agreements, products certified to the standards of these programs may be accepted as equivalent to USDA Organic, provided they meet specific terms outlined in each bilateral arrangement. This framework allows international operations to demonstrate compliance with organic principles recognized by the NOP and, therefore, meet the baseline requirement for pursuing Regenerative Organic Certified[®].

Operations will not be eligible for Regenerative Organic Certified[®] at any level until they achieve USDA Organic certification or an equivalent certification.

b. Other Applicable Certifications

Regenerative Organic Certified[®] recognizes the strong work already conducted by existing standard bodies. The objective behind Regenerative Organic Certified[®] is to collaborate with and build upon existing certifications to avoid duplicative audits and burdensome paperwork.

Producers can demonstrate compliance with Regenerative Organic Certified[®] criteria by leveraging certifications they've already earned. A full list of Regenerative Organic Certified[®] criteria met by existing certifications can be found in the "Required Baseline Certifications and Equivalency Assessment" at [RegenOrganic.org/Resources](https://regenorganic.org/resources). Producers will need third-party verification of any required Regenerative Organic Certified[®] standards not met by their existing certification.

¹ As formally determined by NOP pursuant to a trade arrangement entered into with NOP. Criteria for international equivalent includes only those with which the USDA currently has a trade agreement.

III. Certification Scope & Structure

a. Scope

Regenerative Organic Certified® covers requirements for farming and ranching operations, transportation, slaughter, and certain processing facilities. Operations may be of any size. Regenerative Organic Certified® seeks to create change across a wide variety of farms & ranches to scale best practices to the widest audience possible.

b. Structure

Regenerative Organic Certified® is built on three pillars: Soil Health & Land Management, Animal Welfare, and Social Fairness, with required criteria for each. There are three levels of Regenerative Organic Certified®: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Bronze represents the beginning level, and Gold represents the highest achievable level in regenerative organic production. This tiered approach enables producers to adjust and adapt their practices over time and allows for continuous improvement. Annual recertification audits are required at all levels.

c. Levels of Regenerative Organic Certified®

- **Bronze:** To claim Regenerative Organic Certified® at the Bronze level, operations must meet the following criteria:

At least 10% of fiber-or food-producing land within the operation must be certified at initial certification. Alternatively, the certified portion may represent at least 10% of the operation's revenue derived from food or fiber production.

Claims about organic and regenerative organic can only be made about products specifically grown on land that is already certified organic.

- **Silver:** To claim Regenerative Organic Certified® at the Silver level, at least 50% of fiber-or food-producing land, or revenue from Regenerative Organic Certified® crops, within an operation must be certified at initial certification and must reach at least 75% by year five. Alternatively, the certified portion may represent at least 50% of the operation's revenue derived from food or fiber production. Claims about organic and regenerative organic can only be made about products produced from land that is already certified organic.
- **Gold:** To claim Regenerative Organic Certified® at the Gold level, 100% of fiber-or food-producing land of an operation must be certified, representing 100% of revenue derived from food or fiber production. XXXX Additionally, at least one or more major stages of the manufacturing process must be verified by an on-site audit to meet the Regenerative Organic Certified® Gold level.

The Soil Health & Land Management, Animal Welfare, and Farmer & Worker Fairness modules establish criteria for each level of certification. Criteria include practices that are:

- **Required practices (R):** Practices that operations must meet for an operation to be eligible for Regenerative Organic Certified® at the desired level. When a non-conformance for a Required practice is issued by the certifier,
- **Optional practices (O):** Practices that are encouraged for all, but not required, at a particular level. Optional Practices (O) shift to Required Practices (R) as a producer advances from Bronze to Silver to Gold levels.
- **Critical tolerances (CT):** Practices that require action on the part of producers and shall be reported immediately and addressed. If the Critical Tolerance (CT) is not addressed, the operation may lose Regenerative Organic Certified® status.

To achieve the desired level of Regenerative Organic Certified®, an operation must meet 100% of the required practices for that level. Participation at any level of Regenerative Organic Certified® requires that the entity is properly certified as organic by a NOP-accredited certifying body and complies with all NOP requirements.

d. Operation size definitions

- **Small-scale farms**
 - ≤5 permanent workers and no more than 25 total workers on-site at the management unit at any time (FT-USA, FFL)
- **Small-scale farm organizations**
 - More than 2/3 of member farms meet the criteria for small-scale
 - A maximum of 1/3 of member farms may have up to 2 times the parameters defined
- **Medium-scale farms**
 - 6-25 permanent workers and no more than 100 total workers on-site at the management unit at any time
- **Medium-scale farm organizations**
 - More than 2/3 of member farms meet the criteria for medium-scale
 - A maximum of 1/3 of member farms may have up to 2 times the parameters defined
- **Large-scale farms/farm organizations**
 - All other situations
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IV. Soil Health & Land Management

The Soil Health & Land Management module of Regenerative Organic Certified® seeks to facilitate the adoption of agricultural practices that build, rather than degrade, soils by increasing soil organic matter, biodiversity, and fertility.

Standards for Soil Health & Land Management

1. Base Requirements	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
1.1 Existing Certifications	Operation has proof of existing USDA Organic certification or recognized equivalent.	R	R	R
1.2 Regenerative Organic System Plan (ROSP)	<p>Operation has a documented Regenerative Organic System Plan (ROSP), which includes implementation and requirements related to all relevant pillars. Detailed requirements are outlined in the ROSP template provided at RegenOrganic.org/Resources. Required items include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tillage action plan – Soil lab test results & in-field soil testing results – Record of native flora and fauna on farm – Key performance indicators as required per pillar – Indigenous people’s land rights considerations and criteria. – Biodiversity management plan – All plans include a monitoring process with interventions that are monitored annually 	R	R Plan sets specific goals.	R Scope of the ROSP goes beyond the production unit to incorporate the surrounding ecosystem and neighboring operations.

<p>1.3 Water</p>	<p>Operations conserve and restore natural bodies of water, wetland, riparian areas, and associated habitats. Irrigation rights are legal.</p> <p>Operations shall have a water health management plan that is reviewed annually and updated at least every three years based on monitoring outcomes.</p> <p>The water health management plan shall be designed to monitor any changes in water health within the operation and monitor how these changes are managed.</p> <p>The water health management plan shall include a strategy for water reduction and conservation.</p> <p>Rainwater, municipal water, and groundwater consumption and quality should all be part of the water strategy plan.</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p> <p>Targets that are time-bound and measurable shall be set for water health outcomes within the production unit.</p>	<p>R</p> <p>Targets that are time-bound and measurable shall be set for water health outcomes both within the production unit, and beyond to include the surrounding ecosystems.</p>
<p>1.4 Deforestation & High Conservation Value Areas</p>	<p>From January 1, 2015 onward, operations have not cleared primary, untouched forest or old-growth secondary forests nor converted wetlands, peatlands, or protected grasslands into agricultural production.</p> <p>Establish High Conservation Value (HCV) areas through an assessment that identifies areas critical for biodiversity, environmental integrity, and/or cultural or social significance.</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p> <p>Measurable restoration activities are demonstrated. (Restoration of forests and other natural habitats)</p>
<p>1.5 Extractive Practices</p>	<p>Fracking, mining, and other extractive practices including initial exploration shall not be conducted on land within the operation. Exceptions exist in instances where the land owner does not own the mineral rights and therefore has no legal basis to prohibit a mineral owner to extract on their property; however, land owner shall not aid or get compensated for extraction of any kind taking place on the property. Land owners shall require mineral owners to minimize contamination</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>

