

# SEED AND CROP SERVICES

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## FARMING SUSTAINABLY

Sustainable practices are spreading rapidly throughout the agricultural and forestry industries. Growing consumer awareness and understanding of climate change, biodiversity losses, the contamination or depletion of water and the increasing scarcity of natural resources is making farmers more conscious of the benefits of sustainable practices. Customers want quality products that benefit the economy, the environment and society.

Sustainability covers an enormous range of activities, from environmental and social standards, to corporate social responsibility and codes of good practice (industry, supply chain or label specific). A relatively new concept with the potential to impact every aspect of 21st century business and consumerism, means sustainability frameworks have been developed by academics, governments and international institutions in great numbers. However, this raft of advice, tools and claims has not clarified issues for producers, traders and consumers. Sustainability has not yet established a consistent meaning.

To implement a coherent sustainability plan requires analysis of the full gamut of data, frameworks and tools. Integrating them into a business or development strategy remains a major challenge. Global trade, international regulation and factors outside the individual's control (climate, biodiversity, food safety, financial stability) are compounded by the proliferation of sustainability schemes. These factors have led to calls for multi-party co-operation, supported by 'common rules' in order to reduce fragmentation, conflicts, mitigate uncertainty and establish a common basis for assessing sustainability. Tackling these challenges requires, among other things, a common language for sustainability, as well as a holistic approach to assessment and implementation that considers the complexity and relationships of all dimensions of sustainability. While there is now a wide awareness of the sustainability concept, there is also wide interpretation of the definitions and

components of sustainability, based on different disciplines and political beliefs and values. There is a need to measure what matters. The dilemma is how to measure what matters to whom and how?

The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), which has the mandate to improve nutrition,

increase agricultural productivity and raise the standard of living in rural populations, at the same time as contributing to global economic growth, has issued a draft Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) version 2.0 and structured the goals as follows:

Sustainability means ensuring human well-being (and achieving global food security) without depleting or diminishing the capacity of the earth's ecosystems to support life or at the expense of others' well being

GOOD GOVERNANCE					ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY						ECONOMIC RESILIENCE				SOCIAL WELL-BEING					
G1. Corporate Ethics	G2. Accountability	G3. Participation	G4. Rule of Law	G5. Holistic Management	E1. Atmosphere	E2. Water	E3. Land	E4. Biodiversity	E5. Materials and Energy	E6. Animal Welfare	C1. Investment	C2. Vulnerability	C3. Product Quality and Information	C4. Local Economy	S1. Decent Livelihoods	S2. Fair Trading Practices	S3. Labour Rights	S4. Equity	S5. Human Health and Safety	S6. Cultural Development

SAFA Sustainability Dimensions and Themes

To achieve these goals a structure was developed among the members of the FAO that includes the following, under the headings listed above:

### GOOD GOVERNANCE: DIMENSION G

Governance is the process of making and implementing decisions (UNESCAP, 2009). For SAFA, this includes the aspects of corporate ethics, accountability, participation, rule of law and holistic management.

- G1 Corporate Ethics** Mission Statement; Due Diligence
- G2 Accountability** Holistic Audits; Responsibility, Transparency
- G3 Participation** Stakeholder Dialogue; Grievance Procedures; Conflict Resolution
- G4 Rule of Law** Legitimacy; Remedy, Restoration and Prevention; Civic Responsibility; Resource Appropriation
- G5 Holistic Management** Sustainability Management Plan; Full-cost Accounting

## ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY: DIMENSION E

To protect the integrity of the earth's ecosystems, the use of natural resources and the environmental impacts of activities must be managed, such that negative environmental impacts are minimised and positive impacts fostered. In a SAFA, the following themes of environmental sustainability are addressed: atmosphere, water, land, materials and energy, biodiversity and animal welfare.

E1 Atmosphere	Greenhouse Gases; Air Quality
E2 Water	Water Withdrawal; Water Quality
E3 Land	Soil Quality; Land Degradation
E4 Biodiversity	Ecosystem Diversity; Species Diversity; Genetic Diversity
E5 Materials and Energy	Material Use; Energy Use; Waste Reduction and Disposal
E6 Animal Welfare	Health and Freedom from Stress

## ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: DIMENSION C

Economic activity involves the use of labour, land and capital to produce goods and services to satisfy peoples' needs (Jörissen et al., 1999). The economic dimension of SAFA covers the following themes: investment, vulnerability, product safety and quality, and local economy.

C1 Investment	Internal investment; Community Investment; Long-ranging Investment, Profitability
C2 Vulnerability	Stability of Supply; Stability of Market; Liquidity; Risk Management; Stability of Production
C3 Product Safety and Quality	Food safety; Food Quality, Product Information
C4 Local Economy	Value Creation; Local Procurement

## SOCIAL WELL BEING: DIMENSION S

Social sustainability is about the satisfaction of basic human needs and the provision of the right and the freedom to satisfy one's aspirations for a better life (WCED, 1987). This applies as long as the fulfilment of one's needs does not compromise the ability of others or of future generations to do the same (sustainable). Social sustainability is assessed in SAFA by looking at the theme categories of: decent livelihood, fair trading practices, labour rights, equity, human health and safety, and cultural development.

S1 Decent Livelihood	Right to Quality of Life, Capacity Building; Rights of Fair Access to Land and Means of Production
S2 Fair Trading Practices	Responsible Buyers
S3 Labour Rights	Employment Relations; Forced Labour; Child Labour; Employee's Freedom of Association and Right to Bargaining
S4 Equity	Non-discrimination; Gender Equality; Support to Vulnerable People
S5 Human Health and Safety	Workplace Safety and Health Provisions for Employees; Public Health
S6 Cultural Development	Indigenous Knowledge; Food Sovereignty

SAFA provides a detailed description under each heading referring to existing agreements and a definition of theme and relevance. In addition, objectives for each theme are defined, including core indicators and targets, which include practices and performance.

An additional description addresses the measurement, the performance metric and its final rating.

Since SAFA is a world guideline for sustainable frameworks issued by the FAO, sustainable frameworks are now adjusting their sustainable understanding and interpretation, albeit gradually. A full version of SAFA 2.0 guidelines is accessible through [www.fao.org/about/en/](http://www.fao.org/about/en/).



The Sustainable Agricultural Initiative (SAI) <http://www.saiplatform.org/> is guided by SAFA. Some 50 major food brands and processors support this initiative. They ask their supply chains to comply with the SAI's recommendations. At the same time, certification schemes such as ISSC Plus, among others, coordinate their sustainable food supply certification scheme with SAI, and farmer self assessments are to be audited and certified in future.

Food brands and processors are interested in assessing positive compliance of their supply chains. Additionally, they have opted for verification by third party assessors.

Consequently, farmers and the supply chain will soon need to meet these objectives and demonstrate compliance. SGS provides farm education programmes for almost all sustainability standards. We cover topics including verification, establishing customised compliance criteria and certification. They will also be required to seek independent verification and certification from companies like SGS.

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