



US AGRICULTURE

Carmel, Indiana

LEADING HARVEST FARMLAND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT: 2024 SURVEILLANCE II

July 31, 2024





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- Certification Audit Re-Certification Audit Surveillance Audit
 Scope Extension

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LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the surveillance audit conducted on US Agriculture (US Ag) managed production agriculture properties. The audit was conducted by Matt Armstrong, Lead Auditor for Averum. Matt Armstrong has had experience with Leading Harvest throughout its development, is an assurance provider for multiple sustainability programs, and has expertise in production agriculture on multiple crop types in North American regions. Site visits were assisted by Jacques Werleigh, Field Auditor. All senior members of the audit team hold training certificates in ISO 17021:2015 (Conformity Assessment), 14001:2015 (Environmental Management Systems), as well as IAF MD-1:2018 (Certification of Multiple Sites). The audit process and reports were independently reviewed by Holly Salisbury, who is a certified public accountant in the state of California and has expertise on multiple crop types in the United States.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE

In 2024, Averum was engaged by US Ag to perform an audit of sustainability performance on 50,000 – 100,000 acres of managed agricultural operations and determine conformance to the principles, objectives, performance measures, and indicators of the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2020 (LH FMS). LH FMS objectives 1 through 13 were covered during site visits on properties in the Pacific and Pacific Northwest regions. There was no substitution or modification of LH FMS performance measures.

COMPANY INFORMATION

US Ag is an investment management firm, specializing in the acquisition and operations of agricultural operations and farm management. Farm operating tenants and management contractors are responsible for the day-to-day farmland management services for US Ag's properties. US Ag opted to certify 100 percent of their agricultural properties in 2022, allowing them to engage in broader sampling and simplifying the process of maintaining their certification in the future.

During the surveillance audit, five (5) sites in the Pacific and Pacific Northwest regions combined were selected, with five tenant managers included. Managers overseeing decision making and standard compliance for sample regions were contacted for evidence requests and interviews. The properties in these regions are a representative sample of current practices in place and management decision making. The primary agricultural production on these sites includes apples, cherries, almonds, pistachios, and nectarines.

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AUDIT PLAN

An audit plan was developed and is maintained on file by Averum. An online portal was established for US Ag coordinators to upload evidence and documentation securely for auditor review, and evidence was continuously uploaded throughout the audit. An opening meeting was held on June 7th, 2024, preceding site visits. Following the meeting, a document review of the provided evidence was conducted by Averum. Field sites in the Pacific and Pacific Northwest regions were examined on June 18th and June 19th, 2024. A closing meeting was held on July 31st, 2024.

Throughout the audit engagement, information, and communication technology (ICT) was employed for a variety of tasks. An online portal was provided and made available for clients to supply documentation for review, provide feedback on observation and notes, and for multiple levels of audit team reviews and signoffs. Throughout the audit engagement, conference calling technology (including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) was leveraged for meeting with clients, conducting management interviews, follow-up interviews, and Opening and Closing meetings. As LH FMS engagements are geographically decentralized, the use of ICT was deemed not only appropriate, but necessary.

Opening Meeting: Conference Call

June 7, 2024

Attendees:

(US Ag) Matt Harmon, Kyle Maple

(Audit Team) Matt Armstrong, Jacques Werleigh, Linnea Abel

Topics:

- Introductions of participants and their roles: Matt Armstrong
- Introduce audit team: Matt Armstrong
- Status of findings of the previous audits: Matt Armstrong
- Audit plan: Matt Armstrong
- Expectations of program user staff: Matt Armstrong
- Method of reporting: Matt Armstrong

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Closing Meeting: Conference Call

July 31, 2024

Attendees:

(US Ag) Kyle Maple, Matt Harmon, David Martin

(Audit Team) Matt Armstrong, Linnea Abel

Topics:

- Opening remarks: Matt Armstrong
- Statement of confidentiality: Matt Armstrong
- Closing summary: Matt Armstrong
- Presentation of the audit conclusion: Matt Armstrong
 - Major Non-Conformances: 0
 - Minor Non-Conformances: 0
 - Opportunities for Improvement (OFI): 5
 - Notable Practices: 7
- Report timing and expectations: Matt Armstrong

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MULTI-SITE REQUIREMENTS

US Ag maintains operations on multiple properties in the Pacific and Pacific Northwest regions. US Ag qualifies for multi-site sampling since the properties within the management system are centrally controlled and directed by regional management, with regular monitoring activities. Regional Directors are responsible for developing corrective action plans regarding LH FMS conformance and reporting activities to US Ag management. US Ag's current review and monitoring process is effective and ongoing.

Field visits and observations are conducted based on a sample of regions each year. Sampling methodology is provided in the LH FMS. In accordance with International Accreditation Forum Mandatory Documents (IAF-MD) methodology, all sites were initially selected at random with consideration of any preliminary examinations and then coordinated to ensure representative coverage of the complexity of the portfolio, variance in sizes of properties, environmental issues, geographical dispersion, and logistical feasibility.

Region	Crop	Properties Examined During Engagement
Pacific	Almonds, pistachios, nectarines	Three (3) sites visited during audit <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Pacific region represents 4% of LH enrolled acreage- Management population: Two (2) Regional Directors, two (2) tenants- Sites visited: Whitten, Elder, Terzian
Pacific Northwest (PNW)	Apples, cherries	Two (2) sites visited during audit <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The PNW represents 17% of LH enrolled acreage- Management population: Two (2) Regional Directors (Regional directors accompanied auditor to both regions), one (1) tenant- Sites visited: Razorback, Occidental

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AUDIT RESULTS

Overall, US Ag's agricultural operations conform to the objectives of the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2020 (LH FMS). Interviews and document reviews were performed to determine procedural and documentation conformance to the LH FMS. Documentation of practices was continuously supplied throughout the audit when requested. Documentation from multiple sites was provided to auditors. Field visits were performed on five operating sites, with two in the PNW and three in the Pacific. Visits were conducted during the growing season, so site and soil management were highlighted. Central and regional management representatives, as well as operating tenants, were present and interviewed to illustrate US Ag's conformance and policy implementation. Central office staff with roles that impact LH FMS conformance were interviewed to determine awareness of and support for LH FMS conformance, and to illustrate company practices and procedures not performed by farm managers. US Ag's Regional Managers served as guides and were available throughout the entire engagement, providing logistic support and documented evidence whenever requested.