	of the extraction site and surrounding area and to leave the extraction site in a condition that following a 36-month transition period the land may be used again for crop production after the exploration or extraction site is abandoned.			
2. Regenerative Practices	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
2.1 Vegetative Cover	<p>Operations shall aim to cover land with living vegetative cover year-round. Otherwise, maintenance of either dead/rolled/lightly incorporated crop residues or mulch is required when field preparation or planting is not underway. See requirements per level on the right.</p> <p>For perennial systems, either native vegetation or seeded mixes are maintained as ground cover between perennials.</p> <p><i>CT: No vegetative cover maintained.</i></p>	Maintains year-round vegetative cover on 25-50% of all cultivated land	Maintains year-round vegetative cover on 50-75% of all cultivated land	Maintains year-round vegetative cover on 75-100% of all cultivated land, and utilizes at least one nitrogen-fixing cover crop (i.e. legumes) in each full crop rotation of each arable field.
2.2 Crop Rotations	<p>Operations shall demonstrate the use of crop rotations or perennial systems</p> <p>A crop rotation should be designed to maximize living plant cover and minimize soil disturbance.</p> <p>Considering the local agricultural environment, operations can adopt intercropping, interseeding, and/or fallow agricultural land practices, where each of these will count as part of a crop rotation sequence.</p> <p>Intercropping or interseeding practices may be incorporated into a crop rotation sequence. They can be planted simultaneously or non-simultaneously, but they must, at some point, be actively growing concurrently with the main crop.</p>	Minimum of three crops rotated through the same area	Minimum of four crops rotated through the same area	Minimum of seven crops in each rotation, including at least one nitrogen-fixing cover crop

	<p>A fallow period practice intends to improve natural resources and the period is managed by the operations based on the existing local agriculture environment. Other forms of fallow, if managed for most of a calendar year, shall also be considered part of the crop rotation. Example: If the cover crop or green manure is not harvested for sale and/or is growing for most of a year (e.g.,183 days or more) it shall be considered fallow.</p> <p>The length of a crop rotation may be calculated in the number of years and cash crops harvested for sale or defined fallow period.</p> <p>Crops within the same plant family shall be separated in time by a minimum of two years with other crops growing in the field during that time.</p> <p>See requirements per level on the right.</p>			
<p>2.3 Minimal Soil Disturbance</p>	<p>The goal of Regenerative Organic Certified® is to reduce soil disturbance as much as possible. To achieve this goal, all tillage events shall be documented with an action plan to reduce the intensity of tillage over time.</p> <p>Soil disturbance shall only occur when necessary to accomplish one or more of the following objectives: incorporate crop residues and/or green manures into soil to feed soil micro-organisms; control weeds; prepare seed bed/planting; break up compacted soil; or develop drainage. Shallow cultivation tools must be used whenever possible.</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>Operation shall adopt a no-till system where soil disturbance only occurs at time of planting</p>
<p>2.4 Rotational Grazing</p>	<p>For commercial livestock operations: Operations practice intensive grazing in which animals, excluding bison and pigs, are used in high concentrations for brief periods of time. Pastures divided into paddocks, with animals moved regularly.</p> <p>Grazing plans must be developed by properly trained and knowledgeable personnel.</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>

	<p>Sensitive areas (e.g. habitat for declining & rare species, rare ecosystems, and natural wetlands & riparian areas) are not grazed in times of the year when it could have a negative impact on the ecosystem or on local wildlife.</p> <p>Operations that use grazing contractors must have a grazing plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Considers using species that support the local ecosystem and positively impact the soil health/quality – Monitors animal grazing records (i.e. recent grazing locations to account for disease/pest contamination) and cross contamination. 			
2.5 Soiless Practices	<p>Aquaponics, hydroponics, and other soilless practices are not eligible for Regenerative Organic Certified®. Exceptions are made for plants intended to grow in water, such as water cress and certain ornamentals. Container growing where crops are never integrated into a field for most a crop's life is not eligible for Regenerative Organic Certified®.</p>	R	R	R
2.6 Control of Invasive Species	<p>Operations must have a plan for identifying, monitoring, and managing the intentional, accidental or unintentional infestation of unwanted exotic or invasive plants and animals, including insects, that may spread to natural areas on and off the farm.</p>	R	R Plan sets specific goals.	R Plan sets specific goals and includes areas surrounding the production unit.
2.7 Protection for Animals, Endangered Plants, and Protected Habitats	<p>If not already prohibited by local or national laws, operation does not allow hunting, fishing, or gathering of rare or endangered animal species on the property, nor do they cause harm to the species' habitat.</p> <p>Operations must implement a buffer zone between the certified production area and any protected habitats, if present. Buffer zone size and type may be determined by a risk assessment.</p>	R	R	R Operations need to ensure that all farm animals have their five freedoms of animal welfare respected.

	<i>The legal hunting of non-endangered species is permitted.</i>			
<p>2.8 Regenerative Practices</p>	<p>Operations engage in additional regenerative practices to improve overall ecosystem health and productivity of operations. See requirements per level on the right.</p> <p>These practices are documented with timestamped photos, linked to GPS coordinates or an equivalent georeferencing system.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agroforestry – Anaerobic Digester – Forage & Biomass Planting – Forest Stand Improvement and Forest Slash Treatment – Grassed Waterways – Herbaceous Wind Barriers & Field Borders – Integrated Crops & Animals – Moisture-Sensing Technologies for Irrigation – Mulching – Perennial Planting – Pollinator Habitats, Insectary Strips, or Wildlife Habitat – Reclamation of Mined Land or Landslide Treatment – Reduction of Off-Farm Inputs & Recycling of On-Farm Biomass – Riparian Restoration – Silvopasture Establishment – Tree / Shrub Establishment – Vegetative Barriers – Water Conservation and/or Wetland Restoration – Windbreak & Shelter Belt Establishment <p>Producers may use the ROSP to propose site-specific regenerative practices successfully implemented in their location.</p>	<p>Three of the practices listed are used in operation</p>	<p>Four of the practices listed are used in operation</p>	<p>Five or more of the practices listed are used in operation</p>
<p>3. Compost,</p>	<p>Practice Description</p>	<p>Bronze</p>	<p>Silver</p>	<p>Gold</p>

Manure, and Fertilizers				
3.1 General	When used, the operation aims for self-sufficiency in compost and manures. If importing soil amendments to replace nutrients exported off-farm, they shall be from regionally available wastes and by-products. Effort must be made to ensure contaminants are not introduced on the farm through such recycled sources. The use of anaerobic liquid manure from CAFOs is not permitted.	R	R	R
3.2 Crop Nutrient Demand	Imported fertilizers are discouraged unless crop nutrient demand dictates. A comprehensive nutrient management plan or equivalent must be provided when nutrient use exceeds the recommended rate. In dryland areas during seasons with low rainfall, additional imported N & P are allowed, but must be documented.	R	R	R
4. Facilities	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
4.1 Wastewater	<p>Operation does not directly discharge untreated wastewater generated on farm into natural waterways or soil. Operation does not divert wastewater to bypass treatment. Industrial wastewater goes through primary and secondary treatment (onsite or offsite).</p> <p>Facilities producing more than 50 cubic meters of wastewater per day shall have evidence of compliance to the prevailing authority.</p> <p><i>CT: Leaking wastewater pipes; wastewater is not prevented from overflowing outside the proper effluent streams in the case of rain.</i></p> <p><i>CT: Lack of description and schematic diagram of onsite wastewater treatment system.</i></p>	R	R	R
4.2 Waste	The goal of Regenerative Organic Certified® is to minimize waste whenever possible.	R	Waste management systems are in	Waste management systems include

