

Bee Better Certified™ Certification Body Authorization Process and Application Requirements

Bee Better Certified™ works to give bees a healthy place to live
An Initiative of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

beebettercertified.org

Version 1 (February 2022)

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Named for the first butterfly species known to go extinct due to habitat loss, the Xerces Society (Xerces) has worked tirelessly for the past 50 years to protect invertebrates and their habitat. By using applied research, engaging in advocacy, providing educational resources, and addressing policy implications, Xerces endeavors to make meaningful long-term conservation a reality. For more than a decade, Xerces' Pollinator Program has partnered with land managers, farmers, researchers and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) across the US to implement and evaluate habitat targeted at enhancing pollinator populations and bolstering crop production. The techniques the Pollinator Program have developed form the basis for the Bee Better Certified Agricultural Production Standards.

Bee Better Certified

Bee Better Certified (BBC) is a one of a kind, third-party verified, food and farming certification program that champions growers who make a commitment to pollinators. This program distills down the best and most up-to-date pollinator science and field tested methods to set the standard for pollinator conservation in agricultural landscapes. Third-party verification from an authorized certification body ensures that the rigorous requirements are being met.

Agricultural Production Standards

To ensure that the BBC Production Standards were achievable yet rigorous, the Xerces developed a multi-step standards creation and review process. This included the following four step process:

1. Key Xerces staff evaluated the scientific literature to identify key habitat implementation and pesticide mitigation techniques that supported pollinators. These techniques were then cross-referenced with our extensive habitat field trials.
2. Xerces convened a team of experts from fields including agriculture, bee biology, pollination ecology, pesticide mitigation, sustainable supply chains, and retail to develop the BBC Production Standards. We also included farmers in this process to ensure that the perspectives of the growers adopting the standards were reflected. Many of these experts joined the BBC Advisory Board to continue providing insight that improves the program's functionality.
3. Xerces asked a larger group of experts to review the standards and provide feedback. This feedback was then incorporated into the standards.
4. A leading NOP organic certification body, Oregon Tilth, evaluated the standards to ensure that each one was verifiable during their on-site inspection process. They assisted Xerces in the creation of record-keeping forms and helped identify actions that could bring farmers out of compliance with the standards.

The result of this two year process is a set of Production Standards and supporting documents that reflect the most up-to-date scientific understanding of the threats pollinators face and state-of-the-art techniques that help mitigate these threats. For more information about the scientific underpinnings of each standard see our Background to the Standards. The Production Standards and the associated documents are updated on a bi-annual basis and reviewed by the advisory board and other experts to ensure they are an up-to-date reflection of current science and practice.

An authorized certification body must demonstrate a rigorous approach to upholding these standards and have the ability to assure all stakeholders that farms certified under the BBC program are meeting these high standards for pollinator conservation.

Labeling and Licensing Standards

The Labeling Standards, similar to the BBC Production Standards, was developed with the input from certification and industry professionals. This document lays out the requirements for the use of the BBC Program Mark and Ingredient and Product Seals.

Please note that the approval to issue licenses for the use of the Bee Better Seal is managed under a separate application process. Mentions of the Labeling and Licensing Standards in this document are included for reference purposes only to provide a full picture of the scope of Bee Better Certified as a whole.

2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The certification body authorization procedure will give consistency and transparency to the certifier onboarding process. It will define the timeline and outline the steps a prospective certification body needs to take in order to gain authorization to certify to the BBC Production Standards. Specifically this document sets out:

1. The qualifications needed to become an authorized certification body
2. How an organization can apply to become an authorized certification body
3. How organizations maintain authorization
4. Mechanisms to obtain extensions to required deadlines
5. Mechanisms to facilitate extensions to authorization agreements
6. Mechanisms to dispute or appeal decisions related to compliance findings or award of a certification body's status

This document should be used by interested parties to inform and guide the process to be authorized to certify to the BBC Production Standards. It is also a guide to how and when decisions are made by Xerces in relation to an authorized certification body's status.

An Open Dialogue and a Culture of Transparency

Although authorized certification bodies will be held to the standards outlined in this document and periodically audited, it is important to maintain an open dialogue between Xerces, the certifying body and the certified farms. This open dialogue is critical to the flow of information between the partner organizations and to promoting the long term success of the BBC program.

