HORTICERT – Step-by-Step Guide

for System Users and Certification Bodies *effective from February 2025*

Who*		Relevant Documents and Information
1 - Preparation for HORTICERT Certification		
All System Users and Certification Bodies (CB) In general, Group Managers are responsible for their Group Members	**1.1** Register for client section on the HORTICERT website. Get accustomed to HORTICERT through reading material provided on website: See relevant system documents and identify which role under HORTICERT is applicable to your organization (see Annex 1 – Glossary in 01 System Basics). Download applicable audit checklist(s) from client section.	System Document 01 System Basics If applicable: System Documents 02 GHG calculation and 03 Group Certification Applicable audit Checklist "HORTICERT Sustainability Requirements" and "HORTICERT Traceability, CoC and GHG requirements"
All System Users	**1.2** Decide if the company wants to pursue HORTICERT certification.	
Growing Media Mixing Plant, Wood Fiber Producers, Coir Importers	**1.3** Inform suppliers so they can start with preparing for the HORTICERT certification audit as well.	
Group Managers and/or Certificate Holders	**1.4** Begin collaborative efforts for group certification with suppliers (Group Members), who agree to implement HORTICERT requirements. Decide on who will be the Certificate holder.	System Document 03 Group Certification
All System Users	**1.5** Conduct gap-analysis of audit checklist and risk assessment, develop sustainability improvement plan based on results.	Audit Checklist "HORTICERT Sustainability Requirements" and "HORTICERT Traceability, CoC and GHG requirements"
All System Users	**1.6** Conduct GHG calculation (mandatory for Final Product Refiners, optional for other system users).	System Document 02 GHG Calculation
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**1.7** Register for next HORTI-TRACE training.	Contact form website
2 – Application for HORTICERT Audit		
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**2.1** Select and contact one of the CBs cooperating with HORTICERT or introduce new CB to HORTICERT that can get approved by HORTICERT (in this case more time is needed as auditors of the CB must participate in a HORTICERT CB training in which also an INTACT is set up). Sign a contract with the CB.	HORTICERT website System Document 01 System Basics Chapter 3.4
New Certification Bodies (CB)	**2.2** Get in contact with HORTICERT, read through system documents and register for the next HORTICERT CB training. Sign a contract with HORTICERT.	Contact form website
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**2.3** Download and fill in the registration form and ToU from the Client Portal, sign it, and send it to the CB with info@horticert.org in copy.	Registration form, Terms of Use (ToU)

min. 9 weeks before audit

min. 7 weeks before audit

min. 6 weeks before audit

**This guide is intended as an overview for all stakeholders involved in the certification process. Please consider the steps relevant to your role.*

Certification Bodies (CB)	**2.4** Evaluate, approve, and finalize the registration form (see chapters relevant for CBs) and send Registration form and signed ToU to info@horticert.org with System User in copy.	Registration form, Terms of Use (ToU)	min. 6 weeks before audit
HORTICERT	**2.5** Approves application and ToU, sets unique registration number and sends it to CB and new System User. Makes applicable audit checklist digitally available in INTACT.		
All System Users + Certification Bodies (CB)	**2.6** Decide on audit date (in case of Group Certification including farms: Ensure that the audit date is during harvesting season) and informs HORTICERT about the audit date.		
3 – Preparation for HORTICERT On-Site Audit			min. 4 weeks before audit
Certification Bodies (CB)	**3.1** Log-In into INTACT and prepare audit with digital audit checklist.	HORTICERT CB Training Slides	
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**3.2** Conduct internal risk assessment and send results as well as relevant supporting documents (e.g. audit report of previous year, GRAS analysis, etc) to CB.	Management System and Risk Management Guidance	min. 3 weeks before audit
Certification Bodies (CB)	**3.3** Assess internal risk assessment of System User. If a System User seeking recertification previously had major non-conformities with these requirements or with any other aspect of the mandatory sustainability criteria, inform HORTICERT.	System Document 01 System Basics Chapter 6.3; HORTICERT CB Training Slides	
Certification Bodies (CB)	**3.4** Conduct risk analysis for System User, define risk levels for Sustainability Principles and Traceability and share results with System User.	System Document 01 System Basics Chapter 6.3; HORTICERT CB Training Slides	
Certification Bodies (CB)	**3.5** Prepare the audit plan (Schedule and time for the audit day) and share with System User and HORTICERT.	HORTICERT CB Training Slides	min. 2 week before audit
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**3.6** Finalize GHG calculation and send to CB (mandatory for Final Product Refiners, optional for other system users).	System Document 02 GHG Calculation	
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**3.7** Finalize gap-analysis of applicable audit checklist (dependent on defined risk level by auditor) and implement needed improvement measures, finalize Sustainability Improvement Plan and conduct internal audit.	Applicable Audit Checklists; Management System and Risk Management Guidance	
Group Manager	**3.8** Finalize gap-analysis of applicable audit checklist (dependent on risk level defined by auditor) and implement improvement measures also for Group Members, finalize Sustainability Improvement Plan for Group Members.	Applicable Audit Checklists; Management System and Risk Management Guidance	min. 1 week before audit

