



One planet
inform with care

FiBL

Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL

Sector: Food and Agriculture

Region: Based in Austria, operates globally

[The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture \(FiBL\)](#) is a non-profit, European research institute that aims to advance science in the field of agriculture.

FiBL has developed the [SMART](#) – Sustainability Monitoring and Assessment RouTine: a method that allows farms and companies in the food sector to assess their sustainability performance.

SMART mainly consists of a database including a rating methodology and a comprehensive pool of indicators that allows the sustainability assessment of primary producers (agricultural and horticultural farms), as well as food processing companies. The results of a SMART assessment are summarized in a graphical representation (the 'polygon', which includes a scale). The polygon shows the sustainability performance on a scale ranging from 0 to 100%. It communicates an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the company and farmers in relation to sustainability criteria to stakeholders in the supply chain.



smart
sustainability monitoring
and assessment routine

Mindset

Life Cycle Thinking: The assessment focuses on the overall performance of the operation or farm (including inputs and outputs, such as supplies and resources or waste and disposal). Not only the processes on the farm or company premises are considered, but also the main sphere of influence and responsibility of the respective farm or company within the supply chain.

Hotspots Analysis: The assessment covers relevant aspects considering the sustainability performance of agricultural producers, companies or production systems. Through FiBL's analysis, it is possible to identify hotspots along the supply chain.

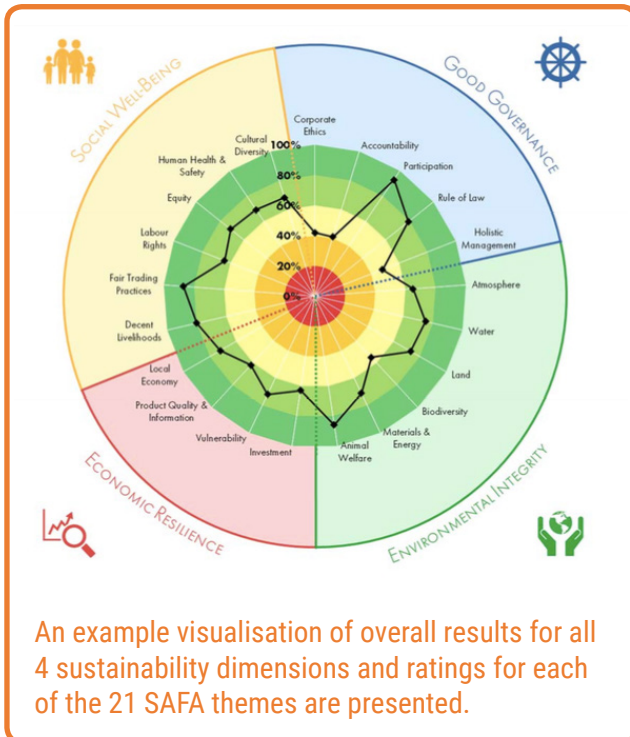
Mainstreaming sustainability: FiBL encourages that the results of SMART be incorporated into the decision-making and management process of the products. Companies can use the results of this assessment for strategic development, internal improvement, monitoring, and communication to business partners, as well as to compare their sustainability performance with other companies.

Principle 1: Reliability

The tool is based on the Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture Systems (SAFA) Guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). The SAFA-Guidelines divide sustainability into overall 58 themes within four dimensions: Good Governance, Environmental Integrity, Economic Resilience and Social Well-Being. These dimensions in turn divide up into 21 themes and 58 subthemes. FiBL has developed SMART as a practical assessment tool to make the SAFA-Guidelines applicable in the context of farms and companies. With the help of SMART, the specific sustainability performance of farms can be recorded, analysed and communicated in a systematic manner.



The SMART method is published in many scientific papers, which are listed on the FiBL [website](#). The assessment method involves a weighting of the indicators according to the level of impact on the various SAFA themes. Data from certifications, audits, CO₂-calculations or from LCA or CO₂ assessments are integrated into the SMART assessment.



In order to support the interpretation of the visualization of the results, FAQ are available on the website. FiBL is also further conducting a survey with farms and companies to test the perception and understanding as well as expectations and needs concerning the overall sustainability communication concept.

Principle 2: Relevance



The relevance of the 58 themes defined in the SAFA-Guidelines is analysed for each company or farm. Context-specific indicators are compiled individually for each case. If any theme is considered irrelevant for the specific assessment, this will not be rated; however, exclusions are explained in detail.

The assessment exceeds regulatory requirements of the production countries. The assessment includes a compliance check for agricultural standards like the European Organic Farming Regulation.