	<p>Operation does not illegally dump, bury, or burn waste. Operation documents that any hazardous waste is identified, isolated, and properly disposed.</p> <p><i>CT: Non-disclosure of any and all onsite sources of air emissions.</i></p> <p><i>CT: No Restricted Substances List and/or lack of a program to ensure compliance with it.</i></p>		place and monitored to prevent air pollution and the contamination of soil and water.	surrounding areas beyond the production unit.
5. Use of Prohibited Substances	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.1 Synthetic Chemicals & Chemical Management	If used, organically approved pesticides that are highly toxic to pollinators, as defined by Xerces Society’s “Toxicity of Common Organic-Approved Pesticides to Bees” shall not be applied within 50-100 feet of a waterbody or applied when pollinators are in flight. They shall be applied at the lowest efficacious rate and all effort shall be taken to find alternative controls.	R	There must be a chemical management plan that is managed by knowledgeable personnel and is reviewed at least every three years.	There must be a chemical management plan that is managed by knowledgeable personnel and is reviewed at least every three years.
5.2 Quick-acting Fertilizer	Operation does not use quick-acting soluble fertilizers such as Chilean Nitrate.	R	R	R
5.3 Genetically Modified Inputs & Cloning	Operation does not use any genetically modified additives or processing aids such as fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, seeds, or crops derived from genetically modified sources, including emerging technologies that edit or regulate genes such as RNAi, CRISPR, and TALEN. Cloned animals are not eligible for Regenerative Organic Certified®.	R	R	R
6. Measurement	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
6.1 Soil Health Lab Test	Producers conduct Regenerative Organic Certified® Soil Health Lab Test in accordance with procedures laid out by an accredited organization, such as a university, lab, or private	R	R Producers shall have a documented soil	R Producers shall have a

<p><i>See Soil Sampling Guidelines for detailed instructions</i></p>	<p>organization with an expertise in analyzing soil health. Refer to the Regenerative Organic Certified® Soil Sampling Guidelines and appendices for specific guidance. Soil testing shall be done within the first year of certification, and then every three years thereafter.</p> <p>The same lab should be used for all testing to ensure consistency.</p>		<p>health plan that includes targeted outcomes for improving soil health. At a minimum, it must include indicators listed in the ROC Soil Sampling Guidelines. <i>Applicable to medium and large-scale operations only.</i></p>	<p>documented soil health plan that includes targeted outcomes for improving soil health. At a minimum, it must include indicators listed in the ROC Soil Sampling Guidelines. <i>Applicable to medium and large-scale operations only.</i></p>
<p>6.2 Soil Health In-Field Test <i>See Soil Sampling Guidelines for detailed instructions</i></p>	<p>Producers conduct soil health in-field tests and follow Regenerative Organic Certified® Soil Health In-Field Test instructions in the Soil Sampling Guidelines. Soil testing shall be done within the first year of certification., and then every audit thereafter.</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>
<p>6.3 Computer Models & Monitoring</p>	<p>Operators use digital modeling tools to estimate annual greenhouse gas emissions, removals, and trends in soil organic carbon. Tools must be appropriate for the operation type and based on recognized scientific methods. Operators document all inputs, assumptions, and results and review these annually with the auditor. Requirements scale by certification level:</p> <p>Bronze</p> <p>Operators use an approved computer-based tool to estimate emissions and removals and document the practices entered in the model.</p>	<p>O</p>	<p>O</p>	<p>R</p>

	<p>Silver</p> <p>Operators use an approved tool with site-specific data inputs, including soil test results, yields, livestock numbers, and input quantities, to estimate GHG fluxes and soil carbon trends. Operators review model assumptions and results with the auditor annually.</p> <p>Gold</p> <p>Operators use scientifically validated modeling systems incorporating measured soil health indicators, high-resolution field-level data, and updated regenerative methodologies. Modeled results must be supported by measured SOC/SOM trends and all assumptions, data sources, and results must be fully documented and submitted to the certifying body.</p>			
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V. Animal Welfare

The Animal Welfare module of Regenerative Organic Certified® ensures humane practices in the raising and handling of animals marketed with Regenerative Organic Certified® claims. Dairy operations must follow the dairy-specific animal welfare criteria in the following section. For operations without commercial animals, this module is not applicable and is considered met.

The standards below incorporate the Five Freedoms of animal welfare (freedom from hunger/thirst, discomfort, pain/injury/disease, fear/distress, and freedom to express normal behavior), as well as additional species-specific requirements. As stated in Section II, to receive Regenerative Organic Certified®, all requirements listed in this section must be met, and all products sold, labeled, or represented as regenerative organic must also comply with USDA organic regulations at 7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program. Additionally, any livestock or livestock products with organic and regenerative organic claims must comply with the USDA organic regulations, and operations must comply with all federal humane handling, transportation, and slaughter requirements, as outlined by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act of 1978.

Standards for Animal Welfare

1. Base Requirements	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
1.1 Existing Certifications	<p>All livestock products intended to be sold with a Regenerative Organic Certified® claim must have proof of existing USDA Organic certification or recognized equivalent for livestock.</p> <p>Operation has proof of existing animal welfare certification recognized under the Regenerative Organic Certified®, as applicable to the operation being certified.</p> <p>*Dairies are exempt from holding an existing animal welfare certification provided all applicable criteria within the dairy specific module are met and verified at Regenerative Organic Certified® audit. In countries where none of the recognized third-party animal welfare certifications are available; dairy operations shall only qualify for Bronze level certification, contingent upon full compliance with the Dairy Animal</p>	R*	R	R

	<p>Welfare and the Animal Welfare pillar.</p> <p>To be eligible for the Regenerative Organic Certified® program, livestock operations* are required to hold one of the baseline certifications listed in the “Required Baseline Certifications & Equivalency Assessment” document. The equivalency assessment represents the needed criteria to earn Regenerative Organic Certified® Bronze level. For Silver or Gold level, please refer to the full Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework.</p> <p>**Certified Humane laying hen operations must meet the Certified Humane standards for Seasonal Pasture Raised or Pasture Raised as outlined in Part 4: A & B of the Humane Farm Animal Care (February 1, 2018) Animal Care Standards for Egg Laying Hens. Laying hen operations that only meet the baseline requirements (no outdoor access) or Free-Range standards of the Certified Humane certification are not eligible for the Regenerative Organic Certified® program.</p>			
1.2 General	Operations have researched all applicable laws regarding animal welfare (general and species specific) and are in compliance with all local, provincial/state, and national laws.	R	R	R
1.3 Applicability	<p>Animal welfare requirements apply to commercial livestock operations. See specific requirements per level at right.</p> <p><i>CT: Egregious violations of the five freedoms of animal welfare and/or any abusive treatment of any animals on-site, commercial or non-commercial.</i></p>	Applicable to animals used for dairy, meat, or fiber production	Applicable to animals used for dairy, meat, or fiber production	Applicable to all animals on an operation, including those used for dairy, meat, or fiber production and farm operations (e.g. dogs used to control predators, horses used for herding, etc.)