KEY FINDINGS

Previous Non-Conformances: No Non-Conformities were identified during US Ag's 2023 Surveillance audit.

Major Non-Conformances: A major non-conformance is any nonconformity that affects the capability of a management system to achieve intended results or reflects an inability or unwillingness to address an identified non-conformance.

- **Zero (0)** major non-conformances were identified during the audit.

Minor Non-Conformances: A minor is any nonconformity that does *not* affect the capability of a management system to achieve intended results. Corrective or management action plans can be provided to and approved by certification bodies in the case of minor non-conformances and will be marked for examination the following year to determine the effectiveness of corrective actions.

- **Zero (0)** minor non-conformances were identified during the audit.

Opportunities for Improvement (OFI): Opportunities for Improvement are not non-conformances. Rather, OFI's are situations that arise during an audit where auditors or certification bodies have identified areas where a conformance demonstration can be simplified, clarified, or made more efficient. Still, OFI's are marked for review during following audits to ensure that performance remains in conformance with standard requirements.

- **Five (5)** opportunities for improvement were identified during the audit.
 1. 4.2.1 Application and Storage of Crop Protectants
 2. 6.1.3 Management of Agricultural Chemical and Other Materials
 - a. Missing fire extinguisher and spill kits on site visited (applies to 4.2.1 and 6.1.3).
 3. 7.1.1 Threatened and Endangered Species

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- a. US Ag has an opportunity to increase communication with tenant operators regarding the need for continued monitoring of at-risk, threatened, and endangered species post due diligence.
- 4. 11.1.3 Compliance Commitment
 - a. Burn permits could be made available for review by auditors to reinforce practices by site operators.
- 5. 13.2.1a Process for Monitoring
 - a. Farm questionnaires are well designed and implemented. If geotagged and dated visual evidence was included in site questionnaires, site visit requirements could be further streamlined and made more efficient.

Notable Practices: Notable (or Exemplary) Practices are areas where a standard user has demonstrated additional and initiative-taking work in a performance measure of the LH FMS.

- Seven (7) notable practices were identified during the audit.
 - 1. 2.1.4 Crop Residues
 - a. Notable practices recorded by auditors for participation in the Healthy Soil Program offered by the California Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation (CA OEFI), which incentivizes farmers for implementing on-farm conservation practices, including compost applications. Selected sites use compost and biochar, which allows growers to increase Soil Organic Matter (SOM) and use residues for beneficial purposes.
 - 2. 5.1.1 Energy Conservation &
 - 3. 5.2.1 Air Emissions
 - a. Selected sites use advanced technology including the use of a fleet management platform (Samsara) on all tractors. Samsara facilitates electronic logging for several functions and supports energy efficient equipment use on farms. More efficient operations enable reductions in GHG emissions from operations (applies to 5.1.1 and 5.2.1).
 - 4. 5.3.1 Greenhouse Gas Emissions
 - a. Auditors noted progressive carbon reintegration practices in place; namely chipping and making Biochar when redeveloping a block.
 - 5. 9.4.1 Public Health and Safety
 - a. Best practices were identified related to the use of platforms to harvest produce, reducing injury associated with ladder use.

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6. 12.1.3 Agricultural Innovation
 - a. Selected sites have designed and built trellises that can facilitate automated harvests and increased use of robotic technology. Advanced trellis designs will allow for more efficient and safer harvests, with reduced waste.
7. 13.1.3 Communicating Leased-Land Objectives
 - a. Lease language is notably inclusive of sustainability initiatives and contains commitment to LH FMS and sustainable growing practices.

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Review of Previous Audit Cycle: US Ag's was initially certified to the LH FMS in 2022, with their first year of surveillance taking place in 2023. The surveillance audit resulted in one opportunity for improvement and five notable practices. As US Ag's conformance demonstration to the LH FMS have become more refined, the audit team found slightly more opportunities to provide feedback and streamline future audits. Additionally, the audit team saw an increase in notable practices demonstrated due to US Ag integrating LH FMS into their central management function.

The following are summarized findings, per LH FMS performance measure. Specific non-conformances, OFIs, and notable practices are described above in "Key Findings."

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Objective 1: Sustainable Agriculture Management

1.1 Sustainable Agriculture Stewardship

Conformance Evidence

- Critical External Factors Meeting Minutes
- US Agriculture Farm Management Services Operating Policies and Procedures Manual
- US Agriculture Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Policy Statement
- Due Diligence Checklist

