



Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) Standard for Canadian Farmers

In the context of open and globalized markets, grain farmers across Canada and their business partners are competing with a growing number of soy-producing countries.

While prices and product quality remain key competitive aspects, new criteria related to the environmental and social attributes of products and business activities are becoming increasingly important, especially in the agri-food industry.



Consumers are increasingly concerned about the sustainability of farming and food, particularly the impact on the economy, the environment, and their communities.

The Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) standard was established to verify sustainable soybean farming practices. Adopting this standard will enable Canadian soybean farmers to continue to access international markets.

The RTRS certification program promotes the adoption of best management practices on the farm. It enables farmers to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable farming to business partners, consumers, and retailers.

New market realities and expectations

The adoption of environmentally and socially sound practices is becoming a prerequisite for market access and a social license to operate individually and collectively. These expectations are held at all levels of society:

CONSUMERS have growing expectations in terms of how responsibly the agri-food industry behaves in regard to environmental stewardship and socioeconomic contribution and are looking for food products that meet high and credible standards attesting to sustainable production.

RETAILERS are increasingly adopting sustainability strategies and responsible procurement practices, which require their suppliers to comply with social and environmental criteria and specifications.

GOVERNMENTS are continuously assessing initiatives to help increase the sustainable footprint of agriculture and make the sector as resilient as possible to climate change.





Status in Canada

While RTRS sets the overall framework, each participating country works to develop and approve its own interpretation of the standard. Each interpretation supports the program’s mission but is adapted according to national labour laws, environmental regulations, and other legislation.

The Canadian standard began to take shape in 2013 when initial roundtable discussions were held between grower representatives, industry partners, and retailers. The Canadian interpretation of the RTRS standard was finalized at the end of August 2014.

Increased demand from European retailers led to a pilot project during the 2014 growing season to assess the feasibility of the certification process in Ontario. Seven farmers dedicated acreage to the project and tracked their sustainable growing methods to put the proposed framework to the test. The pilot project was a success, and farmers were able to complete the certification process and meet the end-use requirements.

Building the capacity to respond to the new market expectations



Introducing the leading global initiative in the soy industry: RTRS

Founded in Switzerland in 2006, the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) is a multi-stakeholder organization. Its objective is to facilitate global dialogue on economically viable, socially equitable, and environmentally appropriate soybean production. It provides stakeholders—farmers, social organizations, companies, and industries—with the opportunity to develop joint global solutions leading to responsible soybean production.

RTRS has developed a standard for responsible soybean production that includes requirements to preserve areas with high conservation value, promote best management practices, guarantee fair labour conditions, and respect land tenure claims.

RTRS members



180+ members around the world



2 members in Canada

RTRS is a global initiative that has over 180 members around the world, including soybean producing and importing countries such as Brazil, Argentina, the United States, India, China, Singapore, and several European countries.



The RTRS standard at a glance

Basic principles verified on a RTRS producer's farm



LEGAL COMPLIANCE AND GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICES

Farmers are expected to comply with all applicable laws and continuous improvement criteria with respect to the requirements of the standard.



RESPONSIBLE LABOUR CONDITIONS

Farmers must provide employees with a safe and healthy workplace and fair working conditions.



RESPONSIBLE COMMUNITY RELATIONS

To avoid conflict, ensure the social acceptability of soybean farming operations and offer fair opportunities to the local population and suppliers, a constant and respectful dialogue with local communities must be established.



ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Farmers are expected to minimize and mitigate the negative environmental impact of their operations and make an effort to reduce their carbon footprint and protect biodiversity.



GOOD AGRICULTURE PRACTICES

As stewards of the land and producers of high quality foods, farmers should incorporate best management practices to protect air, water, and soil for the next generations.



The standard is comprised of 5 principles and 28 criteria applicable to soybean farmers seeking to obtain the RTRS certification for a conventional or an organic system. The standard consists of a total of 99 indicators: some require immediate compliance (69) and others require compliance within one (20) or three years of the certification date (10).

The certification process

For the first year, certification requires compliance with 70 % of the 99 indicators of the Canadian National Interpretation of the RTRS standard. The certificate is valid for 5 years, during which annual follow ups are carried out to ensure progressive implementation and ongoing conformity.

How can you start the process?

- 1 Choosing a certification body
- 2 Pre-audit (voluntary)
- 3 Public consultation
- 4 Audit
- 5 Preparation and revision of audit reports
- 6 Issuing the certificate

It's easy. Start by submitting an application to a certification body. Then, an audit will be conducted on your farm. Once the evaluation is completed and corrective measures (if needed) are implemented, you will receive your compliance certificate.

Be prepared!

Grain Farmers of Ontario has released a **growers' guide** to help farms prepare for the audit. This easy-to-use self-assessment tool will help you benchmark your current practices based on the requirements of the standard.

The guide also provides a wealth of information on available resources and good practices to ensure compliance. The tool is available online at www.gfo.ca (in the Market Development - Sustainability page).



Why should you move towards RTRS?

RTRS certification confirms that you meet the global standard for sustainable soybean production and provides greater access to international markets.

Testimonials from certified producers

"I saw the RTRS certification program as a lever to improve our business management skills and quality control while allowing us to differentiate our products and secure the market."

"The RTRS program will give us a competitive advantage in terms of the buyers who are looking for this certification. It should also enhance our profitability through better recordkeeping, for instance. Overall, it will make us more aware of our social and environmental impacts."

"Growers have to expect to meet higher quality and data management standards. While paperwork is rarely a priority on farms, the hurdles we had were very limited."

"I would definitely encourage other farmers to join RTRS to improve profits in soybean while reaching or maintaining higher management capabilities."

The benefits of being RTRS certified

Economic benefits

- Gain better access to international markets
- Retain markets that transition to RTRS requirements

Environmental benefits

- Lower your environmental footprint
- Improve your environmental commitment

Social benefits

- Increase employee satisfaction
- Enhance community relations

Get involved

Individual Certification – An individual farmer may certify his/her own operation.

Group Certification – As a group, several producers may apply for a single certification that covers all of their fields and share certification and annual monitoring costs.

Multi-Site Certification – Multiple farms subject to the same, sole management may obtain a single certificate.

More information

Mike Buttenham
Market Development Coordinator
Sustainability and Environment
Grain Farmers of Ontario (GFO)
mbuttenham@gfo.ca
519 767-4128

About GFO
www.gfo.ca

About RTRS
www.responsiblesoy.org
www.responsiblesoy.org/documentos/canadian-national-interpretation/