3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Xerces Society – The Standard Owner

As the standard owner, Xerces has the ongoing responsibility to maintain dialogue with authorized certification bodies, including soliciting and incorporating feedback, and the responsibility to maintain the Production Standards, Labeling Standards and all associated documents. With the participation of the advisory board and other industry experts, Xerces will continue to build on its robust set of standards that protect pollinators and utilize the best available science and practice to maintain the gold standard for pollinator conservation in agricultural landscapes.

Bee Better Certified Standards Management

As the standard owner, Xerces will:

1. Maintain and periodically update the Production Standards, Labeling Standards and all associated documents
2. Communicate any updates or changes made to the standards and/or associated documents, including updates to procedures, in thirty (30) days or less.
3. Maintain a qualified team of industry and scientific professionals on the advisory board to help guide the continued improvement of the standards
4. Continue to evaluate the efficacy and validity of the Production Standards against the evolving science of pollinator conservation and pollinator protections BMP's

Program Oversight

In its role as general program overseer, Xerces will:

1. Authorize qualified certification bodies to train inspectors, conduct inspections and issue certifications to qualified applicants
2. Communicate reporting and training requirements and required deadlines
3. Receive, assess, and approve or deny requests for extensions to deadlines identified in this procedure
4. Renew, suspend or withdraw an authorized certification body's status
5. Communicate authorized certification body's compliance status
6. Manage claims related to BBC certification body authorization
7. Issue licenses to allow certain authorized certification bodies to sublicense the use of the Bee Better Program Mark and Ingredient and Product Seals to qualified entities. **(Please note that the authority to issue licenses requires a separate application process and agreement).**

8. Receive, assess, and approve or deny requests for temporary variances from the BBC Production Standards

Certification Body

A certification body has the responsibility to maintain an active knowledge of all BBC standards and procedures and meet all training and reporting obligations.

Role and Responsibilities of Certification Body

As an organization authorized to certify to the BBC production standards and sublicense the use of the program mark and seals, an authorized certification body will:

1. Train inspectors and audit staff and maintain required records pertaining to inspection personnel (see requirements in inspector qualifications and training section)
2. Assess, review and inspect applicants for certification and issue certifications to qualified farming entities
3. Maintain required records of certified farming entities
4. Upload an anonymized report to the certification body portal on the BBC website that identifies certified farms, certified crops, certified acreage and the location of certified farming entities at least on a quarterly basis
5. Undergo trainings conducted by Xerces to stay up to date on any changes to the standards, associated documents and procedures
6. Periodically renew authorization based on outlined timeline

Qualifications

Bee Better Certified is built around a unique set of standards that require a certification body and the inspectors and auditors it employs to have an understanding of agricultural production systems, along with a level of understanding and aptitude to find information about the natural ecology of an area in which the farm being certified is located.

To qualify to become an authorized certification body, the certification body must:

- Have a proven track record of minimum two years in one or more agricultural certification program, including but not limited to USDA Organic, Fairtrade, GLOBAL G.A.P., or Rainforest Alliance
- Retain qualified staff to train and manage inspectors
- Retain qualified inspection staff (see on farm inspector training requirements below)
- Demonstrate effective systems to manage applications, review, and inspections of BBC applicant farms
- Demonstrate an effective training process for training inspectors to conduct farm inspections that demonstrate adherence to the BBC Production Standards

4 CERTIFICATION BODY AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

Applying for BBC Certification Body Authorization

Applications will be accepted on an ongoing, rolling basis and will be assessed in a timely manner. Any qualified certification body may apply for authorization to certify to the BBC Production standards.

Applicant evaluation begins at the completion of the application form. Only complete applications will be accepted for consideration. BBC program staff may request additional information at any time during the application review and processing period.

Applicants will complete the [BBC Certification Body Application Form](#) through this link. An application will be processed and a determination given within six (6) months of initial application submittal. Determinations as to the applicant's qualification to become a BBC certification body are made in the sole discretion of Xerces and are final. Successful applicants will be contacted through the website portal and via email to arrange an onboarding meeting. The onboarding meeting will:

- Support the applicant in their understanding of the BBC program
- Understand the context and maturity of the applicants audit and record keeping system
- Facilitate the most appropriate sequence of onboarding
- Agree on a provisional start date

Term of Contract

An authorization to certify to the BBC Production Standards will be valid for a five (5) year approval period. Authorized entities are eligible for reauthorization at the end of that period if they are in good standing and have met all required obligations. At any time during that period Xerces reserves the right to audit any certification body and suspend or revoke authorization.