Auditor Notes

- US Ag requires operators to act as good stewards. Their ESG Policy addresses sustainable management commitments and property goals.
- US Ag's Operating Policies & Procedures Manual details their Farm Management Services (USAFM) operations and clarifies property management, acquisition and disposition policies and procedures.
- Lease language requires tenants to complete necessary repairs and assist in capital improvements.
- US Ag holds weekly asset management meetings to discuss operations on sites and address potential issues in a timely manner. An External Critical Factor Group discusses challenges faced by Regional Directors.
- US Ag tenants participate in programs such as the Healthy Soils Program, which allows them to receive compost for free.
- US Ag has a large network of product suppliers which allows them variety in their product selections, as well as remaining current on information and trends in the agriculture industry that may impact their business operations.
- Tenants are professionally trained and have the autonomy to make economic soil health and crop rotation decisions on managed properties with attentive support from US Ag's central management.
- US Ag conducts due diligence research that determines long-term strategic decisions on properties. US Ag avoids the conversion of production land to non-agricultural use.
- Capital expenditure items are discussed with tenants throughout the year and addressed during annual review meetings. Questionnaires and buy/sell analyses guide and inform annual review meeting discussions.
- US Ag management takes into consideration mixed uses in addition to production farmland, such as solar panels and livestock grazing on site. Leases are temporary (30 years) and may potentially be converted back to farmland.
- US Ag has placed production land into Conservation Reserve Programs (CRPs) in situations where land has restricted access, limited sunlight, and lower yields due to proximity to wooded areas. CRP areas provide habitat for wildlife and beneficial organisms.
- Due diligence process entails a Phase 1 and Phase 2 environmental assessment, which provides a thorough historic information and arial timeline of properties.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 1: Sustainable Agriculture Management (Continued)

1.2 Critical External Factors

Conformance Evidence

- Annual Tenant Questionnaires
- Farm Visit reports

Auditor Notes

- Us Ag's Tenant/Operator Questionnaire, farm visit schedules, annual budget process, appraisal process, annual deliverable requirements, and supporting policies and procedures enable US Ag and farm operators to adapt to external challenges and support long-term profitability and sustainability.
- Weekly asset management and Critical External Factors Group meetings are held to discuss agricultural production operations and address external factors.
- US Ag considers profitability, water laws, labor issues, climate change, insurance complications, evolving regulatory environments, consumer preferences, and import and export dynamics all critical factors on properties, and takes them into consideration when making strategic management decisions regarding a property's development and operation.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 2: Soil Health and Conservation

2.1 Soil Health

Conformance Evidence

- Annual Tenant Questionnaires
- Farm visit reports
- Soil tests
- Organic Certificate
- Soil Paste Extract (SPE) tests

Auditor Notes

- US Ag visits farms at least twice a year to conduct farm reviews and visually inspect farms. Permanent crops are visited more frequently. Regional Managers communicate with on-site management teams weekly.
- Operators record agrochemical applications and strive to reduce synthetic fertilizers. Soil amendments are used based on consultant recommendations to enhance soil quality.
- Sites update nutrient management programs (NMPs) annually. Changes are supported with soil test results, crop load, petiole analysis, soil type, fruitlet samples, and recommendations from consultants, agronomists, pest control advisors (PCAs), and agrochemical vendors.
- NMPs are designed to maximize yield and balance soil nutrients
- Operators track application usage rates to support food safety programs, organic certifications, and to track and compare resource usage. Records are used to develop NMPs, and guide timing of compost and soil amendments applications such as gypsum.
- Sites regularly conduct multiple types of soil tests to determine soil composition, nutrient levels, pH, electrical conductivity (EC), and organic carbon. Varied testing methodologies provide significant insight into soil health and support tailored NMPs.
- Operators are working with a third-party to calculate on baseline carbon inventory.
- Operators of site visited consults with and receive recommendations from a third-party vendor, Soil Matters.
- US Ag's Orchard Design & Development Manager designs and manages irrigation and trellises to increase efficiency.

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Objective 2: Soil Health and Conservation (Continued)

2.1 Soil Health (Continued)

- Whitten stops tilling in almond groves after new trees are established, while Elder disks every 3 years and shreds and chips in-between rows post-harvest.
- Orchards and vineyards are encouraged to use alternative practices for disposal of agricultural material through the Ag Burn Alternatives Grant Program, which provides incentives for chipping and incorporating agricultural residue.
- Site visited is a Healthy Soils Program grant recipient, working to secure funding for all sites to increase compost applications. The program is designed to support the implementation of conservation practices to improve soil health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Operator noted a reduction in the use of synthetic fertilizers since implementing the practices.
- Sites use composted manure to build soil organic matter (SOM), reduce the use of synthetic fertilizers, and balance soil nutrients.
- Sites use cover crops to benefit pollinators and improve soil health. Cover crops are specific to blocks, allowed to grow naturally between rows, and may include varieties such as rye grass and triticale. Cover crops are mowed and blown into the row.
- Sites have a “No Round Up” policy for weed management to limit the use of single spectrum glyphosate use.
- Pacific sites reuse tree prunings and crop residues in drive rows. Woodchippers and fine shredders are used to break down vegetative waste, which may also be lightly incorporated into the soil. Chipped trees are used as mulch or to produce biochar.

Result: *In Conformance, Notable Practice*

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Objective 2: Soil Health and Conservation (Continued)

2.2 Soil Conservation

Conformance Evidence

- Soil tests
- Irrigation maps

Auditor Notes

- Sites have various need for the intensity of erosion management. Some sites have limited issues with erosion due to flat topography, compost applications, and good drainage. Other sites manage erosion with wood chips, berms, drip irrigation, cover crops, and windscreens.
- Tenants manage soil compaction by reducing the number of passes, using lightweight vehicles, ripping and disking in opposing directions, and avoiding farm equipment use during wet conditions.
- In established blocks, compaction issues are restricted to the drive rows. Cover crops planted in drive rows reduce the potential for compaction and are disked every three years.
- Operators practice no-till and conservation tillage as often as possible. Sites with permanent crops practice no-till unless new blocks are being redeveloped.
- Sites had few issues associated with acidification and salinization thanks to water quality of water use for irrigation.
- Pacific sites monitor and manage their soil and water quality to ensure optimal conditions for their crops through pH adjustments via acid injection and gypsum applications via fertigation. All farms regularly test and adjust water pH as needed to maintain balance. Additional gypsum applications may be banded to the root zone if necessary.
- Acidification from groundwater is treated with sulfinates and sulfur-based fertilizers. Salinization is controlled with limited flood irrigation and deep furrow leaching.
- Sites visited have been in used for long-term agricultural production and maintain productive soil health. Blocks visited have not been fallowed or put to rest due to soil mismanagement.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 3: Water Resources

