

Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) Program Frequently Asked Questions: April 2011

The Basics of SFI Certification

1. What is the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program?

Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. (SFI) manages the largest single forest certification standard in the world. A fully independent, registered non-profit organization, SFI works with conservation, community, government and industry partners to improve sustainable forest management in North America and fiber sourcing globally.

2. What led to third-party forest certification?

Voluntary third-party forest certification began in the 1990s in response to market concerns about pressing global issues such as deforestation and illegal logging, primarily in developing countries. Today, more than 50 third-party forest certification standards are recognized by world markets, reflecting the diversity of forest types and tenures around the world. However, only about 10 percent of the world's forests are certified.

3. Who is responsible for the SFI program?

An independent [Board of Directors](#)¹, representing environmental, social and economic interests equally, governs all aspects of the SFI program.

4. What is the role of the SFI External Review Panel?

The [SFI External Review Panel](#)² is an independent group of 15 distinguished volunteer experts from conservation, environmental, forestry, academic and public/government organizations that advises the SFI Board of Directors on ways to improve the quality of the SFI program and make it more successful in achieving its mission.

5. How does SFI encourage government involvement?

The SFI program encourages the involvement of public agencies on its board, its External Review Panel and through its community-based SFI Implementation Committees. SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant projects complement existing government initiatives in North America, and support communities by involving organizations such as government agencies, Aboriginal communities and universities.

How SFI Compares

6. How does SFI compare with other certification standards?

Forest certification standards actually have a fair amount in common. [Recent reports](#)³ have shown there is little difference among certification programs in North America. A 2009-2010 UN market review said: "Over the years, many of the issues that previously divided the (certification) systems have become much less distinct. The largest certification systems now generally have the same structural programmatic requirements." The SFI program also has many unique aspects, including requirements for research, logger training and responsible procurement for even the uncertified wood in the supply chain.

7. How does the SFI Standard compare specifically with FSC standards?

SFI and the Forest Stewardship Council are very much working towards the same goal – promoting responsible forestry. Both are rigorous programs, grounded in science, with measures in place to conserve biodiversity, old growth, endangered species, water quality, and the rights of indigenous peoples. Both use third-party audits. One main difference is that SFI has one single standard for forest management

¹ www.sfiprogram.org/sustainable-forestry-initiative/sfi-governance.php

² www.sfiprogram.org/sustainable-forestry-initiative/external-review-panel.php

³ www.sfiprogram.org/sustainable-forestry-initiative/how-sfi-compares.php

certification in North America whereas FSC has dozens of standards it uses worldwide. SFI includes government representatives on its Board and its External Review Panel. The Forest Stewardship Council excludes government from its board membership and decision-making, which means excluding a major interest or even the ultimate landowner in the case of public lands. Additional information can be found in the [What Others are Saying](#)⁴ fact sheet and the [SFI-FSC Comparison](#)⁵ report.

8. What does PEFC endorsement of SFI mean?

The independent, non-profit [Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification](#)⁶ (PEFC) helps buyers identify and promote products from forests that are managed sustainably by endorsing national and/or regional forest certification standards that meet its rigorous criteria. PEFC has endorsed SFI and two other certification standards in North America – the American Tree Farm System[®] (ATFS) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). The SFI certified forest content chain-of-custody labels can be used when a product's fiber content comes from forests certified to ATFS, CSA and/or SFI – as long as the company has an SFI and/or PEFC chain-of-custody certification.

Credible Certification

9. What does SFI third-party certification involve?

Voluntary third-party certification involves an independent audit to ensure that requirements set out in the SFI Standard and supporting documents have been met. A certificate is issued if the planning, procedures, systems and performance of on-the-ground forest operations are found to be in conformance with the standard. This is more rigorous than self-regulated claims by companies about their own products.

10. How is this independence maintained?

[Certification bodies](#)⁷ performing audits to SFI forest management, chain-of-custody and/or fiber sourcing requirements must be objective and have the necessary knowledge and skills. Depending on the scope of the audit, they must complete an accreditation program through internationally recognized accreditation bodies such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB) and/or the Standards Council of Canada (SCC).

