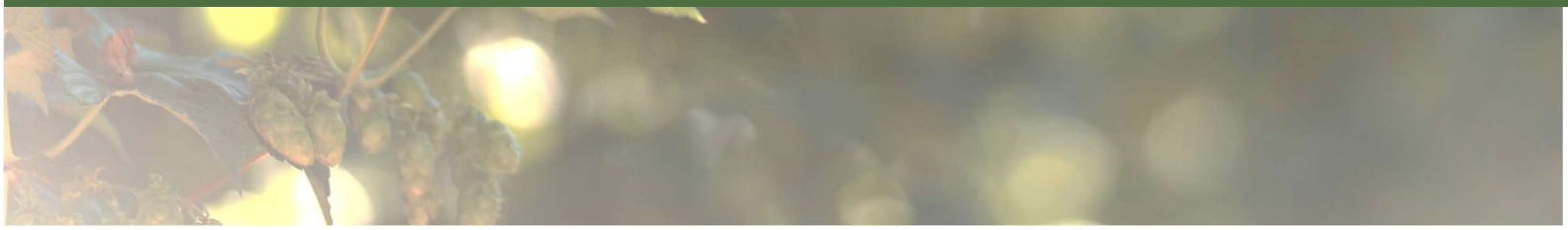
Sustainability Results Report for the Harvest Year 2026



Hopfenring e.V.

Kellerstraße 1, 85283 Wolnzach

www.hopfenring.de

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1. Sustainability (NH) in German hop cultivation

Breweries place extraordinary importance on the high quality of their raw materials. In hop production, particular attention is paid to alpha acid content, oil content, and the external quality of the hops. Today, however, not only product quality itself is important, but also so-called process quality, which demonstrates how a product was produced.

To meet these increasing quality expectations, the hop industry became the first sector of German agriculture to develop a sustainability system in 2013. This enables German hop growers to demonstrate the extent to which ecological, economic, and social sustainability are implemented throughout the industry.

The sustainability program also offers participating farms valuable opportunities for continuous improvement. For example, sustainability-certified farms can participate in extensive advisory and training programs in the areas of soil management, crop protection, farm management, and occupational safety.

Since November 2014, hop growers have had free access to an online platform operated by Hopfenring, enabling them to quickly and efficiently conduct a sustainability self-assessment and register their farm accordingly.

By completing the digital self-assessment and committing to the framework requirements, the results are submitted to Hopfenring. This registration identifies the farm as a sustainably managed hop-growing operation. Hop growers may choose which data may be passed on to specific hop merchants.

The effectiveness of the sustainability system is ensured through internal and external audits. The self-assessment is regularly adapted to the SAI/FSA standards and must be updated annually by the farm manager no later than May 15. Since the 2023 harvest, the SAI/FSA Standard 3.0 has been in effect.

With the implementation of SAI/FSA 3.0, the sustainability criteria were further developed and the level system was retained, ensuring better comparability of results. New self-assessment questions relate to water resources, farm management, and biodiversity. Every hop grower receives an individual sustainability certificate. Depending on the score achieved, farms are classified as Bronze, Silver or Gold.

2. Participation in the sustainability program

In 2026, a total of 651 farms (previous year: 688) from all German hop-growing regions declared themselves sustainable. This corresponds to 71.8 % of all German hop-growing farms (previous year: 71.9 %). Registration was completed both through the online platform and by manually completing the self-assessment form.

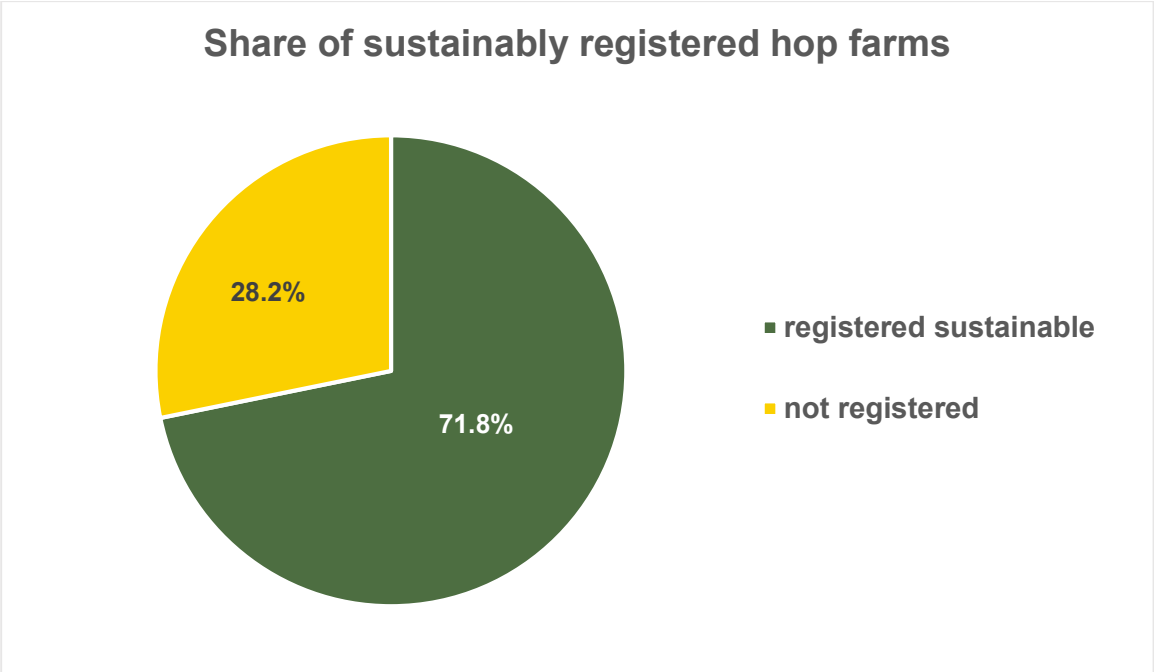

Figure 1: Share of sustainably registered holdings in the total number of hop holdings

A sustainability-certified farm cultivates an average of 22.43 hectares, which is approximately 2.7 hectares more than the average German hop farm, currently cultivating 19.7 hectares.

The 651 participating farms account for 81.8% of Germany's total hop-growing area (previous year: 81.4%), representing a slight increase compared to the previous year.

