

# **GRASSLANDS ALLIANCE**

## **Grasslands Alliance Certification Standard**

### **Supporting Sustainability in Beef Cattle and Bison Grazing Operations in North America**

**Version 5  
January 2019**

The Grasslands Alliance is a coalition of conservation organizations that uses this standard in collaboration with supply chain partners to guide and incentivize continuous improvements in beef production. This standard is a certification tool and a guide to good and continuously improving management of land, natural resources and livestock on beef cattle grazing operations in the United States and Canada, with these priorities: Conserve wildlife habitats and biodiversity; improve soil and water quality; protect public health; promote high animal welfare; support livelihoods, rural communities, and safe and fair working conditions; and provide incentives to implement climate-smart strategies. Additional modules will offer specific criteria for grass-finished beef and bison operations. This draws on standards developed by Food Alliance for certification of livestock operations in North America and is a companion to the Sustainable Agriculture Network standard, which supports Rainforest Alliance certification of many crops, including beef, throughout the tropics and subtropics. The authorized uses of this version of the standard are for stakeholder review (including public consultation) and field-testing.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

There has long been a need for agreement on what “sustainable” rangeland and pasture management looks like in practice. Many ranchers and farmers believe that their operations are examples of good practices in the three spheres of sustainability – environmental conservation, economic viability, and social responsibility. Yet because there are no widely adopted *comprehensive* standards for sustainable beef, they have no credible way to prove it – no mechanism to distinguish their beef in a marketplace that increasingly demands certified sustainably produced goods. Producers want guidance and access to the growing pools of knowledge about better management practices (BMPs) that generate triple bottom line benefits, and technical assistance in implementing them. Retailers, restaurant chains and consumers are seeking ways to recognize and reward well-managed beef cattle ranches and farms.

In other crops and commodities, stakeholders have come together to find common ground on identifying the environmental, economic and social challenges and associated improvement opportunities. They have found that setting standards provides the most productive forum for agreeing which detrimental practices and impacts should be prohibited, and which desired outcomes indicate well-managed, regenerative agriculture and deserve special recognition. Sustainable business leaders and consumer advocates recognize that the most thorough and credible way to verify the performance of a ranch or farm is through independent, third-party audits. In addition, they recommend that the best way for well-managed ranches to communicate with retailers and consumers is via a certification seal.

Sustainability standards and certification programs are transforming sectors such as coffee, tea, cocoa, palm oil, fisheries, forest products and tourism. In 2012, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) began research on standards for more sustainable livestock production in the United States, first documenting the latest and best science to identify priority impacts or “hot spots” resulting from poor management, and BMPs that have been proven to remedy each impact. It consulted with dozens of stakeholders – from ranchers and extension specialists to corporate beef buyers and NGO colleagues – to understand the economic and social barriers to improving ranch and farm management, and to identify solutions to each barrier. NRDC then evaluated existing programs for verifying which ranches and farms are mitigating impacts, and found that the Food Alliance had the most credible and comprehensive standard for crops and beef produced in the U.S., but limited market uptake. NRDC also found that the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) had a comprehensive standard and certification program for tropical agriculture – including beef – that was growing quickly and proven effective in 40 countries, but did not apply to temperate ecoregions of North America (above Mexico).

In response to the need for a *comprehensive* standard and certification program for beef production in the U.S. and Canada, NRDC, Food Alliance and the Rainforest Alliance – which uses the SAN standard – formed the Grasslands Alliance and invited other conservation organizations to join. Multiple conservation groups with expertise in topic areas addressed by the Grasslands Alliance Standard have participated in the expert reviews, stakeholder meetings, and consultations that contributed to the development of this standard. These include Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense Fund, California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, Holistic Management International, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation,

Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, The Savory Institute, the Western Landowners Alliance, Point Blue Conservation Science, Friends of the Earth U.S., and Tejon Ranch Conservancy.

In addition, this standard is based on the Food Alliance’s experience since 2000 with certification of beef in the U.S. and on the SAN’s experience in the tropics since the early 1990s. Many ranchers have added their hard-earned wisdom, and scientists representing multiple areas of ecological, economic and land management expertise have provided rigorous analysis of previous drafts.

### **Mission**

The Grasslands Alliance’s mission is to conserve grasslands and their biodiversity; sustain productive, resilient grazing lands; enable North American ranchers and farmers to mitigate and adapt to climate change; and protect public health. We achieve this by synthesizing traditional ranching wisdom with modern science, sparking management innovation, encouraging continuous improvement, and aligning the values of beef producers, buyers, and consumers.