11. How does SFI develop its standard?

The [SFI Standard development process](#)⁸ is open and transparent. The [SFI 2010-2014 Standard](#)⁹ is the result of an 18-month open review that included two public comment periods and seven regional workshops. SFI Inc. publicized the process at every step, and posted comments and draft standards on its website.

The SFI Program: In the Forest

12. What is the SFI Standard?

The SFI 2010-2014 Standard advances responsible forest management in North America through 14 core principles and measures that promote sound forest management and consider all forest values. These principles are: sustainable forestry, forest productivity and health, protection of water resources, protection of biological diversity, aesthetics and recreation, protection of special sites, responsible fiber sourcing practices in North America, avoidance of controversial sources including illegal logging in offshore fiber sourcing, legal compliance, research, training and education, public involvement, transparency, and continual improvement.

The standard also has 20 objectives, 38 performance measures and 115 indicators. To be certified, forest operations must be third-party audited to these requirements by independent, objective and accredited certification bodies.

⁴ www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/SFI_what%20others%20are%20saying.pdf

⁵ www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/SFI_FSC_comparison_2010.pdf

⁶ www.sfiprogram.org/sfi-standard/forest-certification-endorsement.php

⁷ www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/CertificationBodies.pdf

⁸ www.sfiprogram.org/standard-development-process.php

⁹ www.sfiprogram.org/sfi-standard/sfi-standard.php

13. Who owns/manages lands certified to the SFI Standard?

Private landowners, government agencies, forest product manufacturing facilities, conservation groups and universities have certified lands they own or manage in the United States and Canada to the SFI forest standard. At the end of 2010, more than 180 million acres/73 million hectares across the United States and Canada were certified to the SFI Standard, making it the largest single forest standard in the world.

14. How does SFI support forest research activities?

The SFI 2010-2014 Standard recognizes the importance of science for responsible forest management. It is the only forest certification standard in North America requiring that participants support and engage in research activities to improve forest health, productivity and sustainable management of forest resources. The standard's definition of relevant research includes the environmental performance of forest products and climate change impacts on forests, wildlife and biological diversity. Since 1995, SFI-certified organizations have contributed more than \$1.2 billion for research activities that support forestry research, science and technology.

15. How does SFI promote responsible forestry beyond certified lands?

In North America, program participants must promote responsible forestry by providing leadership and sharing best practices to improve forest management, including logger training to reach the thousands of independent contractors that are the key to responsible harvesting practices; regionally appropriate guidance to landowners; and use of best management practices to protect water quality. When sourcing fiber from jurisdictions outside of North America that may lack effective environmental and social laws, they must complete a risk assessment to avoid illegal sources of supply, and they must promote the conservation of biodiversity hotspots and high-biodiversity wilderness areas and promote socially sound practices, among other things.

16. How does the SFI program work with communities?

A network of 37 community-based [SFI Implementation Committees](#)¹⁰ responds to diverse local needs. Members include private landowners, independent loggers, forestry professionals, local government agencies, academics, scientists, and conservationists who raise public understanding about forestry and support local programs such as education and training for loggers, and outreach for family forest owners. The SFI program and many implementation committees have partnered with Habitat for Humanity affiliates in Canada and the United States to build homes for hard-working families.

The SFI Program: In the Marketplace

17. What is SFI chain-of-custody certification?

SFI chain-of-custody certification provides a link between certified forests and certified products. It tells a buyer how much fiber in a product is from certified forest content, certified sourcing and/or post-consumer recycled content. SFI chain-of-custody certification tells buyers the percentage of fiber from certified forests and/or certified sourcing and/or post-consumer recycled content.

¹⁰ www.sfiprogram.org/sustainable-forestry-initiative/outreach-training.php

18. What do SFI on-product labels represent?

The SFI program has four on-product [labels](#)¹¹ to help customers and consumers identify exactly what they are buying: three SFI chain-of-custody labels and one SFI certified sourcing label.