<p>1.4 Prohibition of CAFO and Long-Term Confinement</p>	<p>Operation does not confine animals for 45 days or more within a 12-month period in an area where vegetation is not sustained, and animals do not have access to a managed pasture or vegetative ground cover. Days when animals are kept off pasture due to extreme climate events that could endanger their health or safety are not counted toward the 45-day limit and need to be clearly documented.</p> <p><i>Additional Guidance for the United States: For livestock operations in the United States. Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO), as defined by the EPA, is not allowed.</i></p>	R	R	R
<p>2. Nutrition and Water</p>	<p>Practice Description</p>	<p>Bronze</p>	<p>Silver</p>	<p>Gold</p>
<p>2.1 General</p>	<p>Feed and water must be distributed in such a way that livestock can eat and drink without undue competition. Animals have access to sufficient feed quantity to satisfy hunger & promote satiety. If applicable, feed is stored to maintain freshness and hygiene, avoiding mildew, mold, or contamination.</p>	R	R	R
<p>2.2 Water</p>	<p>All animals must have unrestricted access to drinking water. Temporary interruptions (e.g., during cleaning, handling) must not exceed 2 hours. Water must be free of contamination (e.g., feces, waste), no odor of stagnation or spoilage.</p> <p><i>CT: Limited fresh water access</i></p>	R	R	R
<p>2.3 Feed for Monogastrics</p>	<p>Monogastric feed comes from regenerative organic or certified organic sources. See requirements per level on the right.</p>	100% organic sources	>50% from regenerative organic sources; remainder organic	100% from regenerative organic sources
<p>2.4 Feed for Ruminants</p>	<p>Ruminant feed comes from regenerative organic or certified organic grass/forage/baleage/hay. See requirements per level on the right.</p>	>50% grass-fed; remainder from organic sources	>75% grass-fed; remainder from organic sources	100% grass-fed (including finishing)

	Supplementation for nutritional purposes using organically approved minerals, vitamins, and/or molasses is allowed.			
2.5 Forced Feeding	Operations do not force feed animals, unless life-saving veterinary intervention.	R	R	R
2.6 Malnutrition	Farming practices promote proper nutrition, avoiding malnutrition.	R	R	R
3. Environment and Shelter	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
3.1 General	<p>Environment is considerate of an animal’s welfare needs. Environment is designed to protect animals from physical and thermal discomfort, fear, distress, and allows them to perform natural behaviors conducive to good animal welfare.</p> <p>Selection of species and types of livestock are made with regard to suitability for site-specific conditions and resistance to prevalent diseases and pests. For meat chickens, breeds must be selected that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes and have the genetic growth potential of no more than .10 lbs. (45g) per day.</p>	R	R	R
3.2 Indoor Shelter	<p>Animals are provided with shelter adequate for their physical and behavioral needs. Shelter for animals and birds may be provided by natural features such as shade, trees, or by buildings. Housing may also be used as shelter but must allow animals to express natural behaviors. In extreme weather (extreme cold, heat, wind, or precipitation) there must be a means to feed and water animals in a sheltered environment.</p> <p>Tie-Stall Barns: Tie-stall barns are not permitted for permanent housing; see exceptions for Bronze.</p> <p>Bronze: Dairies are allowed a two-year period to transition to a free stall or complete pasture-based operation.</p>	R	R	R
3.3 Confinement	Operations shall not use permanent confinement practices that restrict normal animal movement or prevent the expression of natural behaviors. Livestock shall have continuous and open	R	R	R

access to pasture and shall live, eat, and rest outdoors for the majority of their lives, consistent with Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Animal Welfare standards.

Temporary confinement is permitted when necessary to protect animal health and welfare, ensure human safety, or prevent environmental degradation. Temporary confinement must be time-limited, restricted to the minimum duration necessary to address the identified risk, and shall not be used as a routine management practice.

Temporary confinement decisions may be made by the operation at the time of need and do not require prior approval from the Certification Body (CB) or ROA. However, all instances must be documented and available for verification during inspections. Repeated or extended confinement may be subject to additional review to ensure alignment with the intent of the ROC Framework. Allowable reasons for temporary confinement include, but are not limited to:

- Inclement or extreme weather events
- Environmental or soil protection concerns
- Animal health or biosecurity needs
- Short-term management activities (e.g., breeding, birthing, weaning, sorting, veterinary handling)

Management-related confinement must be event-specific and short-term and shall not be interpreted as permitting animals, including gestating females, to be confined indoors for extended periods or production cycles.

During temporary confinement, animals must be provided with sufficient space, shelter, feed, water, and bedding (as applicable) to maintain health and welfare.

Dairy Framework additional language:

	<p>Temporary close confinement via tying up or restraint (stanchions) that may be required for vaccination, veterinary procedures, weighing, washing, marking, milking, feeding <u>immediately</u> pre- or post-milking, or while awaiting transport, is permitted. This must be noted in the farm plan or recorded at the time of temporary confinement.</p> <p>For Silver-level dairies, the outlined forms of calf group housing in 3.3 criteria are not considered a type of restraint, so the time limit listed above does not apply.</p> <p>***For Silver-level dairies, the outlined forms of calf group housing in 3.3 criteria are not considered a type of restraint, so the time limit listed above does not apply.</p> <p>Individual Calf Hutches: Individual calf hutches are not permitted; see below applicability for each level: Bronze: Dairies are allowed a two-year transitional period to phase out individual hutches. Single animals born with no pen mates of similar size/age can be separated in a sub-pen in an existing group pen or a calf hutch immediately adjacent to the group pen for up to three weeks. Silver: Dairies must provide group pens for 3 to 8 calves for the entire calf-rearing operation. Single animals born with no pen mates of similar size/age can be separated in a sub-pen in an existing group pen or a calf hutch immediately adjacent to the group pen for up to three weeks. Gold: Heifer calves remain paired with the mother cow until fully weaned and remain with the herd on pasture.</p>			
<p>3.4 Light</p>	<p>Animals have exposure to natural light and are not exposed to artificial light for more than 16 hours per day. A minimum period of 8 hours of continuous darkness must be provided, unless located in geographies where there is less than 8 hours of darkness at night. Natural light must be sufficient indoors on sunny days, such that an inspector can read and write when all lights are turned off. In the case of hens, artificial light intensity is lowered gradually to encourage hens to move to perches or settle for the night.</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>	<p>R</p>