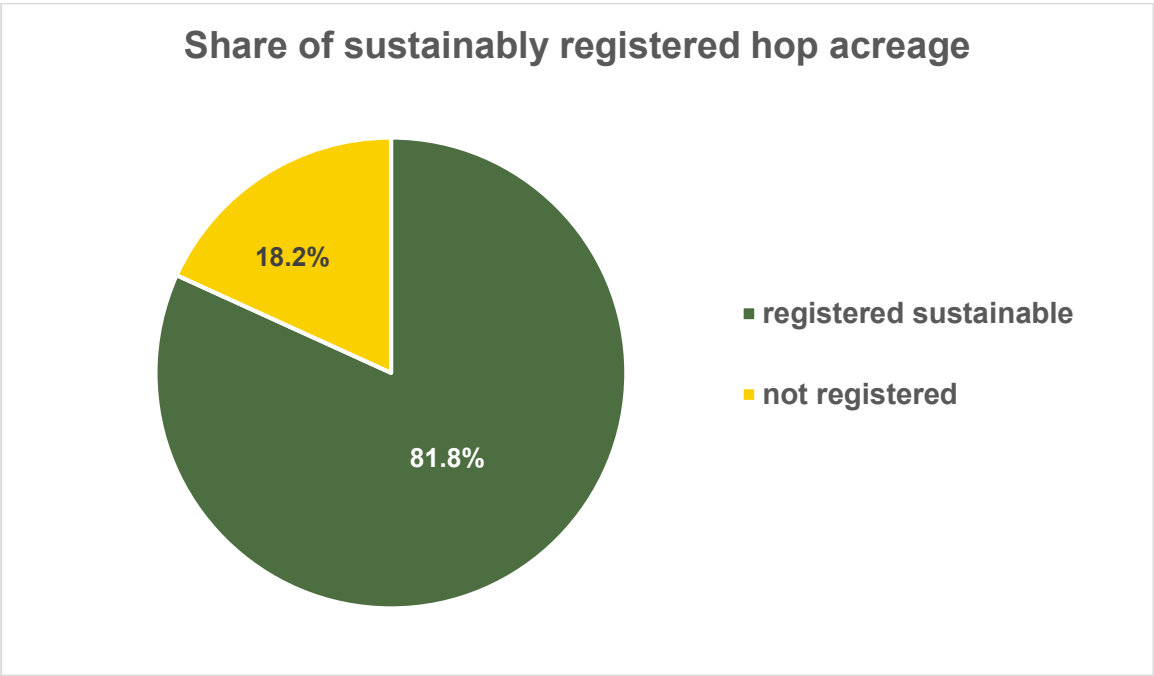

Figure 2: Share of sustainably registered hop area

The results were calculated on the basis of data from the farms that gave their express consent to an anonymised evaluation.

3. Participation by growing region

The level of participation varies among Germany's five hop-growing regions.

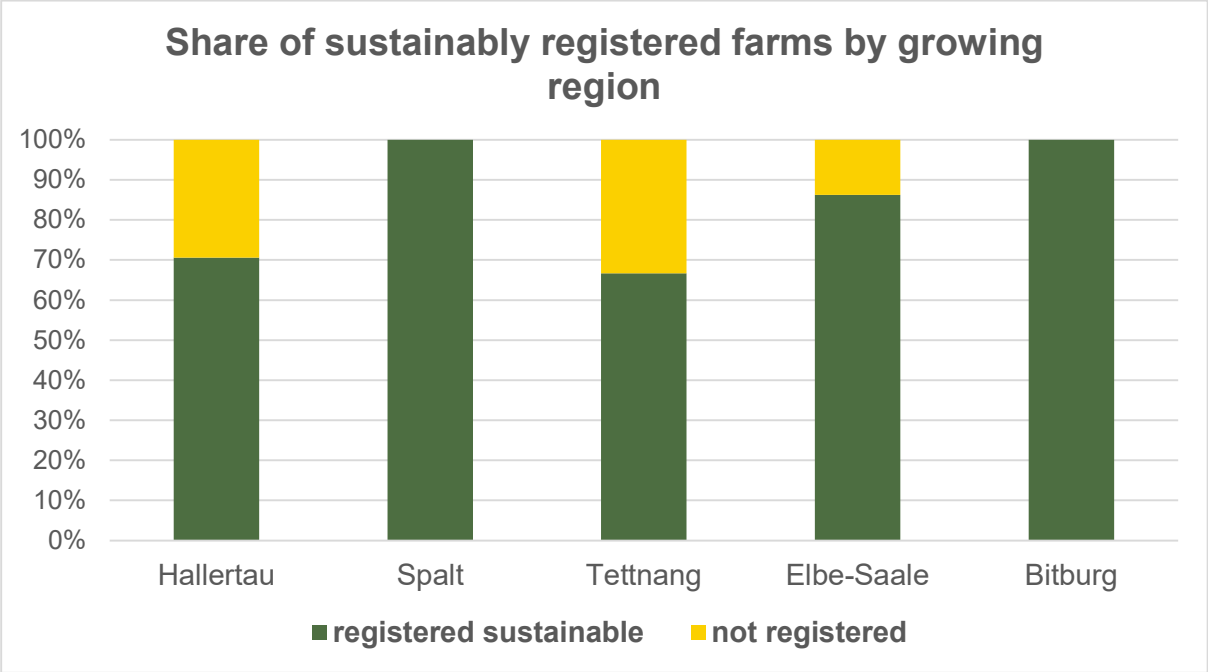

Figure 3: Percentage of sustainably registered farms in 2026 by region

	Hallertau	Spalt	Tettnang	Elbe-Saale	Bitburg
Sustainable farms	511 (542)	36 (37)	78 (83)	25 (25)	1 (1)
Total farms	**724 (769)**	**36 (37)**	**117 (121)**	**29 (29)**	**1 (1)**

Figure 4: Number of farms sustainably registered in 2026 in the growing regions, in brackets the numbers of 2025

In Hallertau, Spalt, and Tettnang, a total of 45 hop-growing farms ceased production during the year, compared to 51 in the previous year. In Elbe-Saale and Bitburg, the number of sustainability-registered farms remained unchanged. Overall, nearly 72% of all farms in Germany are now registered as sustainable.

When considering cultivated area instead of farm numbers, participation is significantly higher. In Hallertau alone, 11,929 hectares are registered as sustainable, equivalent to approximately 80.8% of the region's hop-growing area.

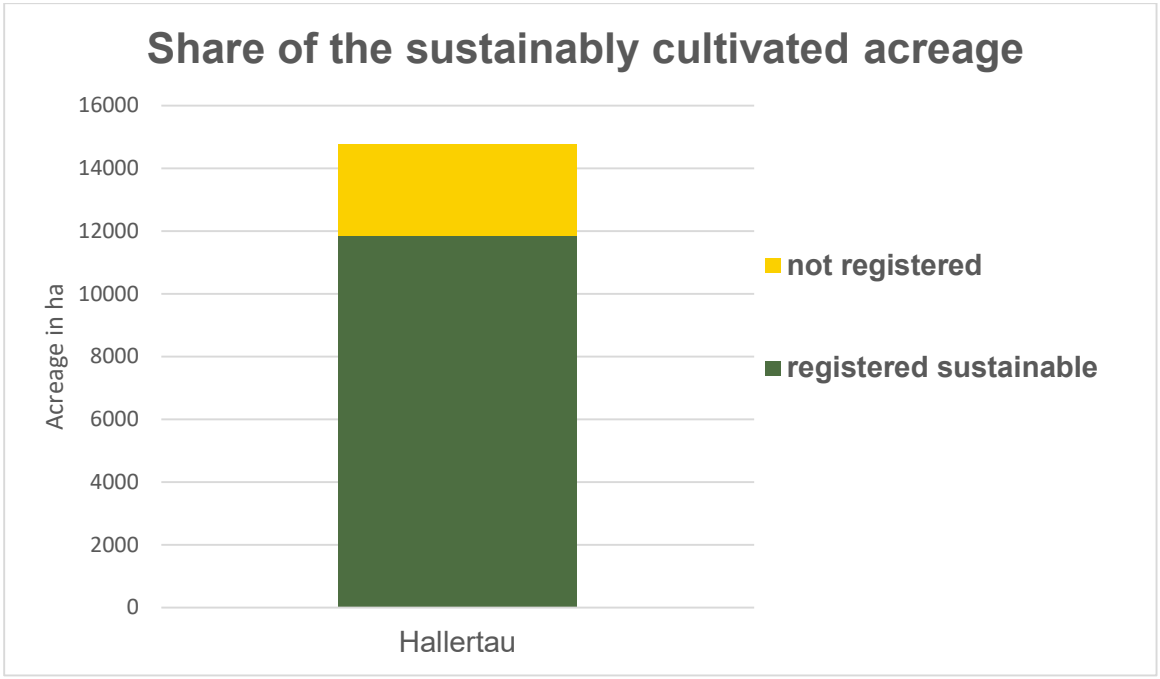

Figure 5: Sustainably registered hop area in the Hallertau growing region in 2026

In the Spalt region, virtually the entire hop area of approximately 350 hectares is sustainably registered. In Tettnang, around 80% of the approximately 1,200 hectares are sustainably managed. In Elbe-Saale, more than 90% of the area is sustainably managed. The single hop farm in Bitburg continues to manage its area sustainably.