- SFI [chain-of-custody](#)¹² labels allow the use of fiber from certified forest content and/or certified sourcing, and/or post-consumer recycled material. All of these terms are defined in the [SFI Definitions](#)¹³.



- The SFI [certified sourcing](#)¹⁴ label and claim **do not make claims about certified forest content**. Certified sourcing can include fiber sourced from a company that conforms to the SFI 2010-2014 Standard's fiber sourcing requirements, and/or from pre- or post-consumer recycled content, and/or from a certified forest content, and and/or fiber sourced from non-controversial sources. Certified sourcing is a defined term in the [SFI Definitions](#)¹⁵.



19. Does an SFI label mean all the fiber in a product is from a certified forest?

No. Fiber supply chains are complex, which is why all the forest certification programs, including SFI, allow for segregation or percentage-based methods to track certified wood flows.

SFI requires transparency. Organizations using the average percentage method must use the SFI X% chain-of-custody label to tell buyers the percentage of fiber from certified forests and/or certified sourcing and/or post-consumer recycled material. They also must have at least 10 percent certified forest content to utilize the X% certified forest content tagline. Since organizations can label 100 percent of a product with the average percent labels, they must communicate the actual percentage of certified content on the label (e.g. with 30% certified forest content, the label would show 30%).

Organizations using the volume credit method to calculate certified content must use the "Promoting Sustainable Forestry" chain-of-custody label. Since they can label the percentage of output corresponding to the percentage of certified forest content used in the manufacturing process, this means that if they use 30 percent certified forest content in their manufacturing facility, they can label only 30 percent of their output.

All of the chain-of-custody labels can include a Mobius loop stating the percentage of post-consumer recycled content in the product, where applicable. This recycled content claim is verified during the third-party audit process.

More information about SFI labels and claims is posted on the [SFI website](#)¹⁶.

20. How much of North America's certified forest output can carry the SFI on-product label?

More than three quarters of the certified forest content in North America can carry an SFI label – this includes forestland certified to SFI and two other credible certification standards, the Canadian Standards Association and the American Tree Farm System, both of which SFI recognizes.

¹¹ www.sfiprogram.org/SFI_labels_and_claims.php

¹² www.sfiprogram.org/sfi-standard/sfi-chain-of-custody-requirements.php

¹³ www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/Section13_sfi_requirements_2010-2014.pdf

¹⁴ www.sfiprogram.org/sfi-standard/sfi-fiber-sourcing_requirements.php

¹⁵ www.sfiprogram.org/files/pdf/Section13_sfi_requirements_2010-2014.pdf

¹⁶ www.sfiprogram.org/SFI_labels_and_claims.php

21. What kinds of products bear the SFI label?

SFI on-product labels are found on a wide variety of wood and paper products – from 2x4s and furniture to reams of paper and envelopes to all types of packaging.

22. How can I find SFI-certified products?

Buyers can use the on-line [SFI Certification Database](#)¹⁷ to find wood, paper, print or packaging products that meet SFI Standard requirements, as well as research information about SFI-certified forests, organizations with SFI certificates, certificate details and which independent certification body conducted the certification. The database provides searchable information on all certificates for the SFI forest management, chain-of-custody and certified sourcing standards as well as chain-of-custody certification to PEFC standards in North America. It can also be used to verify SFI label identification and certificate numbers.

SFI Supporters and Partners

23. How does the SFI program work with the conservation sector?

Conservation groups are represented on the SFI Board of Directors and the External Review Panel; they work with the SFI program and its participants to achieve forest management and conservation objectives; and they help to improve the SFI Standard and its implementation through pilot projects and by providing comments through the standard review process. The [SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program](#)¹⁸ fosters partnerships between organizations interested in improving forest management in the United States and Canada, and responsible procurement globally.