### **Vision**

The Grasslands Alliance envisions cattle ranching that is regenerative, adaptive, profitable and climate-smart. More sustainable ranching generates benefits that include:

- conserving ecosystems, biodiversity, soil health and water;
- preventing pollution;
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- maintaining high animal welfare;
- protecting public health;
- supporting rural communities; and
- producing traceable, high-quality beef.

Through the transparency created by the Grasslands Alliance’s programs, businesses and consumers are empowered to recognize and reward producers of beef grown on certified well-managed ranches and farms.

### **Goals**

- Create an independent, third-party, NGO-managed, voluntary, outcome-based, triple-bottom-line sustainability standard and certification system. One that synthesizes traditional ranching knowledge, current science, and multi-stakeholder input into agreement on the desired states (“outcomes”) for wildlife habitat and biodiversity conservation; natural resource conservation; improved livelihoods and well-being; healthy and humane treatment of animals; and climate smart ranching and farming.
- Assemble the BMPs that will lead to these outcomes into guidance materials that enable producers to continuously improve toward and beyond certification.
- Promote research into rangeland and pasture stewardship, animal husbandry, ranch productivity and resilience, ranch economics, climate change mitigation and adaptation, wildlife and habitat and biodiversity conservation, and soil and water conservation.
- Facilitate access to the training, technical assistance, and financial support needed to enable producers to implement the standard.

- Contribute to awareness and understanding of what positive change looks like at the grassroots, enable producers to benefit from implementing those changes, and empower businesses and consumers with the opportunity to recognize and reward the improvements.
- Build trust, understanding, transparency and communication along the entire beef value chain, from ranch, to supermarkets and restaurants, to consumers.

### Approach

- Build upon the standards and certification programs of the Food Alliance, the Sustainable Agriculture Network and the Rainforest Alliance. Help consolidate standards, marketing terms and labels in the beef sector.
- Use the standard development process as an organized, inclusive, transparently managed forum to agree on and incentivize the desired states of North American grazing lands, and the levels of well-being of producers and their livestock.
- Integrate the latest and best science with traditional ranching knowledge and experience to develop guidance materials – a best practices toolkit.
- Assess ranches according to the standard to identify priority improvement opportunities and associated needs in technical assistance and training, financial support, and research.
- Collaborate with the Global and U.S. Roundtables on Sustainable Beef in promoting constructive dialog among beef supply chain actors and managing a step-wise system of assessments, verification, audits and certification.
- Collaborate with scientific, NGO, ranching, and other supply chain partners to monitor and evaluate results, leverage lessons learned to improve Alliance programs, adapt and repeat.
- Start with the most pressing conservation and climate change mitigation opportunities – on ranches and farms – and move downstream on the supply chain to feed production, feedlots, and processing.

### The Value of the Standard to Beef-sector Stakeholders

- **Ranchers and farmers** can use the Grasslands Alliance’s programs and guidance materials to improve their operations’ productivity, resilience to drought, efficiencies of input use, and access to technical and financial support; the standard as a tool to differentiate their products from the competition, and the certification as a way to verify their marketing claims, build trust in their brand, and convey their story of best-in-class performance through the value chain to end consumers. The standard serves as a comprehensive “one-stop-shop” that enables producers to address key environmental, public health, animal welfare, and social issues of concern in one audit. The Grasslands Alliance’s programs provide a platform on which to access new markets, and to build relationships with conservation groups, public health and animal welfare advocates, government agencies, leading retail and restaurant buyers, and like-minded producers.
- **Brands and institutional buyers** can use the Grasslands Alliance standard and certification program as a ready-made, omnibus solution to their customer assurance and supply chain management needs; to benchmark and improve their procurement policies; and to boost brand reputation, sales and customer loyalty by conveying their sustainability commitment to consumers in an accurate, transparent manner. The standard provides corporate buyers with a structured framework that enables them to work with producers in their supply chains to implement locally appropriate better practices. It serves as an across-the-board solution that enables buyers to address key environmental, public health, animal welfare, and social risks in their beef supply chains via one trusted program.
- **Consumers**, through their values-based purchasing choices and activism, can reward sustainable land and livestock management by supporting a trustworthy certification mark that ensures that the beef

they are about to enjoy came from a ranch or farm that meets rigorous standards covering all the environmental, public health, animal welfare and social issues of concern. The Grasslands Alliance trustmark enables them to cut through the confusing array of sustainable beef marketing claims and make purchasing decisions based on one label they can trust.