3.1 Water Use

Conformance Evidence

- Water usage report
- Automated irrigation bid
- Yield analysis
- Regional Natural Resources District (NRD) letter
- Irrigation maps

Auditor Notes

- Groundwater restrictions are in place and managed by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Authority (SGMA). Water district for sites selected is part of a Groundwater Sustainability Agency that monitors water usage to comply with state regulations.
- Sites visited in the Pacific have decreased flood irrigation practices in lieu of more efficient micro irrigation and impact sprinklers.
- Operators are subject to penalties for overusing groundwater. Additional water credits may be purchased if needed. Water use varies based on weather conditions.
- Site selected uses surface water when available and has a two acre-foot reservoir on site to collect water. Sites manage irrigation and water block by block. Recharge basins and ponds are used to recharge wells and irrigate simultaneously.
- Operators consult third-party irrigation managers, follow annual irrigation cycles, and use soil moisture data and evapotranspiration (ET) rates to support irrigation timing. Consultants visit weekly, scout blocks, probe soil, review tree stress, and provide recommendations on irrigation based on rootzone and tree health.
- ET sensors and weather stations are numerous on sites and facilitate the monitoring of microclimates and facilitate the use of irrigation system for frost control.
- Sites selected have automated irrigation management systems. Hand augers and tensiometers are used to physically check for soil moisture, and irrigation scouts review systems for necessary repairs to support efficiency.
- Site operators will use less water than allotted if trees are healthy.
- Flow meters are used to monitor water usage. Sites uses a pressurized irrigation system which eliminates the need for pumps. Water pressure is monitored throughout the irrigation system.
- US Ag provided a yield analysis used to draw comparisons between the timing of irrigation events (afternoon vs. evening, etc.) to yield. The analysis supported the decision to install new pivot panels capable of controlling and facilitating irrigation since lower evaporation led to increased yield.
- NRD letter provides detailed reasoning and explanations for water allotments. Selected sites are responsible for compliance with water usage restrictions.
- Site operators participate in water boards such as Laguna to CID, Kings County Water District, and King's River Water Coalition and work with consultants to support initiative-taking water management decisions.
- Site selected has pumps onsite with variable frequency drives (VFDs) which may reduce leakage by controlling flow rates.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 3: Water Resources (Continued)

3.2 Water Quality

Conformance Evidence

- USDA GroupGAP Certificates

Auditor Notes

- Pacific sites are monitored by applicable irrigation districts. Usage reports support sustainability certification efforts such as Global GAP, Food Safety, and Primus.
- Water quality is maintained with irrigation systems for pH balance and salt leaching. Site visited source water from superficial wells as opposed to deep wells, which eliminates contamination associated with salts.
- Irrigation scouting is done daily by staff who are trained to identify issues related to the irrigation system such as broken valves or punctured hoses needing repair as well as noting if any trees are showing signs of stress.
- Operator contracts with a third-party who provides monthly Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) maps, which illustrates vegetation and thermal and infrared scans of the orchard.
- Sites' use of drip irrigation allows operators to decrease the use of broadcasted applications and reduce the chances for agrochemicals to drift.
- Operators sample water regularly for the presence of bacteria to comply with food safety requirements.
- Moisture probes used on site are installed to a depth of two (2) to three (3) feet and ensure that water use does not get pushed past the rootzone to reduce the potential for nutrient leaching.
- Site visited has riparian areas bordered by a road and berm to prevent flooding and mitigate impact of on-farm activities.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 4: Crop Protection

4.1 Integrated Pest Management

Conformance Evidence

- Annual Tenant Questionnaires
- Daily trap catches
- Organic Certificate
- Farm visit reports
- Coliform analytical reports
- Trap catch records
- USDA GroupGAP Certificate

Auditor Notes

- Pest Control Advisors (PCAs) and scouts inspect fields to determine pest presence and populations using traps and visual inspections. Agrochemical applications are based on scouting reports and industry standards.
- Sites conduct applications when necessary and are not based solely on a spray program based on a prescriptive calendar. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program focuses on increasing beneficial predator presence.
- Operators manage pest populations with precision applications, agrochemical applications, irrigation adjustments, pheromone traps, beneficial predators, and managing weeds that attract pests.
- Precision applications are done by a third-party who follows nutrient prescription tailored to each block. Precision farming technologies support the reduction of pesticide use and protect beneficial predators.
- Operators actively manage irrigation to support pest management practices and avoid increasing pest pressures with unnecessary water. Multi-faceted approaches to pest management ensure crops' resilience.
- Site visited participates in international regulatory programs that require specified pest controls, such as the Mexico Fruit Tree Program which requires operators to control oriental fruit moth populations.
- Site operators protect crops from common pests including leaf rollers, leaf hoppers, codling moths, mites, aphids, thrips, hole rot, Alternaria, scab, aflatoxin, rust mildew, canker, and cherry virus.
- Some diseases such as canker can be controlled with copper applications. Other diseases such as cherry virus can be controlled through managing disease vectors (leaf hoppers). Operators can also manage codling moth by managing weeds preferred by the pest.
- Site selected uses pheromone sprayers informed by AI cameras. Sprayers activate in response to elevated pest pressure.
- US Ag provided a codling moth trap count for January 1st to June 26th of this year for review. The count contains crop monitoring data such as trap name, block name, and crop name.

