

# The Food Security Standard:

## Upscaling the Right to Food through Certification

What happens if the Right to Food is violated in the very first step of the supply chain – where agricultural products like coffee, rubber or palm oil are grown? This happens in countries affected by hunger which produce products for global markets. The Food Security Standard (FSS) provides a solution: with this certification, the private sector can assess the local food security situation and showcase their commitment to human rights.



### Challenges on the ground - and the leverage of the private sector

Food security can begin with something as simple as washing hands. “We have a sink where we wash our hands before eating,” says Arnolando Jose Gamez Lara, an employee at the palm oil producer Gremca in Colombia. “All the workers gather here, and we have a water dispenser, which is supplied with drinking water provided by the company.” Gremca, certified under the ISCC\* and FSS add-on, has implemented several good practices such as providing adequate hygiene conditions for their workers. After the FSS-audit additional areas for improvement were identified, and aspects related to improving food security were strengthened.

As far as the Right to Food is concerned, this example may seem small in the face of 735 million hungry people worldwide, but it starts precisely where conditions are particularly precarious: At the beginning of global supply chains, where agricultural products grow. „In many places there are multiple failures on the part of government agencies“, says Norbert Schmitz from 4C Services in Cologne, a certification scheme for coffee, hinting at the duty bearers’ obligations regarding food security. The UN Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food provide governments but also stakeholders such as the private sector with guidance to improve the situation. „Then it is also the task of the private sector to translate the voluntary guidelines into action points“ Schmitz says.

### Simply take a closer look - and act accordingly

Companies have an effective lever at their disposal to support the realization of the Right to Food. Under current legislation like the German and European Supply Chain Acts and the EU Deforestation Regulation, companies need to show their duty of care. Several sustainability standards exist in the private sector that demonstrate commitment and provide third-party evidence. They cover economic, environmental, and social aspects such as good agriculture practice, workers’ and human rights and economic sustainability. However, food security and nutrition are not always included comprehensively. Welthungerhilfe and Meo Carbon Solutions jointly promote a holistic approach to food security with



the financial support of the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture and FNR\*\*. The FSS toolbox not only assesses whether farmers and workers have enough to eat but also collects information about social security and wages, health care, education, gender issues, and the influence of company practices on the community. The FSS can complement any existing sustainability standard and can be assessed with minimal effort and cost during the audit of the existing standard – for any type of agricultural product and any size of farm. Within the framework of the FSS, on-site audits and interviews are carried out to assess the food security of workers, smallholders, and the surrounding community.

### Everyone benefits from improved food security

An increasing number of companies are starting to apply the FSS certification, helping to realize the Right to Food: “The FSS has helped us improve our farm management structure, identify the problems related to food security, create an action plan and close the gaps,” says Misgun Teshome, Certification Rules and Regulatory Officer at Vegbox Horticulture, a farm producing for the urban markets in Ethiopia. It’s a sentiment echoed by Pham Huy Dat- John Pham, Project & Marketing Manager and Head of Sustainability Projects at Vietnamese coffee producer Intimex MY PHUOC JSC: “During the recent assessment, I noticed many criteria may pose social risks: some business partners hire immigrant workers. I see a need to provide training programs and mobilize these business partners so that they understand and can support these migrant workers to have a more stable life and access food more easily because temporary workers do not have a permanent residence in their place of work.”

### Lessons learned

- **More and more companies understand** that they must take responsibility for their supply chains and create transparency. Tracking risks to the beginning of value chains is not only demanded by current legislation\*\*\* but also expected by customers.
- **The FSS plays a pivotal role in supporting companies** to provide evidence of compliance with human rights due diligence requirements. Its comprehensive framework helps to address social risks and offers tangible steps towards responsible and sustainable practices.
- **Feedback on the audit has been positive**, with companies reporting that the FSS toolbox is easy to use, and the outcomes lead to rethinking farm management structures to make them food security sensitive.

\* ISCC: International Sustainability & Carbon Certification

\*\* FNR: Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe

\*\*\* Current Legislation: LkSG: German Supply Chain Act (German: Lieferkettensorgfaltspflichtengesetz, literally Obligation to Exercise Due Diligence in the Supply Chain Act); CSDDD: The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive; EUDR: European Deforestation Regulation



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**Norbert Schmitz,**  
**Managing Director at 4C Services GmbH:**

The FSS highlights the importance of social sustainability in agricultural production. It supports companies to take a holistic approach towards food security. So far, this has not always been a top priority and tremendous improvement potential still exists. The FSS is doing valuable pioneering work in this area. Its implementation together with existing sustainability certification systems like 4C helps companies to take action and to improve the food security situation on the ground.

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