Extensions

Authorized certification bodies and applicants can request extensions when they anticipate they will not be able to meet a deadline associated with this procedure, provided the request is submitted at least thirty (30) days prior to the date of the deadline. Extensions must be justified and the granting of an extension is not guaranteed. Extensions may be granted through the following process:

1. The authorized certification body or applicant will request an extension in writing by email or through the website portal. The request must identify the applicable deadline, the reason the extension is needed and the length of extension requested.

2. BBC staff will review the request and may contact the certification body or applicant during this time for additional information.
3. BBC staff will determine whether the request is justified and provide a response within thirty (30) days.

Evaluation Frequency

Authorized certification bodies must be evaluated for compliance against their BBC authorization agreement at least once every five (5) years. BBC will communicate anticipated review schedules to authorized certification bodies annually.

Ad-hoc Evaluations

Xerces reserves the right to initiate ad-hoc independent evaluations in response to any significant change in operations on the part of the authorized certification body or to investigate complaints and other credible reports of non-compliance.

Costs and Fees

There are no direct costs charged by Xerces to become an authorized certification body. Some costs may be incurred by the certification body in training certification staff or conducting trainings. Xerces does not set nor control the fees that certification bodies charge for inspecting a farm and issuing Bee Better Certification designation documents where appropriate. For more information on the fee structure contact info@beebettercertified.org.

5 QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING AND REPORTING

Ongoing Learning

The BBC Production Standards, and the science behind them, are an evolving body of work. The result of this evolution is a set of Production Standards and associated documents that will, at stated intervals, be updated to reflect the best available science and management practices for pollinators. In order to stay current with these changes, authorized certification bodies and the inspectors and auditors they employ will be required to:

- Maintain knowledge of updates to the BBC production standards
- Review changes communicated to them at the time of updates
- Attend Xerces annual online training session/s that outlines any key changes to the standards and program
- Attend in person trainings where necessary

All updates and trainings will be scheduled at published intervals and communicated to authorized certification bodies on an annual schedule.

Reporting Requirements

An authorized certification body is required to provide Xerces with a number of anonymized farm level reporting metrics on a minimum quarterly basis. These include:

Farm level metrics

- Certified and applicant farm/operation location
- Certified and applicant farm crop(s)
- Certified and applicant farm acres, including a breakdown of crop, permanent habitat, and temporary habitat acreage

Note: Xerces may work with a certification body to establish a streamlined process for data sharing. If possible, it is preferred that farm level metrics are kept up to date in a data share with Xerces, such as a shared spreadsheet or database portal.

On Farm Inspectors

Qualifications

In order to qualify to inspect farms to the BBC Production Standards, an inspector must:

- Have a minimum of one year of experience conducting inspections for a third party verified certification program (USDA Organic, Fair Trade, etc.)
- Have a minimum of one year of experience working with agricultural production systems
- Have an interest and aptitude for finding information on local native plants and the ecology of the region the applicant farm is being certified in
- Have a knowledge of integrated pest management (IPM) and possess the ability to understand records relating to IPM

Inspector Trainings

An inspector needs to complete the below training schedule to qualify to become a BBC inspector:

- Completion of five online training modules, including questionnaires
- Introduction to the Xerces Society and Pollination Ecology
- Introduction to Bee Better Certified
- Bee Better Certified Habitat Requirements
- Bee Better Certified Pesticide Requirements
- Bee Better Certified Bumble Bee Requirements and Record Keeping
- Infield training course including habitat assessment and IPM training modules (on request when COVID-19 situation and location permits)
- Guided review of BBC sample farm plan

Supporting Documents and References

The following documents provide supporting information for authorized certification bodies and applicants when interacting with clients and communicating authorization status. A certification body and its inspectors should be familiar with these documents:

- Bee Better Certified Production Standards
- Bee Better Certified Background to the Production Standards
- Bee Better Certified Labeling and Licensing Standard (to refer client to an approved sub-licensing body, if applicable)
- Bee Better Certified Farm Plan Template
- Bee Better Certified Sample Plan

- Bee Better Certified Document Update Schedule
- Bee Better Certified Authorization Procedures
- Bee Better Certified Annual Training Schedule

6 DISPUTES, APPEALS AND SUSPENSIONS

Disputes

When an authorized certification body or applicant certification body disagrees with the outcome of a decision, the certification body is encouraged to seek resolution with Xerces through dialogue.

