



Food Alliance Certification for Food Handlers

Food Alliance has been certifying farmers and ranchers for sustainable agricultural practices since 1998. Our certification standards are recognized for their breadth and depth, addressing a full range of industry and consumer concerns with an approach that is science based, peer reviewed and outcomes-focused.

Food Alliance introduced an important new component to the program in 2006 – a certification for food “handlers,” including packers, processors, manufacturers, and distributors. This certification distinguishes businesses that:

- Use Food Alliance certified ingredients
- Ensure quality control and food safety
- Preserve product purity and nutritional value
- Provide safe and fair working conditions
- Conserve energy and water
- Manage solid waste responsibly
- Reduce use of toxic and hazardous materials
- Plan for continuous improvement

Food Alliance’s handler certification addresses concerns in the supply chain for the traceability and integrity of products, and preserves the value of claims made by certified farmers and ranchers for social and environmental responsibility. It also provides an opportunity for processors, distributors and other businesses to demonstrate their own commitments to sustainability.

The certification is rigorous, involving annual on-site inspections to evaluate product segregation, tracking, and record keeping systems, and to assess performance on social and environmental criteria. It requires facilities to set goals for improving social and environmental performance and to show regular progress against those goals.

Are all businesses that handle Food Alliance Certified products required to be certified?

Farmers and ranchers are required to be certified to establish sustainability claims for products. Food processors and manufacturers, which change the form of products or utilize products as ingredients, are also required to be certified to preserve the integrity of product claims.*

Distributors are not required to be certified. However, distributors may voluntarily seek Food Alliance Certification to distinguish themselves as purveyors of certified products and to support their own claims for social and environmental responsibility. Food Alliance Certified distributors are taking extra steps to assure product integrity and to “green” the supply chain.

Retail outlets, food service operations and restaurants are also not required to be certified. Food Alliance maintains a broad network of relationships with businesses in this category to promote awareness of sustainability issues and to stimulate market interest in certified products. We list a number of businesses that have expressed interest in buying more certified products on our website as a resource for our certification clients. However, this is not an endorsement of those businesses.

Is the handler certification related to offering more certified products or more local products?

Certification is not related to the diversity, availability, volume, or regional origin of certified product offerings. The handler certification ensures the integrity of certified products and verifies claims for sustainable management practices in the handler’s facilities. However, a distributor or other business that invests in Food Alliance certification has a clear commitment to the success of the program. By providing traceability, the certification also facilitates local purchasing initiatives.

* Note: Businesses contracted by third-parties to provide processing or other services may elect to complete only the “chain of custody” portion of the certification. In this case, the integrity of the product is assured, however the handler in question may not use Food Alliance’s name or seal in association with any product or performance claim.