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Objective 4: Crop Protection (Continued)

4.1 Integrated Pest Management (Continued)

- Operators clean and sanitize blocks in the winter. Pest food sources including mummy nuts (nuts that remain on trees after harvest) are removed to sanitize blocks and prepare them for dormancy.
- Scouting reports, trap counts, and weather data inform chemical selection, timing, and rates.
- Data from weather stations facilitate the use of microclimate models with growing degree days to support targeted applications, specific to pest life cycles.
- Operators use a documented IPM program created by a third-party PCA. The program promotes irrigation management, winter sanitation, and the use of pheromones spray to manage pests and reduce agrochemical application.
- Non-chemical options are preferred whenever possible, such as using dish soap water to control spider mites.
- Operators select resistant varieties and rootstocks to reduce disease and pest pressure.
- Ceres (aerial) imagery allows for specific application of compost and nutrients based on soil type.
- Predator boxes and traps to control porcupines are also used on site visited to manage pests.
- Birds can cause damage and are controlled with sound cannon and speakers producing bird calls.

Result: In Conformance

4.2 Crop Protectant Management

Conformance Evidence

- Farm visit reports

Auditor Notes

- Sites use appropriately trained and licensed staff to conduct agrochemical applications.
- Operators triple rinse, puncture, and recycle chemical containers.
- Site uses software that allows users to remotely access data and control flow rates, which is particularly advantageous to specialty crops (with canopies).
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is maintained by a PCA within the company.
- Safety trainings are conducted quarterly for employees, including new hires who go through orientation and safety meetings.
- Site visits revealed agrochemical storage units were lacking spill kits and fire extinguisher. Farm visit records indicate chemical management is inspected by US Ag management. Manager previously identified missing spill kit.

Result: Opportunity for Improvement (OFI)

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Objective 5: Energy Use, Air Quality, and Climate Change

5.1 Agricultural Energy Use and Conservation

Conformance Evidence

- Annual Tenant Questionnaires
- Pivot irrigation report

Auditor Notes

- Site visited conserves energy by efficiently managing irrigation systems, upgrading well pumps from diesel to electric, and installing Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs) on all pumps.
- Operators use diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) to increase efficiency of farm implements.
- Sites use pressurized irrigation systems which use less energy than systems that rely on pumps.
- Sites have small solar panels to power weather stations and irrigation controllers. Site visited has plans in place to develop seven acres into a solar project that will be connected to the grid and managed by Southern California Edison (SCE).
- Annual tenant questionnaires are designed to monitor chemical use, soil management, water, and environmental factors. System monitoring may support efficiency through identifying maintenance or site improvement opportunities.
- Sites have Samsara technology on all tractors which tracks On-board Diagnostics (OBD), idling time, carbon footprint, GPS location, run hours, and maintenance schedules. (FLEETIO) maintenance tools inform crews when maintenance is required.

Result: In Conformance, Notable Practice

5.2 Air Quality

Conformance Evidence

- Management interview

Auditor Notes

- Sites prioritize efficiency and emissions reduction with low-emissions technologies on farms, participation in trade-up programs, following equipment maintenance schedules, and providing training to support operating farm equipment efficiently.
- Operator visited leases vehicles and updates to newer tractors whenever available. Upgraded farm equipment run on diesel and can use DEF.
- Operator plans to add hybrid electric sprayers and autonomous tractors to the fleet. Autonomous tractors will spray to control weeds, mow, and spread compost and fertilizer.
- Operators equip vehicles with multiple tools to allow them to combine tasks and reduce the number of passes.
- Operators face regionally high water costs which limit the amount of water available for dust abatement. To manage dust, operators use pistachio shells, mulch, and lignin (tree pulp) on drive rows, irrigation on berms, magnesium chloride, and cover crops to mitigate airborne dust.

Result: In Conformance, Notable Practice

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Objective 5: Energy Use, Air Quality, and Climate Change (Continued)

5.3 Climate-Smart Agriculture

Conformance Evidence

- Windscreen Detail documents
- Windscreen site photo

Auditor Notes

- Regional climate impacts on selected sites include extreme heat, drought, heavy rain, wind events, hail, frost, and seasonal fires.
- Selected sites use conservation tillage, reuse crop residues, treat crops, maintain crop insurance, and make site improvements to mitigate climatic impacts.
- Selected site uses regenerative practices including reduced tillage, reusing vegetative residues to build soil organic matter, and participating in the Healthy Soils Program.
- Sites use newer and more efficient tractors with Tier-4 engines and diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) and electric vehicles. Staff monitor and update maintenance logs for all equipment and vehicles to ensure operating efficiency.
- Selected site is a recipient of a UC Davis grant. Funds are used to chip trees during the most recent block redevelopment.
- Selected sites use lighter and more efficient tractors and farming equipment whenever possible.
- Operators use a variety of mechanisms to protect crops from climate impacts, including netting to reduce wind, hail, and excessive UV exposure. Sites irrigate and use fans and misters to mitigate frost damage and provide heat stress relief on plants. Heat and drought resistant varieties and rootstocks are selected. US Ag provided detailed plans and a site photo of the windscreen installed to protect crops.
- Selected sites use a crop cuticle supplement to protect and fortify fruit and mitigate damage from sun, pests, and other natural stressors.

Result: In Conformance, Notable Practice

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Objective 6: Waste and Material Management

6.1 Management of Waste and Other Materials

Conformance Evidence

- Farm visit records
- Annual Tenant Questionnaires

Auditor Notes

- Sites repurpose vegetative waste and chip, compost, mulch and incorporate into the soil, or use it for dairy feed. Some burning of vegetative waste occurs on-site with a required burn permit.
- Operators recycle plastic, cardboard, tires, and waste oil in accordance with state requirements.
- Operators return agrochemical containers to vendors to be reused or recycled.
- Selected site that grows apples processes culled fruits for apple juice or apple sauce.
- Farm visit reports and Annual Tenant Questionnaires are used to evaluate waste management practices and provide feedback to operators.
- Sites repurpose prunings and biochar to enhance soil nutrients and soil organic matter (SOM).
- Selected site with chemical storage is missing a spill kit at fuel areas and could potentially be out of conformance with environmental safety requirements. Regulated materials are stored according to labels.