Group Managers	**3.9** Conduct internal audit also for Group Members, collect signed self-declarations and further evidence of compliance with HORTICERT requirements applicable to Group Members (documentation of agrochemicals used, ...).	Applicable Audit Checklists; Management System and Risk Management Guidance	min. 1 week before audit
HORTICERT/CB	**3.10** Creates HORTI-TRACE account for System User.	Registration form	before audit
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**3.11** Participate in HORTI-TRACE-Training and put in relevant Master Data in HORTI-TRACE (with support of HORTICERT or CB).		
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**3.12** Ensure all relevant documents and records to show the auditor during the audit are available (digital form is sufficient).	Document Checklist; Applicable Audit Checklists	
4 – Conduction of HORTICERT On-Site Audit			within a few days after audit
Certification Bodies (CB)	**4.1** Conduct on-site audit and evaluate the System User's compliance with the applicable HORTICERT sustainability and traceability, CoC and GHG requirements by using INTACT.		
Certification Bodies (CB)	**4.2** In case of major non-conformities, summarize needed corrective actions and share with System User.		
All System Users	**4.3** In case of major non-conformities, work on corrective actions in case of major non-conformities within the timeframe set by the auditor. Contact auditor once corrective actions are implemented.		within 40 days after audit
Certification Bodies (CB)	**4.4** In case of major non-conformities, conduct desk audit or follow-up audit onsite to approve corrective actions and update INTACT checklist.		
5 – Certification Decision			within 60 days after audit
Certification Bodies (CB)	**5.1** Make a certification decision within the required timeframe of 60 days after on-site audit, create final audit report and certificate in INTACT and share with HORTICERT Certification Team.		
HORTICERT	**5.2** Checks and approves audit report and certificate. Publishes certificate on HORTICERT website in case of positive verification. In case of a negative decision, a full new on-site audit must be conducted once the System User is ready to comply with all applicable HORTICERT requirements.		
Certification Bodies (CB)	**5.3** Share final audit report and certificate with System User.		
Certification Bodies (CB)	**5.4** Invoice HORTICERT certification fee (and audit fee) and forward the HORTICERT certification fee to HORTICERT.		

6 – Continuous Improvement after successful Audit

All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**6.1** Use HORTI-TRACE to document traceability and chain of custody of materials and products forwarded downstream and/or received from upstream supplier.	
All System Users	**6.2** Implement minor corrective actions that must be realized within one year and work on Sustainability Improvement Plan.	
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**6.3** Continue to monitor compliance performance and be able to report this to HORTICERT.	
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**6.4** Report sold certified materials or products within certification period by using HORTI-TRACE and having thorough documentation in place.	
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**6.5** Sign-up for HORTICERT Newsletter and regularly check HORTICERT website for news and changes. If applicable, implement System Updates.	
HORTICERT	**6.6** If applicable, sends out System Updates via Newsletter and publishes on HORTICERT website.	
Certification Bodies (CB)	**6.7** Check validity of Attestation of participation in HORTICERT training and, if applicable, register for next training.	
All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**6.8** Arrange recertification with CB in time.	

7 – Recertification

All System Users (excl. Group Members)	**7.1** Start again from 3 – Preparation for HORTICERT audit (on-site or desk audit) and continue with applicable steps towards recertification.	This Step-by-Step Guide
All System Users	**7.2** Invoices quantity dependent fee directly from System User for the previous certification period.	

ongoing

max. 6 weeks before validity of certificate ends

right after recertification audit