- **Conservationists** can use the Grasslands Alliance standard and support programs to offer additional recognition and rewards to their ranching partners via the beef marketplace; and to help design and manage initiatives to protect and restore rangeland ecosystems and the valuable benefits that they provide to society. The program can be used to help mitigate and adapt to climate change, regenerate rangelands and pastures, become more resilient to drought and unexpected events, prevent and control weed invasions, and promote improvements in public policy. The standard and guidance materials synthesize generations of ranching experience with latest and best science, ensuring that conservationists are recommending the most advanced and locally appropriate better management systems and practices. Certification will bring an array of benefits to producers, incentivizing them to be partners in conservation. Auditing and certification are effective tools for independent monitoring, transparency, and improved communication and collaboration along the supply chain – all essential ingredients to durable and effective conservation initiatives.

### **The Grasslands Alliance Standard in the Marketplace**

The Grasslands Alliance standard frames consensus agreement on what well-managed ranching looks like on the ground (the “criteria” – defined on page 11) and provides detailed guidance that enables producers to achieve this ideal level of performance. Each criterion includes “indicators” (defined on page 11) that will ensure consistent, meaningful audits.

In the early 1990s, the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) and Food Alliance were the first to integrate the three spheres of sustainability – environmental conservation, economic viability and social responsibility – into certification standards. Now, many standards mirror this structure in recognition that ranch and farm-management challenges are linked and cannot be effectively tackled individually. Select any management issue – for example, soil health, water conservation, invasive species management, animal welfare, ranch-hand wages, product quality, productivity and profitability – and its linkages with the others is apparent.

The Grasslands Alliance standard, like that of the SAN<sup>1</sup> and Food Alliance<sup>2</sup>, is comprehensive, meaning that it covers environmental, public health, animal welfare, and social responsibility concerns. It is being developed through an open, inclusive, transparent, multi-stakeholder process. As in the SAN, final decisions about the Grasslands Alliance standard and certification process will be made by nonprofit, apolitical, independent, experienced, conservation organizations – the Grasslands Alliance board of directors – guaranteeing that the standard is objective, credible and market-smart, but science driven.

Auditing will be conducted by experienced, well-trained, independent inspectors following clear protocols proven by the Food Alliance and Rainforest Alliance. The certification process, under development, will also mirror those systems.

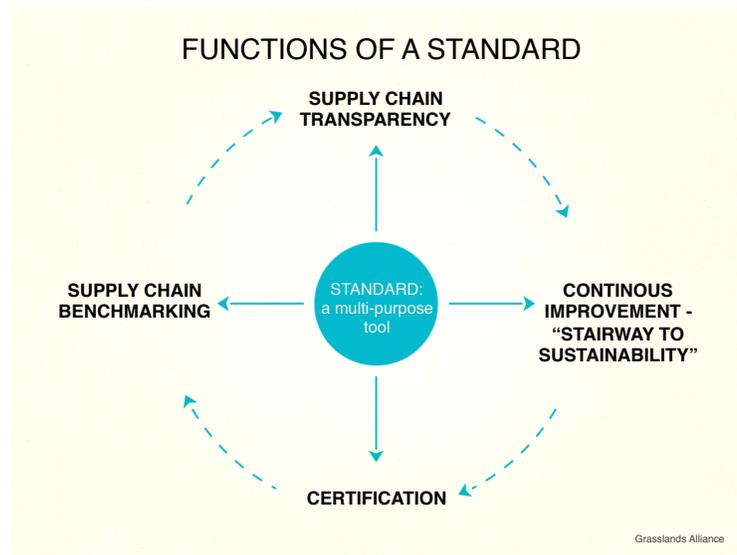
The standards of the Grasslands Alliance and the SAN are aligned, so producers in the tropics and in North America will meet similar criteria, adapted to their region’s climate, environmental, economic and social

conditions. Commercial buyers and consumers will benefit from this alignment of sister programs, which will enable them to purchase certified beef from domestic or international producers with full sustainability assurance.