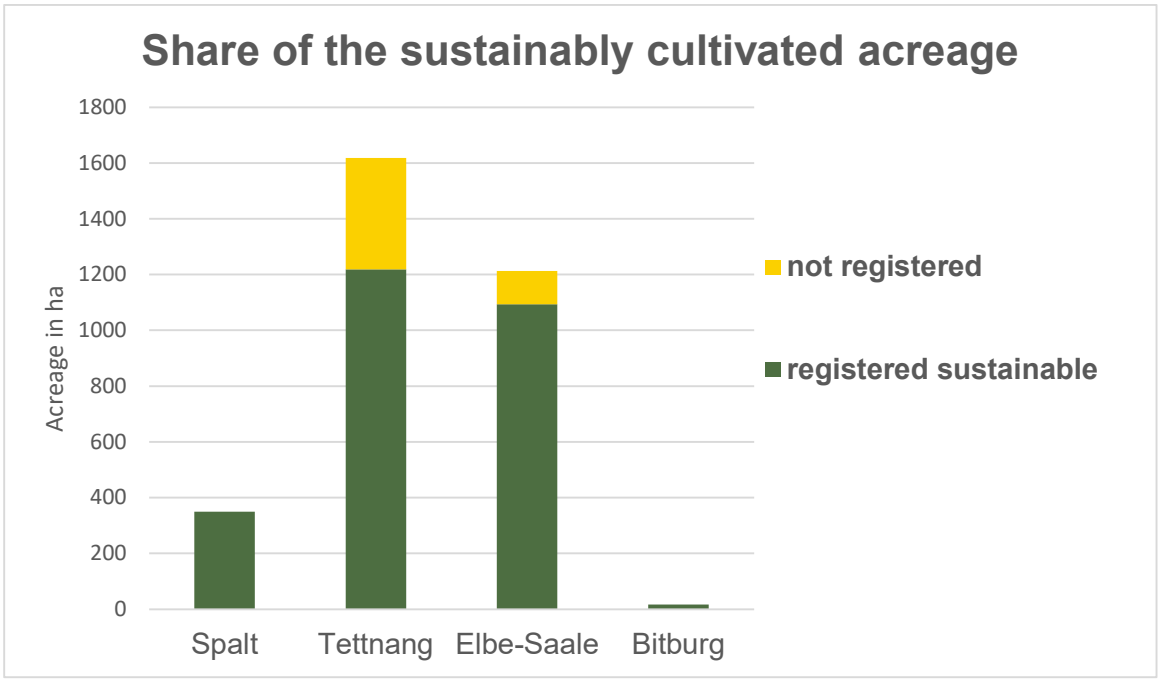

Figure 6: Sustainably registered hop acreage in 2026 in the growing regions of Spalt, Tettnang, Elbe-Saale and Bitburg

4. Overview of results from participating farms

4.1. Overall results across indicators

For evaluation purposes, each fulfilled criterion was awarded one point. Since the self-assessment contains 31 sustainability criteria, the maximum score is 31 points. If a criterion is not applicable to a farm, the maximum possible score is reduced accordingly.

The criteria are divided into three categories:

- Essential (C) = mandatory
- Intermediate (B) = basic
- Advanced (A) = advanced

The average farm fulfilled 26.2 out of 31 criteria, corresponding to 84.5% compliance (previous year: 86.1%). On average:

- 12.8 of 14 Intermediate criteria were fulfilled (98.2%)
- 13.4 of 16 Advanced criteria were fulfilled (83.8%)

The best-performing 25% of farms fulfilled at least 28 criteria in total.

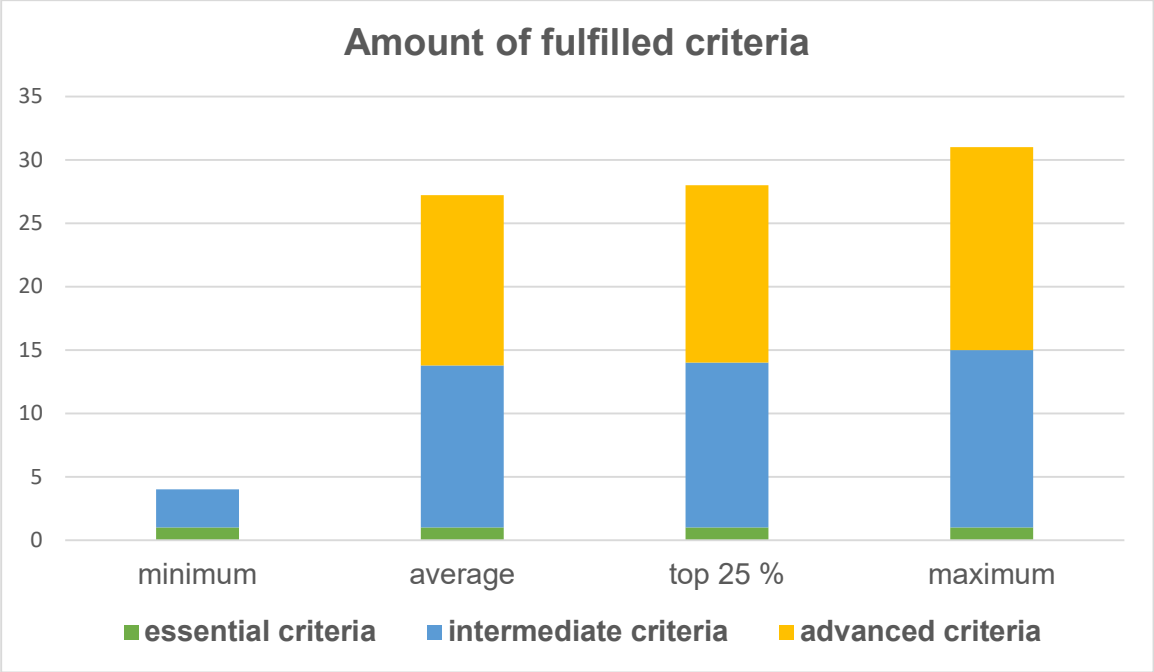

Figure 7: Overview of the results of the sustainably registered farms

All farms fulfilled the single Essential criterion. The top 25% achieved at least 13 of the 14 Intermediate criteria and at least 14 of the 16 Advanced criteria.