4. Handling & Management	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
4.1 General	Producers promote compassionate care and handling of animals. Daily inspections of animals occur.	R	R	R
4.2 Physical Modifications	<p>Operations shall not abuse animals or treat animals with cruelty and shall not use the practices listed below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-Beaking • Caponization • Cattle Wattling • Clipping, Grinding, or Filing of Teeth • Declawing/ Toe Clipping • Dehorning^ • Desnooding • Despurring • Disbudding^ • Dubbing • Ear Notching* • Forced Molting • Hot / Cold Branding • Mulesing • Pinioning • Prodding • Tail Docking of Cattle • Tail Docking of Sheep shorter than Distal End of Caudal Fold • Tusk Removal <p>^Must meet specific requirements detailed in Glossary of Key Terms, Appendix 1-A.</p> <p>*Permitted for hog operations</p> <p>Routine beak trimming/debeaking is prohibited in Regenerative Organic Certified® poultry operations should avoid the use of routine beak trimming/de-beaking.</p>	R	R	R

	<p>Poultry producers should use environmental interventions to reduce the incidence of injurious feather pecking, including, but not limited to early access to forage and range, mash feeding, providing areas of refuge for subordinate birds, and having matching housing conditions during pullet rearing and lay for laying hens.</p> <p>Infrared beak trimming of chicks immediately after hatch may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Hot or cold blade trimming is not a permitted method. Only infrared beak trimming is recommended at hatch and not to be applied beyond 10 days of age.</p>			
<p>4.3 Disposition of Culled Animals – Specific to Dairy Animal Welfare Criteria (NEW)</p>	<p>Only applies to dairy bull calves from dairy operations Animals cannot be sold to standard auctions. See requirements for each level.</p> <p>All other classes of dairy animals, including <u>cull cows</u>, that need to be treated, euthanized, or sent to slaughter are covered under the relevant sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria 4.1, 5.1, and all of sections 6, 7, & 8 regarding humane treatment, euthanasia, transport, slaughter/killing, and personnel training in the Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework and the Dairy Animal Welfare Criteria. 	<p>Dairy bull calves are sold to an operation that provides continuous access to pasture.</p>	<p>Dairy bull calves are sold to an operation providing continuous pasture access and raised to maturity.</p>	<p>Dairy bull calves are raised on site to maturity or sold to another Regenerative Organic Certified® farm to be raised to maturity.</p>
5. Health	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.1 General	<p>Treatment for sick, injured, or diseased animals is undertaken promptly at the first reasonable opportunity to alleviate any unnecessary pain or distress. Medical treatment must not be withheld from a sick animal in order to preserve certification status.</p> <p>Treatment is also undertaken for non-ambulatory livestock, even if the treatment causes the livestock to lose its certified status or to be humanely euthanized.</p> <p><i>CT: Animals are not treated effectively or promptly for injuries</i></p>	R	R	R

	<i>or sickness, or euthanized if necessary, using humane euthanasia methods as described in Euthanasia Section.</i>			
5.2 Vaccines, Antibiotics, & Growth Hormones	<p>Antibiotics may be used only when: Recommended by a veterinarian, or when other non-antibiotic treatments (homeopathic, herbal, or supportive care) are unavailable or ineffective.</p> <p>Offspring must not nurse from an animal undergoing an antibiotic treatment (until withdrawal periods have passed). Vaccines appropriate for the species and region must be optimized for prevention of disease.</p> <p>Growth hormones or non-therapeutic use of substances to induce heat are prohibited.</p>	R	R	R
6. Slaughter/Killing	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
6.1 General	<p>All slaughter/killing systems need to be designed and managed to ensure and prevent unnecessary or intentional distress or discomfort before slaughter.</p> <p>If slaughter does not occur on farm, approved Regenerative Organic Certified® third-party animal welfare audit records of the slaughter facility must be provided.</p>	R	R	R
6.2 Pre-slaughter	<p>Operations work to minimize the pre-slaughter handling of animals. This includes but is not limited to handling animals without abuse, ensuring animals have good traction on flooring and do not slip or fall during unloading and movement around the farm or plant, and have their view of the slaughter floor obscured as to avoid any unnecessary stress or discomfort.</p> <p>If slaughter does not occur on farm, approved Regenerative Organic Certified® third-party animal welfare audit records of the slaughter facility must be provided.</p>	R	R	R
6.3 Slaughter Methods	<p>Slaughter is performed using stunning methods that result in immediate insensitivity, such as a firearm shot to the brain or penetrative bolt stunning followed by bleeding. Pre-shackle, multi-step controlled-atmosphere stunning may be used in poultry.</p>	R	R	R

	If slaughter does not occur on farm, approved Regenerative Organic Certified® third-party animal welfare audit records of the slaughter facility must be provided.			
6.4 Euthanasia	<p>Animals experiencing pain or suffering from which they are unlikely to recover must be promptly euthanized on the farm in a manner that renders the animal immediately insensible to pain. Prohibited euthanasia practices include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suffocation – Manual blow to head by blunt instrument or any manual blunt force trauma – Use of equipment that crushes the neck (incl. killing pliers or Burdizzo clamps) <p><i>CT: Euthanizing in a way that causes unnecessary pain or suffering.</i></p>	R	R	R
7. Transportation	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
7.1 General	<p>Animal transport systems are designed and managed to ensure animals are not subjected to unnecessary distress or discomfort. Operations and handlers have emergency plans in place that address possible animal welfare problems that may arise during transport.</p> <p>If the producer does not control the transportation of animals off-farm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved Regenerative Organic Certified® third-party animal welfare audit records must be provided for the transport operator <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The producer must keep records of all off-farm transportation, including date of transport, number of animals transported and destination, type of vehicle and company used, and transport time. 	R	R	R
7.2 Transport Time	<p>Food and water must not be withdrawn for more than 12 hours prior to slaughter.</p> <p>Transportation time from loading of first animal to last animal</p>	R*	R	R

	<p>unloading must be less than 13 hours.* Exceptions apply for transportation of breeding stock when such livestock with desired genetics are not located within maximum transport time allowance.</p> <p>If the producer does not control the transportation of animals off-farm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved Regenerative Organic Certified® third-party animal welfare audit records must be provided for the transport operator <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The producer must keep records of all off-farm transportation, including date of transport, number of animals transported and destination, type of vehicle and company used, and transport time. <p>*For Bronze operations, transportation times greater than 13 hours are permitted.</p>			
8. Training & Personnel	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
8.1 Personnel	<p>Operations ensure that all employees working with animals are trained on basic measures of animal welfare and have the relevant and necessary skills to perform their duties. Producers are thoroughly trained, skilled, and competent in animal husbandry, animal transport, slaughter, and have a good working knowledge of their system and animals under their care.</p>	R	R	R

VI. Farmer & Worker Fairness

The scope of the Farmer & Worker Fairness module within Regenerative Organic Certified® includes guidelines for farmers and workers at the farm level. These requirements apply to all workers on a Regenerative Organic Certified® farm operation, regardless if only a portion of the operation is in scope for the Soil Health and Animal Welfare pillars.

Monitoring and enforcement should benefit and prioritize workers. Violations should not be ongoing indefinitely, and progress and plans must be documented. Emphasis should be on capacity building and continuous improvement to better the social and economic position of farmers and workers.