Principle 3: Clarity



The SMART logo cannot be used on products, and SMART results (as depicted in the polygon) are not easily communicated on product level. Companies who applied the SMART assessment might however develop their own communication vehicles based on the results (example [here](#)). The polygon's colours provide an easy-to-use and fast interpretation of the overall performance: red meaning unacceptable and limited achievement, orange moderate and green good to best achievement (see also Principle 5 Accessibility). The form of the polygon helps creating a good and clear overview of the sustainability performance, while still containing more detailed information.

Principle 4: Transparency



Information on the results, methods, data collection, relevant stakeholders, and system boundaries are available on the [website](#). All published scientific studies are being linked. The results of a SMART assessment are summarized in a comprehensive report including graphical representation (the polygon). It provides a detailed overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the company in relation to each SAFA subtheme and the respective objective. The report and the polygon are used to communicate the company's sustainability performance to all stakeholders such as consumers, suppliers or rating agencies.

[An information brochure](#) and farm/company models reports are available on the website. The assessment is not subject to limited validity. However, FiBL recommends companies and farms to perform the SMART assessment every 2 to 5 years, or as soon as significant changes have occurred on the farm.

Principle 5: Accessibility



Following a defined assessment method based on an individually selected set of indicators, it is measured to what extent the farm or company has met the sustainability objectives for each of the 58 themes defined in the SAFA-Guidelines. The achievements of the objectives are assessed using a five level scale from 0 or red (unacceptable) to 4 or dark green (best, objective fully achieved). This scale is also used for the display of the assessment in radar charts, showing the results as percentage figures.



Scheme for the assessment of the sustainability objective.

The information is not aimed at individual consumers since the SMART logo cannot be used on products. Companies can decide how to display the results. The scale is clear and transparent on the performance, however it is necessary to access the website to support the interpretation of the results (i.e. the criteria). The results of a SMART assessment are summarized in a comprehensive report, including a graphical presentation (the polygon), which provides a detailed overview of strengths and weaknesses in all SAFA themes and their related sustainability goals. The report can be used to communicate one's own sustainability performance to all stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, consumers or rating agencies.

Principle 6: Three Dimensions of Sustainability



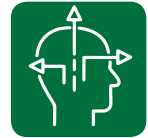
Environmental: This aspect covers atmosphere, water, land, biodiversity, materials and energy, and animal welfare, as in the SAFA-Guidelines.

Social: Decent livelihood, fair trading practices, labour rights, equity, human safety and health and cultural diversity are assessed.

Economic: Investment, vulnerability, product quality information and local economy are assessed.

All sustainability dimensions are addressed in SMART and the 58 SAFA themes cover the three dimensions also.

Principle 7: Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impact



FiBL is currently in the process of reviewing the communication of the project to individual consumers. In order to do so, FiBL is conducting a study to first understand users' perceptions of the tool and how the results could be best communicated to consumers.

At the moment, FiBL focuses on offering businesses and farmers in the agricultural sector a tool to assess their sustainability performance or identify hotspots along the supply chain. Ultimately, the assessments can raise awareness and therefore guide sustainability improvements in the production. There is room to improve the current communication concept to individual consumers and to understand how this would lead to more sustainable food choices.

Principle 8: Multi-Channel and Innovative Approach



SMART gives companies the ability to externally communicate their sustainability performance and which topics they can develop further. However, FiBL does not currently communicate directly to consumers, therefore the communication approach is focused on a business-to-business approach.

Companies can interact with FiBL through e-mail or telephone. [YouTube videos](#) are available in French and German. There is room to improve and develop a more innovative and multi-channel approach.



Principle 9: Collaboration



Many experts have been involved in the methodological development process. However, the development of the logo and additional communication strategy were conducted by an internal group within FiBL.

The indicators as well as the methodology have been developed over several years by experts of FiBL as well as other research institutions and are regularly adapted to the latest scientific knowledge. Further reference documents have been considered during the development, such as the sustainability reporting guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative GRI-G4, the Principles of UN Global Compact, the ISO 26000 "Guidance for social responsibility", the SA8000 standard for social responsibility, the ILO work and social standards as well as the indicator matrix of the Economy for the Common Good.

Principle 10: Comparability



Results of a SMART assessment allow the sustainability performance of farms and companies in the agricultural and food sector to be compared on a global scale.

The assessment method is based on a selected set of indicators and measures to what extent the farm or company has met the sustainability objectives for each of the 58 themes defined in the SAFA-Guidelines. This assessment allows comparison between the performances of farms and companies.