Sustainability Levels

Under SAI/FSA 3.0:

Bronze: All Essential criteria fulfilled

Silver: At least 75% of Intermediate criteria and at least 50% of Advanced criteria

Gold: All Intermediate criteria and at least 75% of Advanced criteria

Among the 661 registered sustainable farms, the following levels were achieved:

- Bronze: 1 farm
- Silver: 172 farms
- Gold: 488 farms

The positive development in sustainability performance is largely attributable to continuous farm visits and improvement efforts among farms participating in the QM Hopfen quality management program.

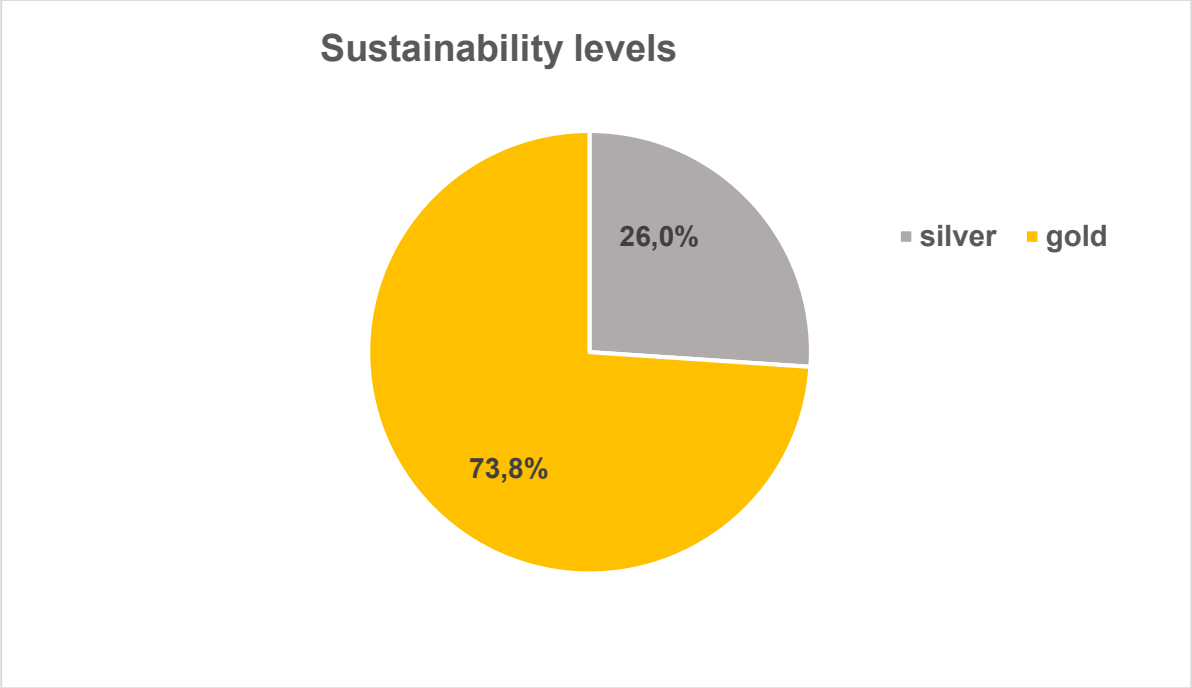

Figure 8: Achieved levels of sustainable farms

4.2. Evaluation of the three sustainability dimensions

Figure 9 shows the average performance of the participants in the various areas of sustainability. The green area represents the average score achieved by the participants. The yellow area shows the difference to the maximum possible score.

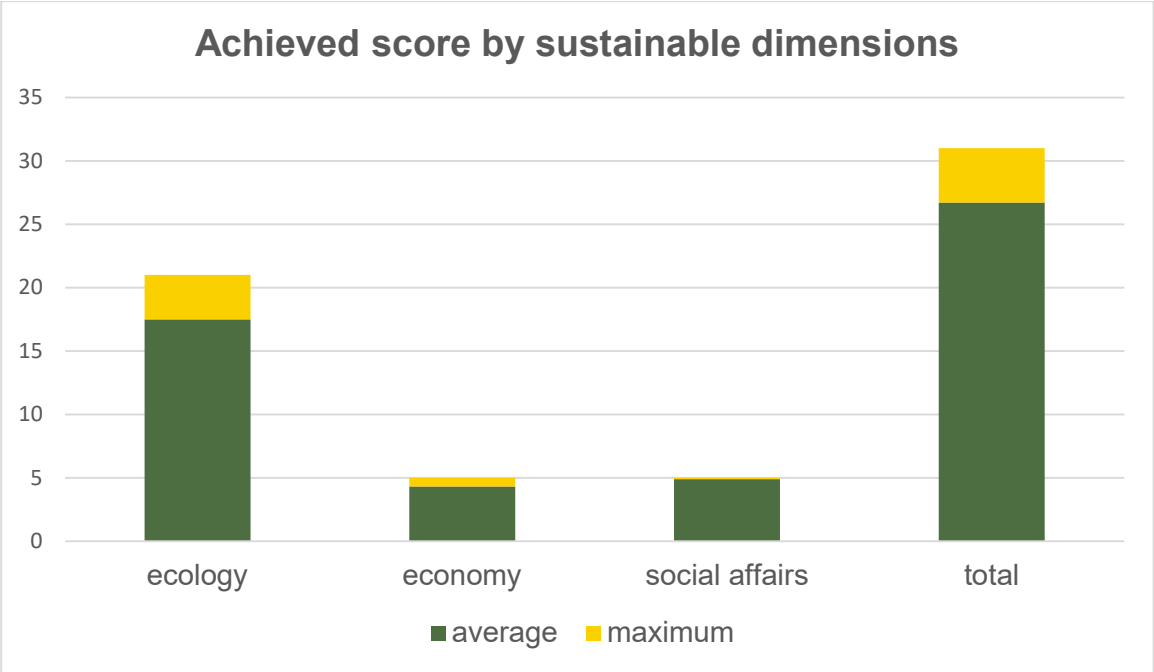

Figure 9: Score achieved by sustainable farms by the three areas

Average scores achieved by participating farms: In the area of ecology 17.5 of 21 criteria were fulfilled. In the economy part 4.3 of 5 and in the social dimension 4.9 of 5 criteria were fulfilled.

The results demonstrate that sustainability performance is supported by all three dimensions. Participants achieved significantly more than half of the possible criteria in ecology, economy, and social responsibility alike.

The greatest improvement potential remains within the ecological area, particularly because the SAI/FSA 3.0 revision introduced numerous new ecological requirements.

4.3. Evaluation of individual criteria

In the following, the three dimensions ecology, economy and social issues will be considered in detail and the associated criteria will be discussed in more detail. For each indicator, it will be examined how many farmers were able to meet the individual criteria. In this way, the strengths and weaknesses of participating farms can be identified.

Figures 10 to 13 show the percentage of sustainable farmers who meet the various criteria of the indicators. The exact questions on the individual criteria are listed with the corresponding number in the appendix. The circles drawn in the diagram show the proportion of farms from the inside out. The green area shows the proportion of farmers who have indicated a criterion as fulfilled.