Where this is not possible, authorized certification bodies and applicants may lodge a formal dispute to Xerces via the website portal or by email at info@beebettercertified.org.

1. An authorized certification body or applicant must lodge formal disputes with Xerces within thirty (30) days from receipt of decision or correspondence.
2. An authorized certification body or applicant must provide a narrative letter outlining why they consider they are compliant with the relevant criterion, or why they should have their non-compliance reassessed. This must be based on the information provided during the evaluation and the discussion of the draft report findings.
3. Xerces will provide their conclusions to the authorized certification body or applicant within sixty (60) days.

Suspension and Withdrawal

Suspension of approval occurs:

- When a certification body is found to be not compliant and/or
- When they fail to meet the deadlines associated with this procedure

When an authorized certification body is found to be out of compliance with policy or procedures, Xerces reserves the right to suspend or withdraw certification body authorization. When notifying a certification body of a suspension, Xerces will identify the non-compliance that necessitates the suspension, and require that the certification body responds within thirty (30) days with a comprehensive plan to address the underlying issues. Failure to respond will result in withdrawal of authorization status.

The maximum term for suspension due to minor non-compliance is six (6) months. If the certification body has not addressed the issues which caused the suspension within that time frame, Xerces may revoke the certification body's authorization. If the non-compliance is a major non-compliance, Xerces may revoke the authorized certification body's ability to issue farm level certifications and license agreements upon written notice.

A certification body may also voluntarily resign its authorization status by written notice sent

via the website portal or to info@beebettercertified.org. Xerces and the certification body shall deal with each other in good faith during the termination period to address certification body's outstanding commitments for land evaluations.

Appeals

Where an authorized certification body or applicant disagrees with a decision to suspend, withdraw, or not award authorization, the authorized certification body or the applicant and Xerces will seek resolution through dialogue.

Where this is not possible, an authorized certification body or applicant may lodge a formal appeal to the BBC advisory board independent review panel for review and determination.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Agricultural Production Standard (BBC Production Standard): The Agricultural Production Standard is the document that outlines the requirements and compliance criteria for all agricultural producers

Authorized: The Certification Body has completed all the steps of the Bee Better Certified authorization process and can issue an unlimited number of authorized certificates for a respective scope and sub-scope(s)

Authorized Certification Body: A Certification Body that has received authorization from the Xerces Society to issue farm level certifications and/or sublicense the use of the BBC Program Mark and Ingredient and Product Seals

Auditor: Any person employed or contracted by a Certification Body to undertake review of a farm or companies compliance obligations for the BBC Production Standards and the Labeling and Licensing standard

Audit: Desk review of documents required for farm certifications and product license verification

Day: One day during a regular working week (Monday-Friday)

Inspector: Any person employed or contracted by a Certification Body to undertake on farm and remote inspections of farms BBC Production Standards compliance obligations

Inspection: The act of inspecting farms compliance to the BBC Production Standards

Labeling Standard: The Labeling Standard is the document that outlines the requirements and compliance criteria for all entities using the BBC Program Mark and the use of the Ingredient and Product Seals

Minor non-compliance: A single observed lapse of a required system, practice or process that is:

- temporary and not systemic
- one where the impacts of the non-compliance are limited in their spatial scale

Major non-compliance: Absence, or a persistent breakdown, of a required system, practice or process that:

- continues over a long period of time; or
- is repeated or systemic; or
- affects a wide area of operations or procedures; or
- is not corrected or adequately responded to by the accredited certification body or applicant once it has been identified; or

- consists of three minor non-compliances across related control points

Not compliant: A procedural determination resulting from an independent evaluation or review of imposed corrective actions

Suspended: The Certification Body has been given notice and is suspended in accordance with the general regulations

Year: One calendar or a continuous 365 day period