

## Scheme for the AACS certification programme

### Questions and answers

The **Austrian Agricultural Certification Scheme (AACS)** covers process certification for monitoring the sustainable production of products on agricultural land that are intended for further use in biofuels, liquid biofuels and biomass fuels in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, as amended.<sup>1</sup> The certification covers the entire process from agricultural production through the supply chain to processing. It does not refer to the respective products themselves, but to the sustainability criteria and procedural steps within this process. Wherever raw materials, products, goods, their sustainability, etc. are mentioned in the text, these are to be understood in the context of the certified process. Products and goods are all plant-based raw materials grown and harvested on agricultural land that serve as starting materials, as well as intermediate products made from them.

#### **Consolidated programme based on the documents submitted to the EC<sup>2</sup>:**

The certification programme covers the processes involved in the acquisition and processing of sustainable agricultural products for the production of biofuels, liquid biofuels and biomass fuels in the mass balances of AACS-certified companies.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. What is meant by sustainability within the meaning of Directive (EU) 2018/2001, as amended?

In the field of biofuels, liquid biofuels and biomass fuels, sustainability means that:

- Raw materials are cultivated responsibly and economically sustainably, without destroying ecosystems worthy of protection.
- Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced – by at least 50–65% compared to fossil fuels.
- Ecological standards are complied with – for example, protection of biodiversity and soil quality.
- Social responsibility through the pursuit of climate-related goals.

AACS (Austrian Agricultural Certification Scheme) is the Austrian national certification system that reviews and ensures compliance with the processes behind these criteria.

<sup>1</sup> This means that the AACS only certifies and covers the process from cultivation to the first stage of processing, and not the entire fuel supply chain. Nevertheless, the system can provide useful information for economic operators further up the supply chain.

<sup>2</sup> See the EC statement and documents cited in the assessment template (Assessment AACS\_v5\_080322 pages 3–5).

<sup>3</sup> See AACS infosheets for registered managers and AACS infosheets for companies.

## 2. Why does AACS exist?

The EU Directive (EU) 2018/2001, as amended (RED II), requires that biofuels, liquid biofuels and biomass fuels:

- be verifiably produced in a sustainable manner.
- have no negative impact on the climate and nature.
- are transparently traceable.
- contribute significantly to reducing greenhouse gases.

## 3. How does AACS work?

**The following system requirements must be met:**

### 3.1 Area and cultivation criteria

No cultivation on: **Areas of high biodiversity value**, such as

- Primary forests and forests with high biological diversity; old-growth forests
- Grassland with high biodiversity (both natural and non natural grassland), for example species-rich meadows); heathland<sup>4</sup>
- Designated areas (e.g. Natura 2000, nature reserves, national parks)
- Areas with high carbon stocks, such as wetlands and continuously forested areas
- Peat bog

**The following are permitted:**

- Land already used for agricultural purposes (since 1 January 2008 or earlier)
- Exceptions may be made for grassland, designated areas (nature reserves) and peat bogs.

### 3.2 Greenhouse gas (GHG) calculation

Minimum requirements:

- 50 % GHG-Reduction (Facilities before 2015)
- 65 % GHG-Reduction (Facilities after 2021)

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<sup>4</sup> Heathland, i.e. areas that have a vegetation of different dwarf shrub heaths. In the narrower sense, these are societies of small-grown woody formations, which can reach growth heights of 5 cm to 150 cm. Dwarf shrub heaths can be found in the valleys and basins as well as in the mountains in different areas, which colonise nutrient-poor carbonate-containing and carbonate-free soils as a location (Definition according to NLAV, BGBl. II. 124/2018 as amended)

The following values can be used:

- Standard values (predefined EU values)
- NUTS II regional values (specific to each federal state)
- Actual values (verification by other recognised systems)

### 3.3 Mass balance & traceability for initial purchaser/retailer/processor:

- Separate accounting for sustainable and conventional products
- Physical mixing of non-sustainable products with sustainable products or products with different sustainability characteristics is possible within the framework of the provisions for mixtures for mass balancing.
- Mandatory reporting to the European Commission's Union Database (UDB)
- Quarterly reporting to the AMA (except for participants in the small quantities regulation)

## 4. Who must comply with the regulations of AACCS?

- Farmers who cultivate plant-based raw materials for the production of biofuels, liquid biofuels and biomass fuels, and who sign the farmer's confirmation (confirmation of compliance).
- First buyers and retailers (for example, grain retailers)
- Processors (for example, oil mills, biodiesel producers)
- Registration with the AMA is required for these parties!

## 5. Advantages of AACCS

- EU-wide recognition – valid in all Member States
- Transparent certification – clear rules and controls
- Promotion of renewable energies – contribution to climate targets
- Market advantage – sustainable products are in demand
- Customer-oriented processing

## 6. How does the certification process work?

- Registration with the AMA (using the form) and submission of all required documents
- After positive registration control: Registration and publication on the AMA website
- Documentation of the flow of goods (maintaining a mass balance)
- Sustainability certificates (NH-U1 form, confirmation from the farmer)
- Annual inspections by the AMA
- If required, the AMA provides the European Commission with all information in accordance with the provisions of Article 30 (10) of the Directive and Article 17 of the Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/996.

## 7. Outsourcing of certification activities

The programme basically provides for certification activities to be carried out by the AMA certification body (CB). In doing so, it draws on the infrastructure, processes and services of the AMA (for example, use of INVEKOS data, MFA selection, on-site inspections). However, the process can in principle also be carried out by other certification bodies, provided they are commissioned to do so by the AMA.