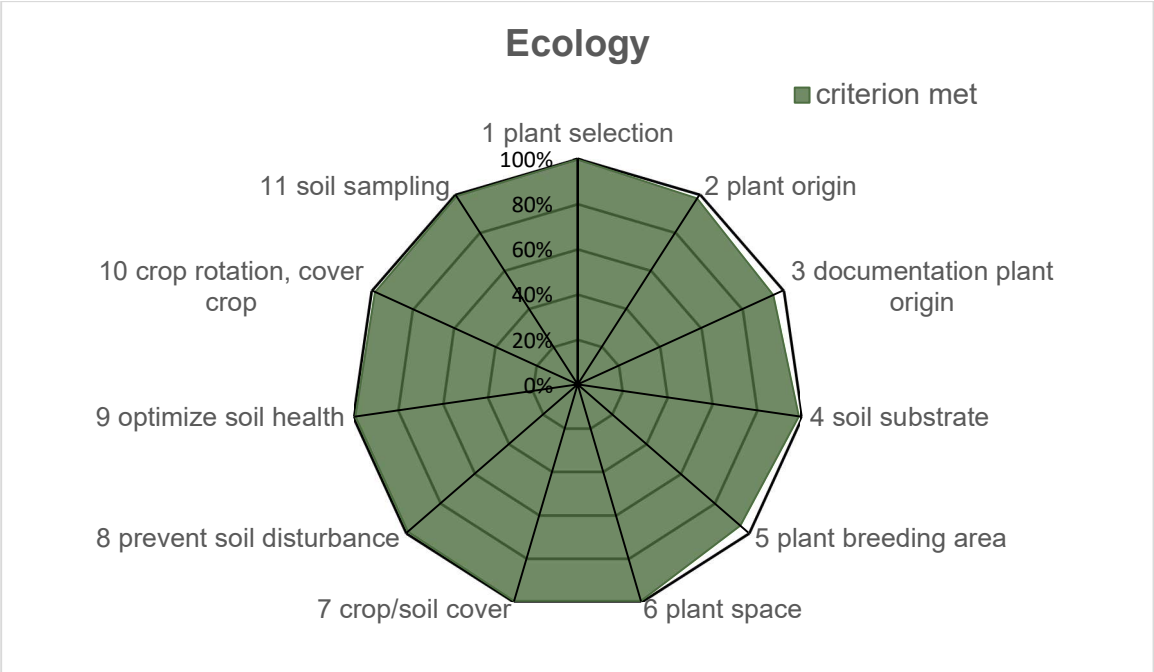

Figure 10: Fulfilment of the criteria by sustainable farms in the dimension ecology

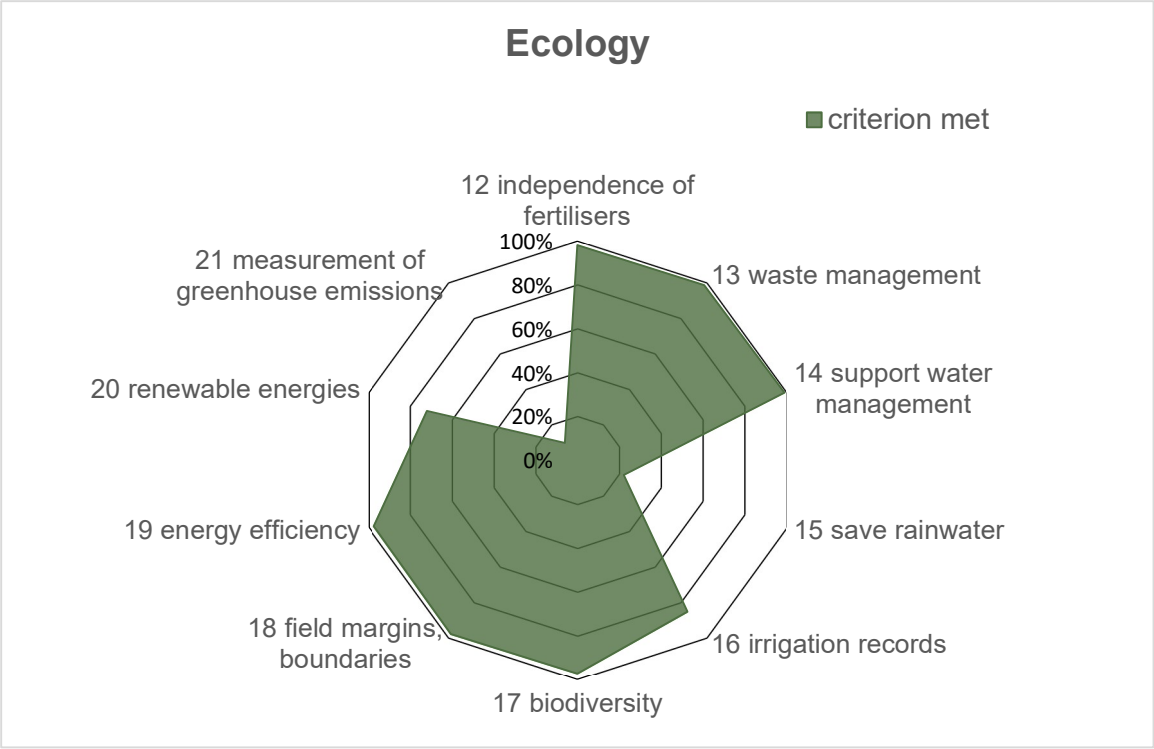

Figure 11: Fulfilment of the criteria by sustainable farms in the dimension ecology

Farms do have ecological strengths in variety selection, plant material sourcing and traceability, soil management, erosion prevention, soil health improvement, biodiversity measures and energy efficiency. Seventeen of the twenty-one ecological criteria were fulfilled by the vast majority of participating farms. The areas of improvement that require a further development are rainwater collection systems, use of renewable energy and greenhouse gas measurement and reporting. Because water management, biodiversity, and renewable energy

were newly emphasized under the SAI/FSA reform, many farms are evaluating these topics for the first time and are beginning to introduce suitable concepts and improvement measures.

Regarding economics, most farms demonstrate a strong performance through long-term supply contracts, profitability assessments and documentation of assets. Only a relatively small proportion of farms maintain formal business unit analyses and documented farm development plans. However, many farms have recently undertaken risk assessments due to current market conditions in the hop sector. Some farms also did the analysis during the annual consultancy visit by Hopfenring.