The Grasslands Alliance standard satisfies the principles and criteria of the Global Roundtable on Sustainable Beef. The Alliance aims to work with narrower and issue-specific certification programs such as Animal Welfare Approved, USDA and other Organic labels, the American Grassfed Association and other grass-fed programs, and Whole Foods GAP to develop protocols allowing producers to receive two or more certificates in one audit.

### Applications of the Grasslands Alliance Standard

*Grasslands Alliance Certification:* One purpose of a standard and certification program is to distinguish the best performing operations. Only those that comply with the standard can earn the certification. The indicators in the standard are designed to be as objective as possible, and auditors are cross-trained to maintain consistent interpretation of them. Compliance is determined by a scoring system that allows some flexibility. Grazing operations can be certified when they meet the Critical Criteria, score high enough overall on remaining criteria, and commit to additional improvements before the next audit in the three-year cycle. The Grasslands Alliance’s programs nurture a culture of continuous improvement.



The Grasslands Alliance will have a certification seal or “trustmark”. Ranches and farms that earn the certification can market their beef products with the Grasslands Alliance’s seal of approval so that buyers and consumers can recognize them. Restaurants, retailers, and other beef buyers can employ the seal to convey their sustainability commitment to other businesses, stakeholders, and directly to customers.

The Grasslands Alliance trustmark, as with the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ green frog seal, will signify that the beef came from a ranch or farm that meets the standards. While most certified beef will be a cut above in quality, the seal is a claim about sustainable production, not meat quality. The program will begin with cattle grazing operations and may later extend to cover grain finishing and other facilities downstream in beef supply chains.

*Enabling Producers to Achieve Stepwise Continuous Improvement Goals:* Sustainability is the goal, and earning certification is a milestone to celebrate. The Grasslands Alliance understands that many operations will need time and support to achieve certification. Producers should benefit at every step along the way. Those who do not yet qualify for certification and corporate buyers who seek to improve their supply

chains can partner with the Grasslands Alliance to achieve step-wise continuous improvement goals. For example, completing the Grasslands Alliance application helps ranchers and farmers assess the current status of their natural resource base, identify improvement opportunities, and develop a better ranch or farm management plan to implement the improvements. Entry into the program brings producers to the attention of commercial buyers who are planning their beef supply chain sustainability and procurement strategies. The standard will serve as a guide to continuous improvement, and the Grasslands Alliance community of partners will provide assistance, information, and peer support during each step of the journey toward sustainability.

*Enabling Buyers to Achieve Beef Supply Chain Sustainability Goals:* The Grasslands Alliance can help commercial buyers and brands manage risks and opportunities in their beef supply chains, benchmark their own sustainable sourcing guidelines against the standard, and develop accurate and transparent claims about more sustainably produced beef. The program will underwrite marketing claims with independent, third-party, sustainability certification.

### **Grasslands Alliance Governance**

The Grasslands Alliance was founded by the Food Alliance, NRDC, and the Rainforest Alliance with support from other nonprofit organizations, ranchers and farmers, scientists, and other stakeholders. We also wish to recognize the contributions of the Sustainable Agriculture Network. The Grasslands Alliance is currently being managed by the Food Alliance. In time, it will be established as an independent entity. As more NGOs formally join the coalition, they will form the general assembly. A board of directors, comprised of representatives of those groups, will be elected. Permanent multi-stakeholder committees will be formed to guide standards development and technical operations, and a secretariat will be staffed.

The SAN is similarly structured and has proven effective. This architecture allows the SAN to quickly and thoughtfully make changes, adapt, evolve, incorporate the latest and best science, resolve internal conflicts, collaborate, and integrate government, corporate and other initiatives. The Grasslands Alliance will be equally agile and efficient. The coalition of NGOs will illustrate independence, command credibility, and stay true to its mission.

At the same time, the Grasslands Alliance will be a multi-stakeholder initiative, both in spirit (eager to learn, to hear different perspectives and opinions, to incorporate new ideas and science) and in function (organization, protocols for stakeholder consultations, governance).

