

FAQs for Farmers on FSA

Summary

1. Why should I consider using FSA and what are the benefits?	2
2. Are other farmers in my country and growing the same crop also using FSA?	2
3. How do I use FSA?	2
4. How long will it take a farmer to complete the FSA and how does this compare with similar schemes?	3
5. What happens if I disagree with my FSA score?	3
6. How easy or difficult is it to move up from one FSA performance level to the next?	3
7. How long does it take farmers to learn how to use FSA?	3
8. Does completing FSA mean I have to pay for training workers on my farm?	4
9. Is FSA primarily aimed at large farms rather than smallholders?	4
10. How will the commercially confidential information I supply be used and stored when using the online tool?	4
11. Isn't FSA just another certification scheme, only adding to my already heavy workload?	5
12. What are the reactions from farmers already using FSA?	5
13. Are you working with farmer organizations?	5

1. Why should I consider using FSA and what are the benefits?

FSA is a highly effective tool recognized and increasingly being used by some of the world's largest food and drink companies and retailers to **assess sustainable farming practices**. It is suitable for all crops and farm sizes on a globally recognized scale.

FSA will save you time and money. The resources required to compile information and to complete multiple assessment forms for multiple customers is often a burden for farmers. By providing one single and easy to use one-stop shop, FSA reduces the amount of time spent by farmers on these forms, and avoids duplication of effort.

FSA helps you assess your sustainable agricultural practices and also improve and communicate their performance.

2. Are other farmers in my country and growing the same crop also using FSA?

FSA is already used for many countries and farms, and for a number of different crops, including arable & vegetable crops, and fruit, including sugar beet in Europe, oranges in Brazil, mango's in India, rice in Spain and hops in the US.

You can either be invited by your customers to complete and use FSA, or you can individually chose to use FSA to assess the sustainability level of your practices at the farm. In countries where FSA isn't used as much yet, you can use FSA and communicate it as a benefit to customers who are interested in buying sustainably produced agricultural produce.

3. How do I use FSA?

FSA is easy and free to use. You complete a simple form made up of a number of key questions, which assesses your sustainable agricultural practices at the farm and provides you with a result (bronze, silver or gold).

The FSA questions are based on sustainable farming practices recognized in the food and drink industry, covering farm management, economic, environmental and social impacts of farming.

You can complete questions in two ways, either by using the online assessment (currently only accessible if you are invited by customers), or by using a form available to download.

The downloadable version of FSA is available in many different languages. To check whether it is available in your language, click on 'Download Excel' in the section 'Working with FSA', 'Using the FSA tool'.

4. How long will it take a farmer to complete the FSA and how does this compare with similar schemes?

On average, it will take a farmer about two hours to complete the FSA questionnaire. This will depend on location, crop, familiarity with sustainable agriculture practices, legal & other requirements, and available support.

For a farmer growing a number of different crops, and receiving requests from many different buyers asking for detailed information, completing FSA in a couple of hours has the potential to save a farmer several days of filling in different forms.

5. What happens if I disagree with my FSA score?

FSA is based on self-assessment, and the score and FSA level will be the result of your answers to the questions, and should be a reflection of the sustainability performance level of the practices on your farm.

As a follow-up, you can improve your practices and then resubmit your assessment after a next cropping period, when your score would be recalculated. We are currently developing a gap analysis tool and implementation guide to help with this.

6. How easy or difficult is it to move up from one FSA performance level to the next?

This really depends on the individual circumstances of the farm. A farmer may not be able to move from for example bronze to silver level overnight, but can address key concerns or 'hotspots' first and then improve practices –and performance levels- step by step and over time.

7. How long does it take farmers to learn how to use FSA?

Completing the FSA questionnaire will only take a couple of hours, by farmers individually. Perhaps first time users or farmers who are not familiar with some of the practices included, it may take a little longer, or some support from others.

Regarding what happens as a follow-up to completing FSA, time spent for learning depends on any gaps or concerns identified, and on the farmer's improvement objectives. It takes time to learn about, adapt and improve agricultural practices.

Changing practices does not need to happen overnight and can be planned in a step by step manner – and in a time frame that is feasible and practicable for the farmer.

8. Does completing FSA mean I have to pay for training workers on my farm?

No. You don't need to pay to train staff to *use* or *complete* FSA – as it is an easy-to-use tool.

Depending on the improvement objectives farmers identify, however, obtaining better FSA scores and changing or adapting practices may require staff training.

For example, changing practices in the areas of integrated pest management, water management and irrigation, and health & safety, may require (additional) training.

9. Is FSA primarily aimed at large farms rather than smallholders

FSA is for farms of all types and sizes, including both very large farms as well as smallholder farms.

Companies in the food and drink value chain who have started to use FSA with farmers in their supply chains have different experiences. They are tailoring FSA and the level of support and guidance provided to the needs of individual farmers and farmer groups, and to specific commodities and countries. In Brazil for example, we have worked with local farming organizations and an NGO specialized in working with smallholders, Solidaridad, to develop a local approach to helping farmers achieve the practices included in FSA.

10. How will the commercially confidential information I supply be used and stored when using the online tool?

Data completed by farmers will be safe and not visible to anyone unless farmers choose to publish and share with customers, farmer organizations or others they provide access to. Upon completion of the FSA questionnaire, the online system gives farmers the choice to select those they want to share their information with, or to keep it confidential if they wish. This is also something farmers should discuss in with customers who are asking them to complete FSA forms.

The data that farmers or farmer groups agree to share will be used by their buyers (processors, traders, brand companies, retailers) to fulfill their sustainable sourcing commitments and identify areas where they want to invest more resources.

The data collected from farmers is stored based on the UN IT security protocols, ensuring high levels of data security.

11. Isn't FSA just another certification scheme, only adding to my already heavy workload?

No. FSA can be used as a simple, easy and effective way to assess, learn, improve and communicate your sustainable agriculture practices.

Verification or auditing steps are optional, and not a requirement for using FSA.

FSA can also be used by buyers and food value chain companies to benchmark existing standards, complementing, and reinforcing existing schemes or legislation. Many of SAI Platform's members are already using the FSA to compare and assess existing standards, such as Red Tractor in the UK, or Rainforest Alliance. If you are already certified against one of more of these schemes, you may simply communicate this with customers, thereby eliminating the need to complete the FSA questionnaire.

12. What are the reactions from farmers already using FSA?

An often-mentioned benefit is that FSA provides an understanding of practices that are important for sustainable agriculture, and of measures that can be taken at the farm to meet legal requirements and buyer expectations. Another benefit they highlight is that FSA allows them to communicate their performance to customers in a simple way.

Farmers who hear about FSA for the first time, sometimes tell us that FSA will bring yet more paperwork to their already busy farming lives. On the contrary, FSA can in fact save time and money, as farmers can now use one form to satisfy the differing needs of different customers. FSA is increasingly being adopted by some of the world's largest food and drink value chain companies and they confirm that it is important to take time to go through questions and address concerns.

13. Are you working with farmer organizations?

Yes, we are working with them on FSA implementation. For example, we work with farming organizations and NGO Solidaridad on oranges in Brazil, and with Skylark -a Dutch farmer organization stimulating arable farmers to improve sustainable arable farming. These farming organizations recognize FSA as an excellent tool for farmers to assess and continuously improve their on-farm sustainability performance, and to communicate compliance with market requirements.