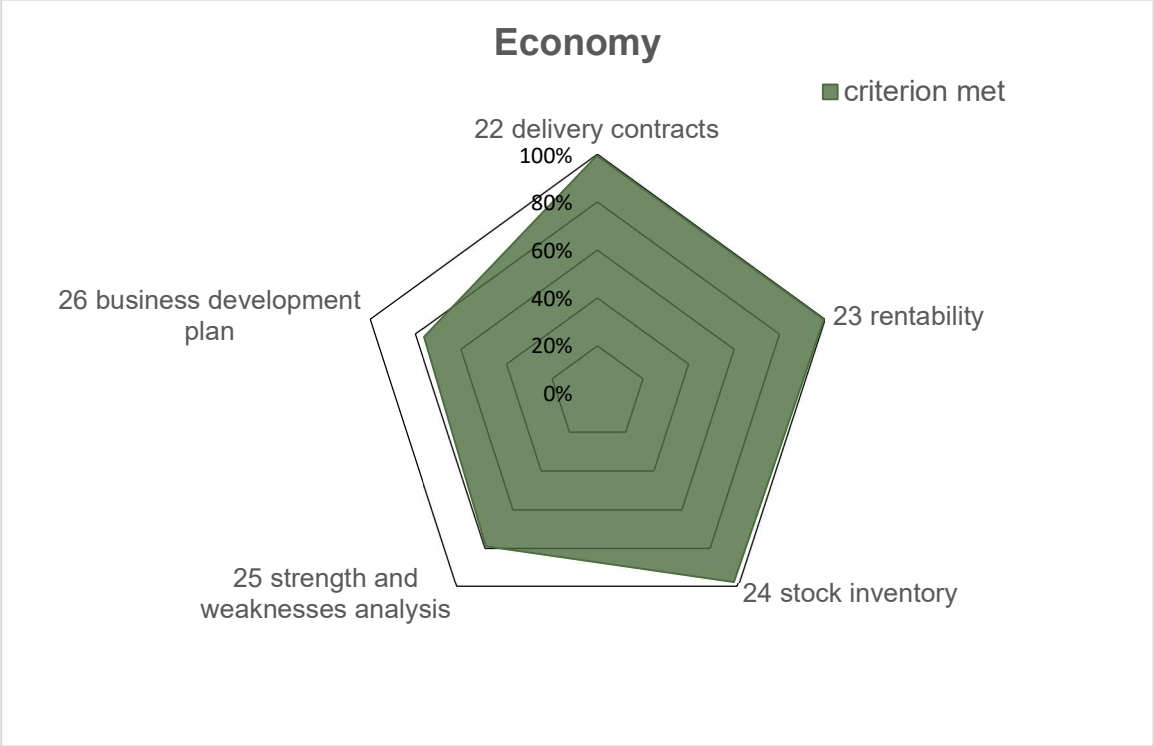

Figure 12: Performance of the participating farms in the sector of economics

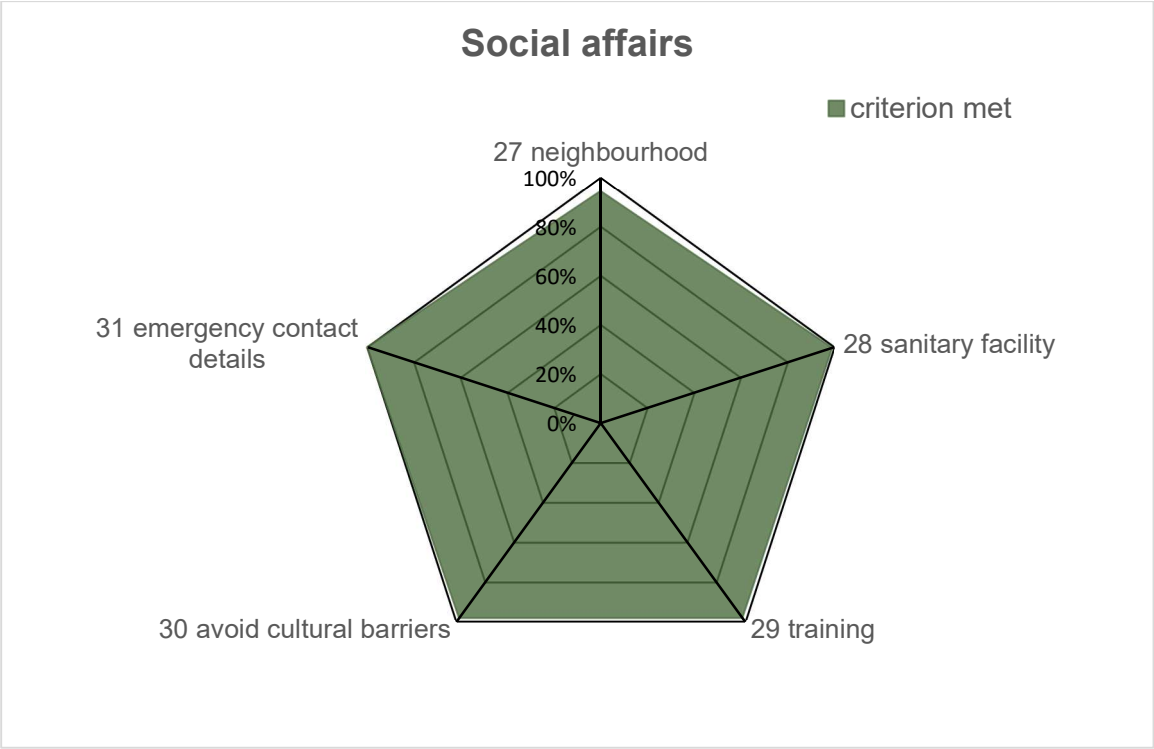

Figure 13: Performance of the participating farms in the area of social affairs

All social criteria were fulfilled by at least 94% of participating farms. The only area with notable improvement potential is communication with neighbouring communities.

5. Sustainability audits

5.1. General

Every sustainable hop-growing farm is subject to an on-site audit by Hopfenring (HR) at least once every three years. As part of this sampling audit process (internal audit), sustainably registered German hop farms are assessed by qualified HR staff based on the self-assessment checklist and the requirements of the SAI/FSA framework. These audits are consistently conducted in the autumn of each calendar year and are evaluated separately.

The level of development and implementation is documented through a scoring system. Any deficiencies and non-conformities identified are recorded in a deviation report, improvement opportunities are assessed, and corrective actions are documented in writing.

The credibility of the internal audit process is ensured through Hopfenring's integration into a quality management system certified according to DIN EN ISO 9001. As a result of this ISO certification, all HR activities are subject to independent external review. This also includes the internal audit procedures conducted at sustainably managed hop-growing farms, which are regularly verified by neutral external auditors.

5.2. Results of the internal audit

The effectiveness of the Sustainability Program (NH System) was demonstrated at the registered producer farms through numerous examples and verified by means of supporting records, sample-based traceability checks of individual processes, and interviews.

Evidence was provided that corrective actions related to non-conformities identified during the previous year's internal audits had been successfully implemented by the registered farms concerned.

All applicable documents were available in full and maintained in their current versions. Compliance with the sustainability indicators of Environmental Responsibility, Economic Viability, and Social Responsibility, as well as the associated documentation requirements, was consistently ensured across all producer farms.

The auditors also confirmed the continued highly positive attitude of all farm managers toward the NH Sustainability System.

5.3. Evaluation of internal audits at the NH producer farms

A total of 403 hop-growing farms were audited as part of the internal audit program. This represents 61% of all registered NH farms. Of these, 220 farms participate in a dedicated Quality Management System for Hops (QM-Hopfen) and are audited annually for compliance with sustainability requirements.

The audits verified the accuracy and consistency of farm-specific information provided in both the NH self-assessment and the NH declaration confirming compliance with the framework requirements. A high level of awareness regarding sustainable hop production was evident among the audited producers.

Farm documentation was generally maintained with great diligence. Through the use of key performance indicators, numerous aspects within the three sustainability dimensions of Environmental Responsibility, Economic Viability, and Social Responsibility were incorporated into a continuous benchmarking and improvement process and updated annually.

Continuous improvement efforts were demonstrated through participation in training and continuing education programs, including certification and professional competency training courses, occupational first-aider training, hop drying seminars, “Soil Practitioner for Hop Production” training. In addition, continuous improvement was supported through consultation with HR specialists in the areas of soil management, fertilization, crop protection, technical operations, energy management, agricultural compliance requirements.