Result: In Conformance, Opportunity for Improvement (OFI)

6.2 Food and Agricultural Waste Resource Recovery

Conformance Evidence

- Farm visit records
- Annual Tenant Questionnaires

Auditor Notes

- Sites carefully schedule harvest to ensure fruit is picked at the correct ripeness. Produce is inspected for quality control before harvest and shipment to support scheduling decisions. Harvesting is done in waves to ensure all crops are picked at the optimal time.
- Selected site harvests cherries in early shifts that begin between 2:00am and 3:00am to prevent heat during the day from softening the fruit and leaving it susceptible to damage that increases the chance of mildew and decay in bags. Harvest staging areas are covered, leveled, and refrigerated as soon as fruit is collected until ready for shipping.
- Hail nets on sites provide an added benefit of protecting fruit and mitigating crop loss.
- Farm visit records and Annual Tenant Questionnaires facilitate US Ag's collection of practices related to best management practices (BMPs) for repurposing vegetative waste.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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Objective 7: Conservation of Biodiversity

7.1 Species Protection

Conformance Evidence

- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)
- Due Diligence Checklist

Auditor Notes

- US Ag identifies endangered and threatened species during due diligence process using Due Diligence Checklists. Checklists must be approved and signed by the Director of Acquisitions and General Counsel before the due diligence period ends.
- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs) are required during due diligence.
- Sites selected reported no threatened or endangered species on or near sites visited.
- Sites selected plant bluegrass, rye, fescue, and pollinator habitats to enhance biodiversity and provide habitats for beneficial insects.

Result: In Conformance, Opportunity for Improvement (OFI)

7.2 Wildlife Habitat Conservation

Conformance Evidence

- Annual tenant questionnaire
- ESG Policy Statement

Auditor Notes

- Sites selected have proximity to the Tule River. The river is buffered by an elevated road which serves as a barrier between the river and production. There are no other protected areas, native habitats, or natural communities near sites visited.
- USAg's ESG Policy Statement includes its commitment to conserving natural resources and promoting biodiversity.
- Annual tenant questionnaires are used to collect information on presence of native habitats on sites and best management practices.
- Auditors observed raptor habitats and bee boxes to provide habitats and support pollination and biodiversity.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

July 31, 2024

Objective 7: Conservation of Biodiversity (Continued)

7.3 Avoided Conversion

Conformance Evidence

- ESG Policy Statement
- Due diligence checklist
- Phase 1 ESA

Auditor Notes

- US Ag conducts ESAs during a property acquisition to determine environmental conditions of a property and whether sites are designated as ecologically important.
- All properties are long term production farmland.
- ESG policy was reviewed and contains a commitment to zero deforestation that meets the requirements of the LH FMS.

Result: In Conformance

7.4 Crop Diversity

Conformance Evidence

- Farm visit reports
- Acreage summary

Auditor Notes

- Selected sites grow a wide variety of crops, including almonds, pistachios, nectarines, apples, and cherries. Various rootstocks and varieties are grown.
- Farm visit reports prompt operators to share rotation practices and strategies with US Ag management.
- Cover crops and orchard grass mixes are used to enhance biodiversity and bolster soil health.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

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Objective 8: Protection of Special Sites

8.1 Site Protection

Conformance Evidence

- Due Diligence Checklist
- Operating Policies & Procedures Manual

Auditor Notes

- US Ag identifies wetlands, forests and special or protected sites during due diligence. Special sites that have been identified are marked off-limits and avoided.
- Acquisition Policies require properties to undergo due diligence prior to acquisition. Due diligence checklists include Native Habitats or Natural Communities report, and a Special Sites report.
- If special site is identified, US Ag Management will respond appropriately, such as the institution of a policy to appropriately manage it or not acquire it if management is difficult.
- Spraying and irrigation are closely monitored to avoid encroachment of special sites. Special sites are marked and avoided.

Result: In Conformance

Objective 9: Local Communities

9.1 Economic Wellbeing

Conformance Evidence

- Lease language
- Irrigation invoice
- Reeter Farm: Special Sites and Species report
- Volunteer postcard
- Conservation article

Auditor Notes

- Lease language requires tax payments to be made and legal compliance with all Federal, State, and local laws.
- All farm staff are local employees or employed with through the use of a farm labor contractor (FLC).
- US Ag and tenants maintain relationships with local dealers and suppliers.
- US Ag makes an effort to source from local suppliers for on-farm improvements. Certified crop advisors (CCAs), PCAs and contracted chemical application companies are hired.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

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Objective 9: Local Communities (Continued)

9.2 Community Relations

Conformance Evidence

- Conservation article
- Day at the Dairy letter
- Future Farmers of America (FFA) "Thank you" postcard

Auditor Notes

- US Ag staff speak on sustainable agriculture at community events, volunteer as judges for FFA events, and have volunteer days to serve at food banks.
- US Ag donated to Day at the Dairy, which is a nonprofit dedicated to educating students about dairy and ag.
- US Ag's Midwest regional director was featured in a local newspaper. The article focused on the importance of improving farmland from an ecological and environmental standpoint to support long-term sustainable investments.
- Selected sites provide church and school sponsorships and support UC Davis tour groups focused on agricultural education.
- US Ag's Farm Questionnaire includes local and community involvement of tenants.
- Site selected frequently hires interns to provide direct experience and education.
- Operator interviewed is a board member of the Washington Apple Education Foundation, which has donated millions of dollars to support scholarships, internships, innovations, and agricultural industry, which include growers, packers, and sales.
- Operator of selected site co-chairs the Technology Committee of Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission.