24. How does the SFI program work with communities?

A network of 37 community-based [SFI Implementation Committees](#)¹⁹ responds to diverse local needs and issues. Members include private landowners, independent loggers, forestry professionals, local government agencies, academics, scientists, and conservationists who raise public understanding about forestry and support local programs such as education and training for loggers and foresters, and outreach for family forest owners. The SFI program and many implementation committees have partnered with Habitat for Humanity affiliates in Canada and the United States to build homes for hard-working families.

25. What is the SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program?

Since 2010, SFI Inc. has been funding cooperative projects that illustrate the tangible, on-the-ground benefits of the SFI program. The [SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program](#)²⁰ supports projects that foster partnerships between organizations interested in improving forest management in the U.S. and Canada and responsible procurement globally, and are working to strengthen communities through SFI-related activities.

Through this grant program, SFI Inc. has committed \$400,000 a year to support cooperative projects that deliver tangible, on-the-ground benefits of forests. Through the involvement of partners, the 2010 projects alone will leverage additional resources and achieve a total of almost \$2.7 million.

Who Recognizes SFI Certification?

26. Who recognizes SFI certification?

The SFI program is recognized by many [influential organizations](#)²¹ around the world, including:

- The U.S. General Services Administration (for new installations of wood products in leased buildings)
- The Canadian Council of Forest Ministers
- The National Association of State Foresters
- Public Works and Government Services Canada
- The American Consumer Council

¹⁷ www.sfiprogram.org/find-sfi-forest-products

¹⁸ www.sfiprogram.org/conservation-grant/index.php

¹⁹ www.sfiprogram.org/sustainable-forestry-initiative/outreach-training.php

²⁰ www.sfiprogram.org/conservation-grant/index.php

²¹ www.sfiprogram.org/sustainable-forestry-initiative/sfi-recognition.php

- The Competition Bureau of Canada ([Environmental Claims: A Guide for Industry and Advertisers](#))²²
- TerraChoice 2010 [Sins of Greenwashing](#)²³
- Environment Canada [EcoLogo program](#)²⁴

The SFI Standard is recognized by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), and PEFC-endorsed standards are recognized by a number of government agencies and corporations around the world.

27. Is SFI certification recognized by forest professionals?

SFI certification is recognized by the Society of American Foresters and the Canadian Institute of Forestry. The National Association of State Foresters says all certification programs in North America, including SFI, “include the fundamental elements of credibility and make positive contributions to forest sustainability.”

28. Is SFI certification recognized by green building rating programs?

Wood is a sound and responsible building material, and certification offers added proof that it is from a responsible source. Many [green building tools](#)²⁵ recognize SFI-certified wood products as a sound environmental choice, including three ANSI-approved standards in the United States (the National Home Building Standard, the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer’s Association and Green Globes U.S.), Green Globes Canada, Built Green Canada and BREEAM in the United Kingdom.

29. Can I use SFI-certified wood for a LEED structure?

Absolutely. By forgoing the one point for certified wood, you can use SFI-certified products in any LEED project and show you support North American forests, communities and jobs. Better yet, you can choose one of the [other green building rating systems](#)²⁶ that encourage the use of wood by accepting all credible certification programs, including SFI. [Learn more](#)²⁷ about SFI efforts to encourage the U.S. Green Building Council to find a workable solution to end LEED’s discrimination against North American wood products.

30. Is SFI certification recognized by consumer organizations?

SFI certification is accepted by respected labeling organizations such as Environment Canada’s EcoLogo program. In its 2010 Sins of Greenwashing report, TerraChoice once again listed SFI among legitimate environmental standards and certifications. Tom Hinton, President and CEO of the American Consumer Council said he “applauds the positive and progressive things SFI is doing.”

For more information about the SFI program, visit sfiprogram.org.

²² www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/02700.html

²³ <http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/>

²⁴ www.ec.gc.ca/education/default.asp?lang=en&n=743D106D-1

²⁵ www.sfiprogram.org/green_building/green-building-acceptance.php

²⁶ www.sfiprogram.org/green_building/green-building-acceptance.php

²⁷ www.sfiprogram.org/leed