Standards for Farmer and Worker Fairness

1. Law and Code Compliance	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
1.1 Existing Certifications	<p>Operation has proof of existing social fairness certification recognized under Regenerative Organic Certified®, as applicable to the operation being certified.</p> <p>*For Bronze and Silver operations within the Global North, requirement for proof of existing certification is waived. All criteria within the Regenerative Organic Certified® social pillar must be met by undergoing a complete social audit with an approved Regenerative Organic Certified® certifier.</p>	R*	R*	R
1.2 Business License	Operations have a valid business license and/or building permit where required by law to operate.	R	R	R
1.3 Labor Laws, Legal, & International Conventions Compliance	<p>Operations shall comply with all applicable laws related to labor conditions, working conditions, health and safety, and terms of employee and are in compliance with all local, provincial/state, and national laws. Operation is in compliance with all Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining laws.</p> <p>Workers understand and are trained on their rights. Terms of employment are documented and communicated to</p>	R	R	R

	<p>workers in their local language and in a manner that is culturally appropriate and assures their understanding. Employment contracts are negotiated and executed in good faith and the operator honors any commitments made in a contract.</p> <p>The operator recognizes the right of all employees to negotiate their terms of employment, whether individually, as a group, or through democratically appointed representatives.</p> <p>Auditors are granted access to the entirety of requested audits. Operation shall not offer bribes to auditors.</p> <p><i>CT: Lack of proper, valid, up-to-date licenses and/or permits as required by law</i></p>			
1.4 Supply Chain Requirements	A Regenerative Organic Certified®-approved social certification must be attained at one or more major stages of manufacturing and processing.	O	O	R
2. Child Labor	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
2.1 Child Labor	With the exception of the operator's family members, no children below the lowest age of 15, legal age, or age of compulsory schooling are employed. Children under 18 do not perform work that jeopardizes health, safety, education, and emotional or physical development.	R	R	R
2.2 Family Members	If an operator's children or children of any employee, farmer, or worker work onsite, the operator must ensure that a child's employment does not interfere with his or her schooling, safety or physical development. Work performed should be light work, under the supervision of a parent, and never at night.	R	R	R
2.3 Work Restrictions for Children and Young Workers	Young workers under 18 do not perform work, that jeopardizes education and emotional or physical development. Young workers between the ages of 15-18 years old (including those residing on the farm and those of migrant workers) shall not engage in hazardous work that jeopardizes their health, or safety, such as heavy lifting, exposure to dangerous agriculture production activities, including exposure to	R	R	R

	chemicals/pesticides.			
3. Forced Labor & Hiring	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
3.1 Human Trafficking and Forced Labor	People are not forced to work or remain on premises against their will.	R	R	R
3.2 Hiring Practices	The operator has a transparent process in place for recruiting and hiring workers. Hiring practices are not deceptive and do not result in forced labor. Operator must not facilitate human trafficking.	R	R	R
3.2.2 Remediation Policy (new requirement)	Operations must have documented remediation policies and procedures to address any identified cases of child labor, forced labor, or human trafficking. These policies must prioritize the protection, safety, and rights of affected individuals, including immediate removal from harmful situations, access to appropriate support services, and steps to prevent recurrence. Remediation procedures should define roles and responsibilities, outline engagement with relevant authorities or competent organizations when necessary, and ensure that corrective actions do not result in further harm or loss of income for affected workers or their families. <i>Not applicable to small-scale operations or smallholders.</i>	R	R	R
3.3 Contractors <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i>	Due to many factors contributing to the challenge of labor shortages that are beyond the control of even the most well-intentioned Operator, the use of contracted labor providers may be inevitable. These criteria intend to ensure that all workers connected to a Regenerative Organic Certified® site get access to fair working conditions, regardless of whether they are hired directly by the Operator or through a contracted labor provider.	R	R	R

	<p>The Operator must have a process in place for ensuring that all contracted labor providers meet legal requirements by local labor laws and that labor providers comply with the Regenerative Organic Certified® Social Standards.</p> <p>All workers, whether employed by the Operator or a contracted labor provider must receive, at a minimum, legally required benefits.</p> <p>The Operator formally recognizes the Employer Pays Principle and requires that all contracted labor providers demonstrate they also formally recognize the Employer Pays Principle. This formal acknowledgment must be documented in some form.</p> <p>All standards apply to all employees whether hired directly or through a contractor, including access to a grievance process for any complaints, the right to be free of forced labor, and no unfair deductions from paycheck. The use of recruiters and subcontractors is allowed only when employer can document need.</p> <p>See Guidance document for more details regarding use of labor contractors.</p>			
4. Harassment, Abuse, & Disciplinary Practices	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
4.1 No Harassment or Abuse	<p>No harassment or abuse including, but not limited to: physical, verbal, or psychological abuse such as threats, foul language towards workers, or intimidation; demoralizing or overly harsh treatment or disciplinary action; monetary fines; or opposite sex pat-down. No cases of sexual harassment experienced before, during, or after end of employment relationship.</p>	R	R	R

	Management must take action to discipline personnel who engage in any such instances of harassment or abuse.			
4.2 Disciplinary Procedure	All operators must have a documented disciplinary procedure, with an escalation process before dismissal is considered. No worker shall be subject to the procedure without a justifiable cause. Where contextually appropriate, workers are allowed to have a representative with them at disciplinary meetings. This requirement does not conflict with “at will” employment laws in the USA.	R	R	R
5. Discrimination	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
5.1 Discrimination	Operations do not discriminate in any aspect of the employment relationship. This can include but is not limited to recruitment, hiring, compensation, benefits, work assignments, access to training, advancement, discipline, termination, or retirement.	R	R	R
5.2 Equal Pay	Operators must have a documented commitment to the principle of equal pay for equal work for all workers. Section 5.2 criteria may or may not apply to immediate family members as defined in Terms & Definitions, depending on local legislation. The operator must share this commitment with the entire workforce.	R	R	R
6. Freedom of Association & Collective Bargaining	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
6.1 Protection Against Retaliation <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i>	The operation has a Freedom of Association policy in place. Operation does not interfere with and is seen to welcome free association and collective bargaining. Representatives of worker organizations may access workers within reasonable limits (such as pre-scheduled times etc.) Operators do not interfere with worker efforts to assemble, strike, or hold elections in an independent manner. This includes interference or prevention of strikes; employer	R	R	R

	<p>proposed or initiated worker elections; worker elections conducted or facilitated by management; mandatory worker participation in elections; prevention of worker organizations from presenting to workers; prevention of trade union representatives from regular and reasonably free access to workers during workers' free time.</p> <p>Operation does not threaten or intimidate workers directly or indirectly with termination, pay cuts, loss of benefits, or plant closure, and does not coerce workers with promises to keep them from freely participating in union or other activities.</p>			
<p>6.2 Employer Instituted Unions <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i></p>	<p>Employers do not institute unions or alternative associations used by employers to hinder union organization. Employers do not utilize protection contracts.</p>	R	R	R
<p>6.3 Precarious Employment <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i></p>	<p>Operation does not utilize atypical employment contracts in order to avoid workers' full or partial enjoyment of social benefits and statutory entitlements, or as a way of limiting workers' ability to freely associate and collectively bargain. Section 6.3 criteria may or may not apply to immediate family members as defined in Key Terms, depending on local legislation.</p>	R	R	R
<p>7. Employment Relationship</p>	<p>Practice Description</p>	Bronze	Silver	Gold
<p>7.1 Worker Voice</p>	<p>All operations have a documented system to listen and address worker complaints in a transparent way. In large operations workers are trained in worker rights and a grievance procedure is provided in a culturally appropriate way (i.e. language-accessible as well as using interactive materials and not exclusively posted). An external workers' association or workers' right group and/or an internal independently- elected workers committee is present for and is involved in all or part of the training. An independently-elected workers committee must</p>	R	R	R