### **The Grasslands Alliance's Theory of Change<sup>1</sup>**

The Grasslands Alliance Theory of Change articulates the organization's beliefs about what change is needed and how its strategies will bring about the desired change over time. The theory will help the Grasslands Alliance identify the key support strategies required to achieve the desired impacts as well as the beliefs and assumptions guiding the activities. It is a dynamic model that will be continuously improved as learning is generated, captured, and disseminated, creating a feedback loop that fosters a culture of learning, adaptive management and continuous improvement of the Grasslands Alliance's programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted with permission from the SAN

The Theory of Change model in Annex 2 includes the following core pillars and proposes the causal relationships among them, including underlying assumptions, influencing factors and possible unintended results:

- 1) *Actors*: who are the actors or partners relevant to achieving desired results?
- 2) *Support Strategies*: what support strategies are needed at the level of each actor to accomplish desired results?
- 3) *Outputs*: what are the immediate results of the support strategies?
- 4) *Outcomes*: what are the short-term changes in knowledge, behavior, practices, or policies resulting from the outputs and what are the medium-term effects of those changes?
- 5) *Impacts*: what is the long-term environmental and socio-economic change we want to achieve?

The Theory of Change outlines how the Grasslands Alliance’s technical and financial support programs will facilitate access to capacity building resources and expertise that enable ranchers and farmers to achieve positive outcomes by improving and sharing practices, management systems, and knowledge. These, in turn, contribute to improved wildlife habitat and biodiversity conservation, natural resource conservation, livelihoods and wellbeing for workers and rural communities, and the welfare of farm animals, while contributing to climate change solutions that boost productivity, cut input costs, and increase resilience to drought and unexpected events. When these sustainability benefits are magnified across many ranches and farms, in synergy with the activities of other partners and stakeholders, the result is to advance the Grasslands Alliance’s broader goals of creating and maintaining sustainable, resilient rural landscapes, communities, and natural areas and the valuable ecosystem services that they provide to society.

### **The Grasslands Alliance Supports Climate Smart Agriculture**

The Grasslands Alliance recognizes the challenges already being posed by climate change and seeks to address these challenges by actively promoting climate smart ranching and farming and improving the resilience of ranches, farms and ranching communities. This is accomplished by protecting native ecosystems and on-ranch biodiversity, maintaining soil and vegetation health, safely and efficiently managing nutrients and animal manure, sustaining water resources, and guiding ranchers and farmers to select and adopt other locally appropriate climate-smart practices. Additionally, the Grasslands Alliance standard seeks to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of cattle ranching and farming associated with the use of energy, fertilizers, pesticides, and methane and nitrous oxide emissions – while maintaining or enhancing carbon stocks in soils, plant communities, and other on-ranch vegetation. As such, the Grasslands Alliance standard promotes all three pillars of Climate Smart Agriculture: 1) sustainably increasing ranch/farm productivity and incomes; 2) adapting and building resilience to climate change; and 3) reducing or removing greenhouse gas emissions, where possible.

### **GRASSLANDS ALLIANCE STANDARD STRUCTURE**

**PRINCIPLES:** A Grasslands Alliance principle is a set of thematically related requirements designed to achieve a particular set of outcomes. This set of outcomes is explained in the introduction of each principle. Each principle is composed of specific criteria that advance the principle’s desired outcomes. The

Grasslands Alliance standard principles are organized into six impact areas and contain 98 criteria for sustainable ranch and farm management (not all criteria are applicable to every operation).

- Principle 1: **Effective Planning and Management System** (with 7 criteria). This principle supports the delivery of all other impact areas (wildlife habitat and biodiversity conservation, natural resource conservation, improved livelihoods and wellbeing, healthy and humane animal care, and climate smart ranching). The separate, principle-specific planning requirements of Criteria 2.1, 3.1.1, 3.2.1, 3.5.1, and 6.1 constitute the operation's resource management plan.
- Principle 2: **Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity Conservation** (with 9 criteria)
- Principle 3: **Natural Resources Conservation** (with 40 criteria among the following Sub-Principles):
  - 3.1 Productivity and Management of Rangeland Vegetation, Pasture Forage, and Feed Crops (with 8 criteria)
  - 3.2 Soil Health (with 4 criteria)
  - 3.3 Water Conservation and Water Quality (with 2 criteria)
  - 3.4 Integrated Pest Management (IPM, with 16 criteria)
  - 3.5 Nutrient Management (with 6 criteria)
  - 3.6 Waste Management (with 4 criteria)
- Principle 4: **Improved Livelihoods and Wellbeing** (with 20 criteria)
- Principle 5: **Healthy and Humane Animal Care** (with 13 criteria)
- Principle 6: **Climate Smart Ranching and Farming and Reduction of Operation's Carbon Footprint** (with 9 criteria)

The authorized uses of this version of the standard are for stakeholder review (including public consultation) and field-testing. A version of the Grasslands Alliance Standard that is binding for audits will be issued following the completion of the public consultation, expected to be in December 2016.