For the instruction and training of seasonal workers, HR training materials, including multilingual documents and videos, are utilized.

As part of the audits, the following documentation tools were introduced to enhance record-keeping and documentation quality:

- SVLFG Hazard Assessment Catalogue for operational risk assessments in the area of occupational health and safety
- Hop Hygiene Guideline published by HR and DHWV for operational risk assessments in hygiene management
- Field journals for plot-specific recording of crop protection applications, fertilizer applications, and hop cultivation activities
- Drying and conditioning records for batch-specific documentation of hop drying processes
- Hop Biodiversity Plan

Overall, only five non-conformities requiring short-term corrective action (maximum implementation period: four months) and one non-conformity requiring long-term corrective action (maximum implementation period: two years) were identified during this year's audits.

The findings can be summarized as follows:

Short-Term Corrective Actions

- 1 case: SVLFG Hazard Assessment Catalogue not maintained
- 1 case: No fire extinguisher available
- 1 case: Emergency contact information not displayed
- 1 case: No smoke detectors installed in accommodation facilities
- 1 case: Missing crop protection certification/competency qualification

Long-Term Corrective Actions

1. 1 case: SVLFG basic or advanced occupational safety training course not completed.

6. Summary and conclusion

In the fourteenth year of sustainability data collection, 81.8% of the total German hop-growing area is registered as being managed sustainably. This represents a slight increase of almost six percentage points compared to the previous year. The total area currently managed under sustainable practices in Germany amounts to 14,606 hectares.

As part of the results analysis, the overall scores of 661 NH-certified farms were evaluated. The frequency distribution of the results showed that farms achieved compliance with an average of 27 sustainability criteria (see Figure 7).

A comparison of the three sustainability indicators revealed that participants performed at a similarly high level across the environmental, economic, and social criteria. As sustainable development is based on a balanced implementation of these three dimensions, this can be regarded as a highly positive outcome.

A more detailed analysis of the individual criteria made it possible to identify clear strengths and weaknesses among participating farms. Within the environmental dimension, a strong awareness of soil management and soil conservation was identified as a key strength. With regard to the economic indicator, long-term viability secured through supply contracts and well-established capital assets were among the strengths observed. In the social dimension, employee training and instruction, as well as the quality of facilities and working conditions provided for employees, were identified as particular strengths.

Within the environmental dimension, one of the main weaknesses identified was the lack of greenhouse gas emissions calculations. In addition, there is still room for improvement in the development of concepts for rainwater harvesting and the use of renewable energy sources. Within the economic dimension, further efforts are required in the preparation of enterprise analyses and long-term farm development plans.

The internal audits demonstrated a high level of awareness among producers regarding sustainable hop production. To further improve documentation practices, several documentation tools and templates were distributed during the audits.

To ensure the continuous advancement of sustainability performance at the farm level, an improvement plan was developed. Using the SAI Priority Screening Tool, key priorities for sustainable hop production were identified. Objectives and action plans were established in the four areas of CO_2 emissions, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), soil management, and water management.

The following objectives were defined in cooperation with the Sustainability Working Group:

1. CO_2 Emissions
    - 75% of hop growers generate and/or use renewable energy on their farms → Current status**:** 72.3%
    - All farms are familiar with the key CO_2 reduction opportunities within their hop production systems.

- 75% of farms have implemented measures to reduce CO_2 emissions → Current status: 97.9%
- Every farm uses the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Tool developed by the Bavarian State Research Center for Agriculture (LfL) → Current status: 9.6%

2. Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

- Implementation of a monitoring system for the surveillance of powdery mildew infestations → Established and currently undergoing continuous refinement and adaptation.
- 50% of farms make use of professional crop protection advisory services → Current status: 54.9%
- 10% of farms have practical experience with the use of beneficial organisms in crop protection → Current status: 7.9%

3. Soil Management

- 95% of farms comply with SAI/FSA Criterion 28 for improving soil management practices → Current status: 98.5%
- By 2026, 150 participants will have completed the “Soil Practitioner” training program → Current status: 172 participants
- 100% of farms have an individual humus-building (soil organic matter enhancement) strategy → A model and demonstration project on humus development in hop cultivation has been running since 2024 and is scheduled for completion in 2030.
- Every farm maintains a biodiversity plan → Current status: 97.6%

4. Water Management

- 90% of farms comply with SAI/FSA Criterion 53 and optimize rainwater utilization to meet crop water requirements → Current status: 99.0%
- At least 70% of all new plantings consist of resource-efficient hop varieties with improved drought tolerance → Current status: 77.6% of new plantings (501 ha) are climate-resilient varieties.

7. Appendix

7.1. Self-check

Sustainability self-check for German hop production

Sustainability SAI/FSA 3.0

Version 1 / 2023

Hops

Who fills out the checklist?
(plant managers, employees, etc.) _____

How big is the acreage of the farm that is cultivated? _____

How many hectares of hops are cultivated by the farm? _____

What are the three most important agricultural and commercial sectors? _____

Who is responsible for the management of the farm? (farm manager, administrators, etc.) _____

Is the land you cultivate leased on a short-term basis (less than 10 years)? _____

What certification standards do you apply on your farm (e.g. QM hops, QS pigs)? _____

How many permanent workers are employed on the farm? _____

What is the maximum number of different seasonal workers (individuals) employed on the farm over the course of a year? _____

Do you employ other people at the farm? (Family relatives, friends) _____

Environmental sustainability criteria

No.	FSA 3.0	Topic	Test criterion	Level	Document	Yes	No	n/a
1	FSA22	Plants	Do you consciously choose the varieties grown so that they consider customer requirements, the climate and socio-economic and environmental factors?	B	Grünes Heft Number of small hop plants per hectare			
2	FSA23	Plants	Make sure that your planting material a) is of high quality; and b) comes from trustworthy sources?	B	Plant passport (cert. A or B) List of suppliers "Hopfenfechser" Bills			
3	FSA24	Plants	Is the origin of the planting material documented?	B	Plant passport, Certificates A or B, list of suppliers “Hopfenfechser", Field journal			
4	FSA25	Plants	Make sure that used soil substrates are a) of high quality and b) come from sustainable sources?	A	Delivery notes, invoices			
5	FSA26	Plants	Do you use special areas or structures to grow planting material?	A	Fechserkompendium			
6	FSA27	Plants	Are you considering the optimal planting distance based on your local situation?	A	Grünes Heft Number of small hop plants per hectare			
7	FSA28	Soil	Do you take measures to: maintain ground cover? increase organic matter? protect and promote soil biodiversity?	B	at least 2 points from: 1. minimal soil preparation 2. return of vines 3. application of org. fertilizers 4. use of cover crops 5. no excessive use of pesticides 6. soil drainage			
8	FSA29	Soil	Are measures being taken to prevent soil erosion? Do you avoid soil compactions and a lack of drainage?	B	Tyres, field journal, no wet soil preparations, reduction of crossings			
9	FSA30	Soil	Have you taken measures for soil improvement and for a better soil health?	A	at least 2 points from: 1. minimal soil preparation 2. return of vines 3. application of org. fertilizers 4. use of cover crops 5. no excessive use of pesticides 6. soil drainage			
10	FSA31	Soil	Do you grow cover crops to loosen crop rotation and improve soil conditions?	A	Funding programmes e.g. KULAP, MEKA, cover crops, seed bills			
11	FSA34	Fertilization	Do you carry out regular soil sampling to monitor changes in soil conditions?	A	Soil test results, Humus content, Trace elements, Nmin			
12	FSA36	Fertilization	Have you taken in-house measures to reduce your dependence on fertilizers?	A	return of vine cuts to the fields			
13	FSA51	Waste	Do you reduce, reuse and recycle waste and by-products of harvesting and processing?	B	Composting, iron trade, use of recyclable materials			