Result: In Conformance

9.3 Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples

Conformance Evidence

- Due diligence checklist
- ESG Policy Statement

Auditor Notes

- US Ag's ESG Policy describes US Ag's commitment to local communities and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Culturally sensitive areas are considered off-limits.
- US Ag's Due Diligence checklists include exploration of Indigenous communities and the presence of cultural sites around potential acquisitions.
- Sites visited were not proximal to any Indigenous communities or Tribes.
- US Ag's contact information is not posted on properties, but US Ag is listed as the property owner on public records. US Ag expects tenants within the communities to be available for contact and to escalate any issues to US Ag.
- Sites selected have bulletin boards with tenant contact information, employee rights, safety on farm, and safety data sheets (SDS) present.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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Objective 9: Local Communities (Continued)

9.4 Public Health

Conformance Evidence

- Employee Handbook

Auditor Notes

- Employee Handbooks outline safety requirements for employees, including mandatory reporting of any dangerous or hazardous situations and handling equipment in alignment with operating instructions, safety standards, and guidelines.
- Sites selected use platforms during harvest to reduce the need for ladders and subsequent potential for injuries.
- Selected sites have trucks and vehicles marked with farm logos and signage. Tenants report having good relationships with neighbors.

Result: In Conformance, Notable Practice

Objective 10: Employees and Farm Labor

10.1 Safe and Respectful Working Environment

Conformance Evidence

- Employee Handbook
- Farm Manager job description
- US Agriculture Compensation Benchmarking and Plan Review report

Auditor Notes

- Employment applications and employment packets contain Equal Opportunity Employment commitment statements.
- Sites monitor air quality and require employees to wear masks on days with lower air quality. If air quality is too poor, employees will not work until air quality improves.
- US Ag's Employee Handbook contains anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. US Ag maintains a visitor policy to standardize expectations for non-employees on farm sites to keep visitors and staff safe.
- Selected sites observe labor restrictions related to heat above 85 degrees (Fahrenheit) to protect employees.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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Objective 10: Employees and Farm Labor (Continued)

10.2 Occupational Training

Conformance Evidence

- USDA GroupGAP Certificates
- Employee Handbooks

Auditor Notes

- Global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits address numerous factors included in personnel and contract worker training, including health and safety procedures, training logs, hazard training, personal protective equipment (PPE), and safety equipment.
- US Ag uses training logs to document practices in place that support GAP and Good Manufacturing (GMP) audits.
- Selected site hires a third-party contractor to provide safety training.

Result: In Conformance

10.3 Supporting Capacity for Sustainability

Conformance Evidence

- Annual tenant questionnaires
- American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (ASFMRA) Accreditation

Auditor Notes

- ESG Policy clearly establishes US Ag's commitment to LH FMS.
- US Ag has designated staff charged with establishing teams that manage and address sustainability issues. Regional Directors understand LH FMS requirements.
- Regional Directors are American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (ASFMRA) accredited which strengthens US Ag's ability to navigate complex property acquisitions and discern properties with the greatest potential to support sustainable practices.
- US Ag uses annual questionnaires to ensure employees receive appropriate safety training. Employee training logs are maintained.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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Objective 10: Employees and Farm Labor (Continued)

10.4 Compensation

Conformance Evidence

- Compensation Benchmarking and Plan Review

Auditor Notes

- Select sites pay minimum wage. Employee retention and returning labor force indicates pay is adequate.
- H2A labor is secured by a third-party who negotiates and establishes wages.
- US Ag engaged a third-party consultant to review competitiveness and fairness of employee wages. US Ag conducts reviews to ensure wages are competitive for the area in which staff operates.

Result: In Conformance

10.5 Farm Labor

Conformance Evidence

- Management interview

Auditor Notes

- US Ag solicits bids, researches, verifies legal standing, and establishes relationships with FLCs and H2A negotiators. Management contracts include FLC review processes.
- Sites harvest with the help of FLC sourced labor. Fields that are not platform ready are harvested by hand using FLCs on ladders. FLCs conduct safety trainings and records are provided for review.
- Selected site hires previous FLC workers as staff and sources a preferred labor force from multiple FLCs. Auditors observed shade and toilets available for farm workers' use.
- Performance reviews occur post-harvest and are documented through email or direct communications.
- US Ag's Regional Director review process to ensure employees receive fair wages that align with industry standards to avoid reputational risks or harmful impacts on farm labor.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 11: Legal and Regulatory Compliance

11.1 Legal Compliance

Conformance Evidence

- Asset management team roster
- Employee compliance training outlines
- Due Diligence Checklist
- American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers accreditation
- Organic certification
- Site visit photos
- Employee training agenda and roster

Auditor Notes

- US Ag has a designated Legal Compliance Officer who monitors potential issues and manages US Ag's response and action items.
- US Ag retains a general counsel that has the right to research areas of concern.
- US Ag is current on Federal and State taxes. Some leases require US Ag to pay property tax, while others the tenant will pay the tax as part of the lease.
- Due Diligence Checklist enumerates property acquisition process.
- General counsel provides memos on new laws or regulations that affect US Ag properties to support legal compliance.
- US Ag managers state tenants acquire appropriate permits related to agricultural burns onsite. Auditors were not able to verify permits during surveillance activities.
- Current compliance topics and regulatory updates are discussed during weekly meetings.
- Due diligence checklist must be completed prior to property closing.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) posters are displayed on sites.
- Permits are acquired for burns on predetermined days.

Result: In Conformance, Opportunity for Improvement (OFI)

11.2 Legal Compliance Policies

Conformance Evidence

- ESG Policy
- Employee Handbook

Auditor Notes

- Us Ag's ESG Policy requires farm operators to manage properties in a socially responsible manner.
- Employee packets address civil rights, Equal Employment Opportunities, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures, workers compensation, health and safety, and wage levels.
- Employee Handbook supports workers' right to organize and occupational health and safety.
- Employee document packet addresses rights in the International Labour Organization (ILO) declaration on fundamental principles and rights to work.
- Lease language directly reflects tenants' right to quiet enjoyment of leased properties.