	<p>also be involved in grievance investigation and resolution.</p> <p>Workers have a safe, anonymous, and accessible channel for communicating feedback to management.</p>			
<p>7.2 Worker Independence & Empowerment <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i></p>	<p>If workers would like to form an association, they are free to do so.</p> <p>If desired, workers hold independent, democratic elections to form worker associations for contract negotiations involving pay and conditions on farm/ranch and to create committees to address relevant ongoing challenges and opportunities, for example premium fund administration and health & safety.</p>	R	R	R
<p>7.3 Employment Contracts & Terms <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i></p>	<p>Employment contracts are negotiated and executed in good faith and the operator honors any commitments made in a contract. The operator recognizes the right of all employees to negotiate their terms of employment, whether individually, as a group or through democratically appointed representatives. The operator takes sole responsibility for fees associated with employment of workers.</p> <p>The use of agency supplied labor is permitted, but the increased risks around this must be recognized by the operator, and reasonable steps must be taken to seek assurance, including collaboration within the area/sector.</p> <p>Operators must have a documented process for onboarding labor providers whereby expectations associated with legal compliance and compliance with this standard are communicated.</p> <p>The operator must ensure that auditors have access to workers, worker files, payroll, and timecard records for all workers, including workers hired through labor contractors. It is recommended that Operators discuss this access with contracted labor providers in advance of the audit. If labor contractors deny access to workers or request records, this will result in non-conformance.</p>	R	R	R

<p>7.4 Interns and Apprentices <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i></p>	<p>Operators may use internships and apprenticeships, including for youth, in the spirit in which these have been established i.e., to educate, to develop, and to create opportunity but avoid any possibility of the arrangement being exploitative. All interns and apprentices must have a clear and comprehensive contracts agreement, their rights explained to them clearly in writing, and a fair stipend paid to cover living expenses.</p>	R	R	R
<p>8. Wages & Benefits</p>	<p>Practice Description</p>	Bronze	Silver	Gold
<p>8.1 Wages</p>	<p>Operations pay wages and benefits in accordance with the law with any deductions also being in accordance with the law and formally agreed in advance with the worker concerned. Operators must not pay wages to anyone other than the employed individual. At least the minimum wage (national or local) and/or the collective bargaining agreement wage must be paid, whichever is higher. <i>CT: Illegal or excessive legal deductions (including charges/deposits for tools, equipment, uniforms, etc.).</i> <i>CT: Pay below minimum wage.</i></p>	R	R	R
<p>8.2 Commitment to a Living Wage</p>	<p>All operations must demonstrate a commitment to pay a living wage and an intent to progress towards paying a living wage as defined in the Appendix*. If an operator cannot pay a living wage, the operation must: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assess wage gaps against the target living wage estimate; and 2) Communicate transparently with workers about why a living wage cannot be paid. Salaries and benefits for workers are set according to relevant national laws, at regional average wages, or at official minimum</p>	R	R	Operations must demonstrate that a living wage is paid to workers without exception.

wages for similar occupations, whichever is the highest. Wages are specified for all employee functions and employment terms, including piecework.

If a worker is paid by piece rate, the worker must receive the equivalent wage rate of the official minimum wage (including eligible benefits, if applicable), regional average wages, or by a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) if one is in place- whichever is higher.

Operators must assess the living wage gap for all workers hired through contracted labor providers and be able to demonstrate that they have discussed with labor provider(s):

- 1) Whether there are wage gaps in relation to the target living wage estimate; and
- 2) Have received a statement from the labor provider about why a living wage cannot be paid.

Medium and large-scale operations only:

If present, operations must pay wages according to a negotiated collective bargaining agreement (CBA), if it is higher than the regional average or national minimum wage. This can be inclusive of social benefits, in-kind benefits, and bonuses. This criteria may apply to immediate family members as defined in ROA Terms & Definitions, depending on local legislation.

Operations must show verifiable evidence of positive social outcomes regarding one or more of the following: payment of living wages, freedom of association/worker voice, or any other social benefits enacted through the operation.

Refer to the Certification Scope and Structure section above for

	<i>definitions of small-, medium-, and large-scale operations.</i>			
8.3 Manipulated or Manipulative Records <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i>	Any type of manipulation of records or other evidence to deceive the auditor and impact audit results is prohibited. Section 8.3 criteria may or may not apply to immediate family members as defined in Key Terms, depending on local legislation.	R	R	R
8.4 Housing	<p>If housing is provided as a voluntary benefit, it does not represent a financial burden. Where workers are provided with housing, housing shall meet local rental requirements, with rent values at or below market value, and the conditions and infrastructure of the housing ensure a reasonable level of comfort, including sanitation, safety, ventilation, reasonable protection from heat and cold, privacy, and security. This may include but is not limited to a clean personal bed and space for personal belongings, protection from extreme temperatures, good ventilation and air quality, clean water for cooking, drinking, and bathing, access to functional toilets, and access to recreational areas.</p> <p>If worker housing is subject to audit, appropriate advance notice must be given to the worker, and the worker must consent to this audit to ensure privacy policies are followed.</p> <p>This criteria may apply to immediate family members as defined in ROA Terms & Definitions, depending on local legislation.</p>	R	R	R
8.5 Timely Payment of Wages	Operators must have systems in place to ensure timely payment of wages to employees no less than every two weeks unless otherwise agreed to in writing with the employee. Payments must be in accordance with the law and fully itemized pay slips must be provided and records kept.	R	R	R

	This criteria may apply to immediate family members as defined in ROA Terms & Definitions, depending on local legislation.			
9. Hours of Work	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
9.1 Hours of Work	<p>Overtime is voluntary and agreed to in writing or verbally. A documented system is in place demonstrating that workers may voluntarily opt-in when overtime is offered and that they are not retaliated against, in any way, for being unable or unwilling to perform overtime.</p> <p>An accurate and reliable timekeeping system must be in place for all workers, including those that are paid by piece rate.</p> <p>Workers shall not work more than 60 hours per week on a regular basis and paid 15-minute breaks are provided at a minimum of every 4 hours.</p> <p>All workers shall be provided with a minimum of 24 hours rest time for each seven-day period. A worker may choose to opt out of this rest period with prior written consent. This consent must be documented and signed by the worker. This applies to both full-time and part-time workers.</p> <p>The Operator must have a documented system to track hours worked by its workers. To reduce the risk of overtime at the workplace, operators must implement a policy requiring workers to only work beyond a certain number of hours with supervisor or management approval.</p> <p>The operation must create a production management plan, and monitor, assess, and document hours worked by the workers to ensure that they do not pose health and safety risks to the worker or others.</p>	R	R	R