## **CRITERIA, INDICATORS, & GUIDANCE**

The standard consists of Criteria (left-hand column) and Indicators (right-hand column):

- **Criteria:** Each principle is made up of several **criteria** that form the basis of assessing compliance with the Grasslands Alliance scoring system. ISEAL defines this component of standards as the conditions on the ground (i.e., desired outcomes) that need to be met to achieve a principle. Criteria add meaning and functionality to a principle without themselves being direct measures of performance.
- **Indicators:** The right-hand column provides **indicators** that further clarify the specific auditable requirements and application of each criterion in the left column. This column contains objective means of verifying performance against the criterion (i.e., auditable, outcome-based observations and documentation that serve as indicators of when the criterion has been achieved). For some criteria, the Grasslands Alliance includes both general indicators (that apply to all operations) and indicators that apply only to specific operation types or regions, defined below. For sub-principle 3.4, Integrated Pest Management, indicators also include selected BMPs that reflect risk management protocols for safe application and storage of hazardous chemicals.

### **Guidance**

*Producer Guidance:* To enable producers to meet one or more criteria in a manner appropriate to their location, operation, and/or management style, the Alliance is developing a guidance manual. It will include a menu of BMP options that reflects the latest and best scientific and practitioner recommendations for different regions and operation types, and will be continually updated as new approaches become

commercially viable. This “outcomes-based” approach is designed to offer producers the flexibility they need to meet the standard in a way that works best for their particular circumstances.

*Auditor guidance:* An additional *Interpretation Guide* for the Grasslands Alliance Standard will provide instructions for auditors about the applicability of criteria and indicators in specific situations (e.g., on specific operation types, in specific eco-regions). This guide will serve as a tool for auditors to clarify standard intent and to calibrate scoring.

**Terms and Definitions:** Throughout the Standard, underlined terms carry a specific Grasslands Alliance definition, which is provided in Annex 1 – Terms and Definitions. These definitions are fundamental for the correct interpretation of criteria.

**Operation Types and U.S. Regions – Flexibility of Requirements:** During 2016-2017, the Grasslands Alliance will collaborate with partners across the U.S. to develop additional local requirements for key regions with certified and continuously improving operations. These documents will be binding for the local audit processes of the Grasslands Alliance’s accredited certification bodies and authorized auditors, with emphasis on local legislation for some of the Grasslands Alliance’s key criteria. These requirements will apply to the operation types and regions described below.

*Operation types (See Annex 1 for more detailed definitions):* The Grasslands Alliance standard applies to any one or combination of the following rangeland and/or pasture-based and mixed-farming systems:

- (a) **Rangeland:** Native and naturalized grassland, shrubland, savannah, woodland, wetland, and desert ecosystems that are grazed by domestic livestock or wild animals, but where rainfall is too low or erratic for growing crops. Rangelands are concentrated in the drier Western United States and are managed using ecological principles – as native ecosystems with few or no inputs.
- (b) **Improved pasture:** Irrigated, fertilized, and/or planted pasture managed based on agronomic principles; “farming with grass” to graze the forage crop(s).
- (c) **Unimproved pasture:** Land used for pasture that includes forage species, but has not been recently seeded, fertilized or irrigated;
- (d) **Marginal lands:** Lands on the edges of cropland or hay fields with low potential for cultivation, but that may be useful for grazing native and introduced forage.
- (e) **Cropland:** Grazed croplands planted to pasture in rotation with crops, grazed cover crops, grazed crop residues, and feed crop fields.

### *Regions*

The Grasslands Alliance recognizes that issues of concern facing livestock managers vary considerably among U.S. eco-regions, depending on climate, topography, soil type, plant communities (including local invasive species challenges and thresholds), land management and land use history, and the diversity and conservation status of local native plants and wildlife. The Grasslands Alliance Interpretation Guide and Producer Guidance Manual will offer guidelines regarding how to take these variations into account when implementing the Grasslands Alliance’s programs.

## THE GRASSLANDS ALLIANCE SCORING SYSTEM

### Scoring Requirements for Certification

The scoring system for Grasslands Alliance certification ensures that all operations comply with key strategic requirements at the first certification audit of the initial 3-year audit cycle, and that operations achieve continuous improvement toward greater compliance in the second and third certification cycles.