Environmental sustainability criteria

No.	FSA 3.0	Topic	Test criterion	Level	Document	Yes	No	n/a
14	FSA53	Water	Are you taking steps to optimize the availability of rainwater for the crop?	B	Cover crops, mulching, hedges			
15	FSA54	Water	Are you taking steps to collect excess rainwater or support groundwater recharge?	A	Water storage basin			
16	FSA58	Water	Do you keep irrigation records?	B	Fountain diary			
17	FSA65	Biodiversity	Have you taken measures to protect and promote natural habitats on your land, especially in areas bordering watercourses and protected areas?	B	Multiple applications (landscape protection elements, buffer zones, watercourse edge strips)			
18	FSA66	Biodiversity	Are field edges, borders and watercourses managed only to a limited extent and intervened on time if necessary?	A	Multiple applications (Landscape protection elements, buffer zones, watercourse edge strips)			
19	FSA73	Energy	Do you have a list of your energy sources and quantified your energy needs? Have you taken measures to optimize energy efficiency?	B	Consumption of heating oil, electricity and diesel			
20	FSA74	Energy	Have you identified, purchased or used clean and sustainable renewable energy sources for your farms?	A	Biogas, photovoltaics, wind power, geothermal energy, hydropower, wood chips			
21	FSA75	Energy	Are greenhouse gas emissions measured?	A	emission assessments, CO_2-Footprint, LfL-Tool			

Economic sustainability criteria

No.	FSA 3.0	Topic	Test criterion	Level	Document	Yes	No	n/a
22	FSA7	Administration	Do you have supply contracts that consider a) quality b) price c) quantity and d) terms of payment?	A	Hop supply contract			
23	FSA8	Administration	Are you documenting the profitability of your farm?	B	Accounting			
24	FSA9	Administration	Have you documented your fixed assets and stock of agricultural inputs?	A	Branch analysis, farm development plan			
25	FSA11	Administration	Have you evaluated the opportunities and risks of your farm and initiated appropriate measures? Have you secured the long-term viability of your farm?	B	Branch analysis, farm development plan			
26	FSA12	Administration	Have you identified and implemented opportunities to increase the resilience of your farm?	A	Branch analysis, farm development plan			

Social sustainability criteria

No.	FSA 3.0	Topic	Test criterion	Level	Document	Yes	No	n/a
27	FSA13	Regional awareness	Do you regularly inform your neighbours about activities that may affect them and address their concerns in this regard?	A	Social media			
28	FSA17	Workplace	Are there adequate changing and washing facilities for people handling or using fuels, fertilizers, plant protection products (PPPs) and other hazardous substances?	B	Checklist for seasonal workers			
29	FSA94	Workplace	Do you offer relevant training for all permanent, temporary and seasonal workers?	A	Instruction sheets, Instructional videos			
30	FSA95	Workplace	Do you consider language and cultural barriers when communicating in the farm?	B	Multilingual 10 Rules, Operating instructions			
31	FSA105	Workplace	Are emergency contact details available on the farm and easily accessible to handle any reasonably foreseeable medical emergencies?	C	Emergency plan, Emergency numbers			

Place, Date

Signature

7.2. Sustainability auditing checklist

AUDIT – Checklist

Sustainability review

Farm number: _____
Farm: _____
Street, House No.: _____ Postal Code, City: _____
Mobile No.: _____ Email: _____

		Yes	No	Not applic.
	Office documents			
1	**ecology**			
Y/N	Traceability of the planting material is guaranteed • Plant passport, neutrally tested planting material (NGP)□ • Invoice, delivery note □			
Y/N	Soil cover is promoted, increase of organic substances: • Minimal tillage □ • return of vines □ • Cover crop sowing □ • Application of organic fertilizer: _____			
Y/N	The following soil tests are available: • *Standard soil tests* + Mg □ • Nmin □ • Trace elements □ • Humus content □			
FC	Current *fertilizer requirement assessment* is available			
FC	Documentation of pesticides recycling (*PAMIRA*) is available and maintained			
FC	Field records or field journal are available • *Documentation of plant protection applications* • *Fertilization documentation*			
Y/N	Measures to optimize the availability of rainwater (cover crop, mulching)			
Y/N	Rainwater collection: • Rainwater collection basin □ • Water silo □			
Y/N/ Not applic.	Fountain diary is kept			
Y/N	Ecological awareness: • *Integrated Pest Management Questionnaire* □ • Hops Biodiversity Plan □			
Y/N	Renewable energy sources are used • Photovoltaics □ _____ • Biomass (e.g. wood) □ _____ • Waste heat utilization (e.g. heat recovery) □ • Miscellaneous: _____			
Y/N	Carbon footprint (e.g. LfL greenhouse gas determination) was calculated			
FC	*"Mehrfachantrag"* or *GQS* (one-time) has been submitted/completed			

2	Economics	Yes	No	Not applic.
Y/N	Accounting is available or LfL contribution margin calculator is maintained			
Y/N	Business awareness: • Business Development Plan □ • Branch analysis □ • Investment plan □ • Risk analysis □			
FC	Further training certificates are available: • *Plant protection expertise* □ • First Aiders □ • *SVLFG seminars / LUV MIX* □ • Forklift license □			
FC	Documented food safety system is in place e.g.: • *Hygienic guidelines* □ • Stock release by trading companies □ • Hop storage checklist □ • Hop picking machine checklist □			
3	**Social**			
FC	Occupational safety on the farm is guaranteed: • Hop *Hazard and Contamination Catalogue* □ • *Hazard and exposure catalog* General □ • SVLFG audit report □			
Y/N	Instructions for all employees (seasonal workers, permanent employees, trainees) have been completed and fully signed • Multilingual instruction template is posted			
	Farm tour			
FC	Crop protection sprayers comply with safety regulations • *Test report TÜV* □ • Illustration of the spray pattern (before - after) □ Road safety notice (self-check) – • Application technology checklist □			
FC	Pesticide and fertilizer storage (checklist for hazardous materials storage) • *Room is marked (danger, no entry)* □ • *Leak-proof storage* □ • *Inaccessible to children and non-workers* □ • *Binder is ready* □			
FC	*First aid kits* are available in sufficient quantities (yard and tractor)			
FC	Waste separation is proven • *Oil collection trays* for used oil available • Recycling of waste (scrap iron) verifiable			
FC	Accommodations for seasonal workers have been checked • SVLFG checklist □ • *Smoke detectors* (in bedrooms and escape rooms) and fire extinguishers are available □ • *Emergency contact details* are posted □			

Mandatory documents
As part of the sustainability audit, compliance of the farm's individual sustainability self-check with the associated documentation and compliance requirements was verified. Deviations and completion deadlines were defined.

Date : _____ **Auditor's signature** : _____