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K-Ö

Scheme for the AACSplus certification programme

Questions and answers

The **Austrian Agricultural Certification Scheme Plus (AACSplus)**[1] is a certification system developed by Agrarmarkt Austria (AMA) that reviews processes and the sustainability chain in agriculture, particularly for products such as malting barley, soybeans, oilseeds and vegetable oils. AACSplus ensures that standardised procedures and sustainable practices are adhered to throughout the entire value chain. 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, through the supply chain to processing. 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.

As an extension of the existing AACS system, it is aimed at farmers, processors and companies in the food and feed industry to ensure transparency and sustainability in production.

1. What is sustainability in the context of AACSplus?

Sustainability means that:

- Raw materials are cultivated responsibly and economically without destroying ecosystems worthy of protection.
- social and environmental requirements are met – for example, protection of biodiversity and soil quality, employee protection, etc. (in accordance with FEFAC criteria in the case of soybean cultivation for the feed industry)

[1] The programme for AACSplus is set out in procedural instruction VA-ZS09 ‘AACSplus Sustainability Agricultural Products’ (including work instructions and additional information) and published in the corresponding guidelines.

2. How does AACSplus work?

The following system requirements must be met:

2.1 Area and cultivation criteria for farmers

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 artificially created, for example species-rich meadows); heathland
- Nature reserves (Natura 2000, 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.

2.2 Mass balance & traceability for initial purchaser/retailer/processor:

- Separate accounting for sustainable and conventional products
- Quarterly (or annual under the small quantities regulation) reporting to the AMA

3. Who must comply with the regulations of AACSplus?

- 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)
  - Additional social and environmental requirements (FEFAC criteria) for the cultivation of soybeans!
- First buyers and retailers (for example grain retailers)
- Processors (for example oil mills, Malting Plants)
- Registration with the AMA is required for these parties!

4. Advantages of AACSplus:

- Transparent certification – clear rules and controls
- Promotion of sustainable cultivation and processing – contribution to climate targets
- Market advantage – sustainable products are in demand
- Customer-oriented processing

5. 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

6. 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.