The scoring system for Grasslands Alliance certification is composed of three criteria categories:

1. **Critical Criterion CC:** highlighted as **Critical Criterion** in the left “Criteria” column. These criteria contain those requirements that are most essential to support the Grasslands Alliance mission and desired outcomes. Full compliance with critical criteria is required to obtain or maintain certification. Partial compliance or non-compliance will lead to the denial or withdrawal of certification for the audited organization. A critical criterion is scored as follows:

Scoring Category	Critical Criterion score	Conditions
<b>Fully compliant</b>	1 point	<i>Audited organization complies fully with <u>all</u> criterion components</i>
<b>Zero compliance</b>	0 points	<i><u>None</u> or <u>not all</u> of the criterion’s components are complied with</i>
<b>Not applicable</b>	Does not affect score	<i>Subject of evaluation is not present within the audit scope</i>

2. **Critical Criterion CC+3:** highlighted as **Critical Criterion CC+3** in the left “Criteria” column. To further ensure that other key strategic requirements are prioritized, a second category of critical criterion will be scored by auditors as a normal (continuous improvement) criterion during the first 3-year audit cycle, and then scored as a **Critical Criterion CC** (i.e., required) starting with the certification audit during the second 3-year audit cycle and thereafter. These criteria are considered very high priority, but may require a transition period for operations to plan, finance, and implement any required improvements. Starting with the second certification audit, partial or non-compliance of these **Critical Criteria CC+3** will lead to the denial or withdrawal of certification for the audited organization.
3. **Continuous Improvement Criterion:** Continuous Improvement criteria leave space for flexibility to plan corrective actions and comply with criteria at a later point in time – after the first and additional certification audits. Zero compliance or partial compliance with a continuous improvement criterion does not prevent an operation from obtaining certification. The following table illustrates the scoring system for continuous improvement criteria:

Scoring Category	Continuous Improvement Criterion score	Conditions
<b>Fully compliant</b>	1 point	<i>Audited organization complies fully with <u>all</u> criterion components</i>
<b>Partially compliant</b>	0.5 points	<i><u>Some</u>, but <u>not all</u> the criterion’s components are complied with</i>
<b>Zero compliance</b>	0 points	<i><u>None</u> of the criterion’s components are complied with</i>
<b>Not applicable</b>	Does not affect score	<i>Subject of evaluation is not present within the audit scope</i>

In order to obtain certification based on this Grasslands Alliance standard, an operation has to comply with two general requirements:

1. Comply fully with all applicable critical criteria;
2. Comply with a minimum percentage obtained by compliance with applicable criteria as follows:

- a. Year 0 or 1<sup>st</sup> Certification Audit: full compliance with 60% of all applicable criteria;
- b. Year 3 or 2<sup>nd</sup> regular Certification Audit (all Critical Criteria CC+3 become requirements): full compliance with 81% of all applicable criteria.
- c. Year 6 or 3<sup>rd</sup> regular Certification Audit: 85% of applicable criteria.

The total percentage score of all Criteria is calculated according to the following formula:

<b>Total No. of points</b>	x 100	=	<b>Overall percentage score</b>
<b>Applicable points</b>			

### Applicability

Criteria are implemented by all types and sizes of operations. Policies related to producer groups such as cooperatives and ranching conservation associations will be detailed in the Grasslands Alliance Policies and Procedures Manual.

### Program Scope

The initial Grasslands Alliance standard will support certification and stepwise continuous improvement programs (and customized applications such as internal sourcing guidelines and supply chain benchmarking) for U.S. and Canada-based beef cattle ranch and farm grazing operations (cow-calf, backgrounder, stocker, grass-finishing operations), including on-property feed crop lands and small animal feeding facilities such as backgrounding and winter-feeding lots. As with other schemes, the “unit of primary production” (the operation, including all owned and leased lands utilized for beef production) is certified, not the producing company or the product.

For operations that purchase animals from outside herds, animals must have (1) spent their entire life on a Grasslands Alliance certified operation(s) or (2) spent the last 12 months of their life on a Grasslands Alliance-certified operation in order to qualify for continuous improvement and certification.

The Grasslands Alliance’s programs cover all owned and leased lands utilized by grazing operations for beef production. Policies related to program implementation on leased private lands, state trust lands, and federal public lands will be detailed in the Alliance’s Policies and Procedures Manual.