Result: In Conformance

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Objective 12: Management Review and Continual Improvement

12.1 Farm Review and Continual Improvement

Conformance Evidence

- Primus audit results
- Annual Tenant Questionnaires
- Primus certificates
- USDA GroupGAP Certificates

Auditor Notes

- Staff use a performance review software, Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) Organization, to track goals established by employees, department, and company. US Ag also has established company-wide goals. Goals are reviewed weekly during team meetings.
- Farm Visit documents and preparation for Global GAP / GPS audits support continual improvement of farm operating efficiency and sustainability.
- US Ag's Farm Visit review process document supports the collection of farm practices and resource use on properties.
- Global GAP audit preparedness requires record maintenance in several areas including supplier monitoring controls, equipment maintenance, and sanitation files.
- US Ag maintains a record of invoices to support sustainability audit schemes and to monitor on-farm activities.
- Employees regularly attend agriculture conferences and seek further education.
- Employees look to further education, such as American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers accreditation.
- US Ag leadership supports employees who are seeking leadership opportunities with external organizations.
- Selected sites have multiple types of trellis designs. Operator is moving to add additional "fruit wall" design for the future since that design facilitates the use of robotic harvesters and pruners.
- Annual review cycles begin near the end of the calendar year. External factors are reviewed at the farm level, and hold/sell analyses on properties are used to identify necessary projects during capital expenditure and budget discussions.
- US Ag has high-level company goals that relate to LH FMS objectives.

Result: In Conformance, Notable Practice

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LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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Objective 12: Management Review and Continual Improvement (Continued)

12.2 Support for Sustainable Agriculture

Conformance Evidence

- Management interview

Auditor Notes

- US Ag's Regional Manager reviews and approves potential innovations or new practices tenants would like to use on sites. US Ag provides financial support for biochar incorporation on selected sites.
- Sites participate in multiple trials focused on soil health, building SOM, and new varieties. Sites test newly available biostimulants that benefit microbial soil health and associated services and participate in biochar trials.
- Selected site is evaluating the use of a specially engineered plastic cover to protect crops from wind, hail, and excessive rainfall, and provide a greenhouse effect. The cover may allow fruit to mature more quickly.

Result: In Conformance

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

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Objective 13: Tenant-Operated Operations

13.1 Leased-Land Management

Conformance Evidence

- Farm visit records
- ESG Policy
- Agriculture Lease

Auditor Notes

- Lease language requires good stewardship practices on farms, BMPs, social responsibility, and directly refers to LH FMS. Good stewardship practices are informed by universities and reputable research organizations.
- US Ag establishes housing contracts that are packaged with farmland tenant leases for those who live onsite or sublease housing.
- Farm visits support tenant's ability to meet lease language requirements and increase accountability. US Ag managers communicate frequently with tenants which supports their ability to share ideas and practices from conferences, other farms, and industry trends.
- US Ag's ESG Policy describes goals for leased farmland which focus on environmental sustainability and adherence to LH FMS objectives.

Result: In Conformance, Notable Practice

13.2 Leased-Land Monitoring

Conformance Evidence

- Farm visit records
- Yield analysis

Auditor Notes

- US Ag collects questionnaires and reviews yield data annually to monitor tenant agricultural practices. Questionnaires collect information regarding other farm-related certifications tenants may have achieved to streamline conformance. Questionnaires are revised annually to ensure they remain relevant.
- US Ag conducts farm visits regularly and maintains records.

Result: In Conformance, Opportunity for Improvement (OFI)

CONCLUSIONS

Results of the audit indicate that US Ag has implemented a management system that continues to meet the requirements of and is in conformance with the LH FMS. US Ag's enrolled acreage is recommended for continued certification to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2020.

US AGRICULTURE

LH FMS AUDIT SUMMARY REPORT

July 31, 2024

Summary of Audit Findings					
Program User	US Agriculture				
Audit Dates	June 7, 2024 – July 31, 2024				
Non-Conformances Raised (NCR):	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 60%;"><i>Major</i></th> <th style="width: 40%;"><i>Minor</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">0</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>	0	0
<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>				
0	0				
Follow-Up Visit Needed? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Date(s)					
Audit Report Executive Summary					
<p>US Ag has performed well in demonstrating its management system’s conformance to the Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard. The properties visited were managed by professional tenants and staff. Tenant operators are professionally qualified and experienced on sites, demonstrate expertise and awareness of critical management factors, and assume responsibility to address challenges and emerging issues. The tenant’s and Regional Director’s willingness to share information and results from established and trial practices was appreciated by the audit team. Documentation was illustrative and provided by responsible staff. Interview subjects were transparent and expansive in their responses. All parties have been extremely generous with their time.</p>					
Team Leader Recommendations					
Corrective Action Plan(s) Accepted Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	07/31/2024				
Proceed to/Continue Certification Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	07/31/2024				
All NCR Closed Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	07/31/2024				
Standard(s) Audited Against					
Leading Harvest Farmland Management Standard 2020 (Objectives 1 through 13)					
Audit Team Leader	Audit Team Members				
Matt Armstrong	Linnea Abel, Jacques Werleigh, Jill Brodt, Holly Salisbury				
Scope of Audit					
Management of production farmland on direct and tenant operated properties.					
Accreditations	Approval by Leading Harvest to provide certification audits				
Number of Certificates	1				
Certificate Number	AVERUM-LHFMS-2022-0016				
Proposed Date for Next Audit Event	TBD				
Audit Report Distribution	David Martin: david.martin@us-agriculture.com				