	<p>For salaried positions, hours of work must be included in any employment contract.</p> <p>If applicable, requirements of seasonal agricultural worker programs are followed by the operation (e.g.: H2A in the USA, and TFW in Canada).</p>			
10. Health & Safety	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
10.1 Health, Safety, and Potential Hazards	<p>Operation minimizes number of immediate threats to workers lives. Operations provide the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Personal protective equipment at the employers' expense that is functional and properly maintained, along with training for how to use and store protective equipment. – Protection from excess heat and/or access to shade, particularly in hot climates, and an allowance to take rests/breaks to access shade and/or consume water. – Access to clean drinking water. – Access to toilet and sanitation facilities. – Emergency preparedness training and access to first aid equipment with instructions. – Access to healthcare, at least for cases of workplace accidents and injuries. – Training for proper handling or storage of flammable materials/chemicals. <p>Operators must ensure that health and safety concerns of all employees are listened to and acted upon as appropriate. Operators with 20 or more employees or more must formally establish a Health and Safety Committee with a remit to review Health and Safety performance and any issues arising. Appointments to the Committee must be open and democratic.</p> <p><i>CT: Substandard, unsafe, or unsanitary conditions that pose danger to employees or the environment</i></p>	R	R	R

10.2 Exits <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i>	Buildings have adequate exits to ensure safe evacuation for all workers, and meet all requirements of local law. All exits remain unlocked.	R	R	R
10.3 Buildings <i>This criteria not applicable to smallholders</i>	Policies in place to minimize environmental impacts with respect to energy, air emissions, water, waste, hazardous materials, and other significant environmental risks. All necessary ventilation, plumbing, electrical, noise, and lighting services shall be installed and maintained to conform to applicable laws and to prevent or minimize hazardous conditions to workers in the facility.	R	R	R
10.4 Privacy	Workers living in employer-provided housing have a right to privacy. The employer/owner has a right to inspect and enter the housing for the purposes of routine maintenance and/or repairs, but must, except for an emergency, notify residents. Such work must be done with a minimum of disturbance to any personal belongings. In order to meet additional workers' privacy needs, management agrees with the workers on the privacy needs of the individual worker through a documented discussion.	R	R	R
10.5 Reduction of Accidents	Records must be maintained of all health and safety related incidents and operators must demonstrate a commitment to the reduction and elimination of such incidents over time.	R	R	R
11. Other	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
11.1 Grower Groups	Small-scale farmers must be free to organize in some way. In the Global South, to mitigate the risk of exploitation, small-scale producers who are not organized into formal democratic structures should still hold annual meetings and take on some of the responsibilities of a traditional farmer organization (i.e. electing representatives to negotiate with buyers).	R	R	R

12. Buyers & Supply Chain	Practice Description	Bronze	Silver	Gold
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<p>12.1 Buyers</p> <p><i>This criteria not applicable to farm or factory workers</i></p>	<p>All contracts between producers and buyers are fair and equitable. This includes fairly negotiated and equitable contracts with producers, fair conflict resolution, openness to long-term commitments, and buyers’ right to require up-to-date farmer certification of all applicable products.</p> <p>Buyers make timely payments and provide a sourcing plan to producers with estimates of future purchases. Buyers also respect and work with existing producer groups, rather than to circumvent established groups to contract directly with an individual producer or producer subgroup.</p> <p>Buyers must enter long-term commitments when desired by farmers or be transparent with farmers and the certifying body if they do not enter long-term commitments with farmers.</p> <p>Buyers do not break commitments that adversely affect producers. Producers do not break commitments that adversely affect buyers.</p>	R	R	R
<p>12.2 Bargaining</p> <p><i>This criteria not applicable to farm or factory workers</i></p>	<p>All farmers have the right to freedom of association and to organize and engage in collective bargaining, free from retaliation of any kind by the buyer or his/her agents.</p> <p>If farmers so choose, contracts between buyers and farmers are negotiated using a collective bargaining process.</p> <p>If a farmer chooses to select a representative, the buyer recognizes and negotiates with representatives chosen by the farmer or democratically chosen by the farmer’s association in the case of collective bargaining.</p>	R	R	R
<p>12.3 Fair Pricing</p> <p><i>This criteria not applicable to farm or factory workers</i></p>	<p>Pricing between buyers and producers is mutually agreed upon by both parties through dialogue and active participation to provide fair payment for producers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Where Fair Trade pricing structures exist, these are used as a minimum. – Where Fair Trade pricing structures do not exist, pricing 	R	R	R

	<p>shall be based on the socially acceptable remuneration (in the local context) considered by producers to be fair.</p> <p>Fair Pricing and Fair Payments guidelines are not applicable to producers acting as buyers when buying organic or non-organic commodity grains on an open market.</p>			
<p>12.4 Fair Payments <i>This criteria not applicable to farm or factory workers</i></p>	<p>Payments received by farmers should always meet the cost of production which includes paying living wages, as described in Regenerative Organic Certified® requirements. Documented real costs of productions calculated by producers or producer groups or average costs calculated regionally should be prioritized. When real costs are not known, local market prices or established fair trade minimum prices can be used if these can be determined to cover cost of production; if these prices do not cover cost of production, 10% should be added.</p> <p>Fair Pricing and Fair Payments guidelines are not applicable to producers acting as buyers when buying organic or non-organic commodity grains on an open market.</p>	R	R	R
<p>12.5 Transparent Negotiation <i>This criteria not applicable to farm or factory workers</i></p>	<p>Negotiations between producers and buyers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Transparent communication of pricing and contracting terms – Openness to exploring and negotiating all terms of contracts and clarifying expectations clearly – Providing market information on demand, supply, pricing, and transfer of value in the chain 	R	R	R
<p>12.6 Capacity Building <i>This criteria not applicable to farm or factory workers</i></p>	<p>The operation works towards an increase in the capacities of its members and the organization. Mechanisms for training are developed to facilitate the process of building capacities in the productive, technical, social, organizational, commercial and public impact areas.</p> <p>For example, buyers can work directly with small producers to develop specific activities to help these producers improve their management skills, production capabilities and access to local / regional / international / Fair Trade and mainstream</p>	R	R	R

	markets as appropriate.			
12.7 Production Obligations	Production contracts obligate the producer to deliver only what is harvested from the acres covered by the contract. Under no circumstances shall farmers be required to purchase crop from outside the farm to fulfill delivery requirements of a production contract. Suffering the loss of crop due to natural-occurring flood, drought, wind, hail or other causes beyond the producer's control must never place additional burden on the farmer to source replacement crop.	R	R	R



VII. Appendix

A-1 Glossary of Key Terms: Please refer to the Terms & Definitions main document.

A-2. Living Wage Calculation and Definitions

Living Wage Definition

For the purposes of the Regenerative Organic Certified®, a living wage is defined as:

A combination of wages and benefits that can provide for food, water, housing, education, health care, transport, clothing, and other essential needs, plus a 10% allowance for unexpected events and/or savings.

Living Wage Calculation

Living wage must be calculated using one of the following methods or tools:

Agricultural Justice Project Living Wage Toolkit

- MIT Calculator + 10%, based on one working adult
- Global Living Wages benchmarks per region
- Global Living Wage Coalition calculation manual
- Fair Labor Association benchmarks
- Anker Methodology by the Global Living Wage Coalition
- Calculation in accordance with SAI Guidance Document for Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000, 2004) definition for “basic needs wage”:
 - A “basic needs wage” enables workers to support half the average-sized family above the poverty line, based on local prices near the workplace. Basic needs include essential expenses such as food, clean water, clothes, shelter, transport, education, a discretionary income, as well as legally mandated social benefits (which may include health care, medical insurance, unemployment insurance, retirement plan, and so on).