### LIST OF GRASSLANDS ALLIANCE CRITICAL CRITERIA

The following list summarizes the topics covered by **Critical Criteria CC** and **Critical Criteria CC+3** of this standard:

Principle	Topic	Criterion No.	Critical Criterion	Critical Criterion CC+3
<b>Effective Planning and Management System</b>	1. Baseline assessment	1.1	X	
	2. Operations plan to optimize productivity, including contingency plan and land conversion plan	1.2		X
	3. IPM plan	1.3		X
	4. Herd Health Plan	1.4		X

	5. Monitoring & Up-to-date records of production practices	1.5		X
	6. Collected data are analyzed	1.6		X
	<b>Principle 1 - Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Wildlife Habitat &amp; Biodiversity Conservation</b>	7. Conservation Plan	2.1		X
	8. Management conserves natural ecosystems and ecosystem Processes, Overgrazing is Prevented (Land Mgt)	2.2		X
	9. Conservation of Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species and Communities (RTEESC) and their Habitats	2.4		X
	10. Non-lethal strategies for managing predators	2.5		X
	11. All natural ecosystems and HCV areas are identified and conserved (Land Use) AND no conversion/destruction of HCV areas or natural ecosystems (NE) 5 years prior to certification	2.7	X	
	12. Riparian conservation	2.8		X
	<b>Principle 2 - Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>Natural Resource Conservation</b>	13. Grazing and Pasture Management Plan	3.1.1		X
	14. Prevent, control, minimize extent of Invasive Plants	3.1.3		X
	15. Forage enhancements maintain ecological integrity	3.1.7		X
	16. Grazing and other management avoids or minimizes erosion	3.2.3		X
	17. Water use optimized	3.3.1		X
	18. Water quality – no water pollution	3.3.2	X	
	19. Operation implements IPM Plan	3.4.1		X
	20. Only pesticides legally registered in U.S. for animal/crop are used	3.4.2	X	
	21. GA prohibited pesticides not applied	3.4.3	X	
	22. GA restricted pesticides having risks to aquatic life are only used if non-application zones enforced, and if GA-required application equipment and weather conditions fulfilled at time of application.	3.4.5	X	
	23. GA restricted substances listed for wildlife risk mitigation are only applied if wildlife risk mitigation activities are implemented.	3.4.6	X	
	24. GA restricted substances having risks to pollinators can only be used if target plants not flowering, or during the night	3.4.7	X	
	25. The storage of Grasslands Alliance prohibited pesticides listed in Annex 1 of this standard is prohibited.	3.4.14	X	
	26. Animals covered by GA scope do not consist of GMOs and are not repackaged or processed with GMO products	3.4.16	X	
	27. Nutrient & Manure Management Plan	3.5.1		X
<b>Principle 3 - Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>			<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Improved Livelihoods and Wellbeing</b>	28. Communication of labor policies and grievance mechanisms	4.1	X	
	29. No forced labor	4.2	X	
	30. No discrimination	4.3	X	
	31. Freedom of Association with worker organizations and collective bargaining	4.4	X	
	32. Minimum wage payment	4.5	X	
	33. No practices to avoid legal pay or benefits	4.9	X	
	34. No worst forms of child labor	4.14	X	

	35. No commercial agriculture work under 15 years of age	4.15	X	
	36. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)	4.17	X	
	<b>Principle 4 - Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Healthy &amp; Humane Treatment of Animals</b>	37. Animal identification system / traceability	5.1	X	
	38. Animals are raised on Grasslands Alliance certified grazing operations – time requirements	5.2		X
	39. Cloned animals not permitted	5.3	X	
	40. Mistreatment or abuse of animals prohibited	5.4	X	
	41. Herd Health Plan effectively implemented	5.6		X
	42. Consumable water	5.8	X	
	43. Feed cannot contain antibiotics, hormones, beta-agonists, byproducts, excrement	5.10	X	
	44. No administration of substances prohibited by GA (including non-therapeutic antibiotics, beta agonists, hormones used for growth promotion, and other substances)	5.11	X	
	<b>Principle 5 - Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Climate Smart Ranch</b>	45. Climate smart ranching plan	6.1		X
	<b>Principle 6 - Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Grasslands Alliance Standard – Total Critical Criteria and CC+3</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>

## END NOTES - INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) Sustainable Agriculture Standard: <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/publications/sustainable-agriculture-standard>

<sup>2</sup> Food Alliance Sustainability Standard for Livestock Operations - <http://foodalliance.org/livestock/livestockops>