

The logo for Spreewald Ecolabel is a circular emblem. It features a central illustration of a traditional wooden house with a thatched roof on the left and a basket of fresh produce, including a carrot and leafy greens, on the right. The entire scene is enclosed within a double-lined circular border. The text "Spreewald Ecolabel" is written in a light green, sans-serif font along the top inner edge of the outer circle. At the bottom of the circle, there are five green stars arranged in a slight arc.

The Spreewald Ecolabel: Comprehensive
Certification Manual for Producers

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Introduction

Welcome to the Spreewald Ecolabel certification framework. As a producer, applying for this label signals to the market that your operations align with the highest standards of environmental stewardship, economic fairness, and social responsibility within the Spreewald region.

The Mission and The Three Pillars

The core philosophy of the Spreewald Ecolabel is rooted in sustainable agriculture that captures all three pillars of sustainability, namely:

- Improving efficiency in the use of resources.
- Conserving, protecting, and enhancing natural ecosystems.
- Protecting and improving rural livelihoods and social well-being.
- Enhancing the resilience of people, communities, and ecosystems.
- Promoting good governance of both natural and human systems.

How the Assessment Works

Because the Spreewald economy is diverse, a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. We utilize 3 types of Questionnaires to accurately assess your specific business type:

1. Agricultural

2. Services

3. Artisan

Before proceeding to the point-based sections of the assessment, all applicants must first demonstrate compliance with our non-negotiable baseline requirements outlined in Part 1.

Part 1: Prerequisites & Core Mandates

To qualify for the Spreewald Ecolabel, producers must meet fundamental legal, ethical, and geographical standards. These are mandatory prerequisites; failure to meet these criteria disqualifies an applicant from certification.

1. Legal & Baseline Workplace Requirements

We strictly enforce a safe and legally compliant working environment for all staff.

- **Minimum Wage:** All workers must receive at least the legal minimum wage.
- **Child Labor Prohibition:** Your business must have a strict policy prohibiting child labour. Furthermore, you must actively verify the age of all employees through formal documentation.

- **Occupational Safety:** Producers must demonstrate compliance with German occupational safety laws (Arbeitsschutz).
- **Food Safety:** For agricultural and food products, you must formally declare that all ingredients are legally permitted and food-safe in Germany.

2. The Regionality Rule (Deep Regional Value Chains)

The Spreewald Ecolabel protects the authentic local economy. We require a "Deep Regional Value Chain," meaning that processing (e.g., pickling cucumbers, pressing oil) must happen within the Spreewald, not just the growing of the raw materials.

- During the assessment, you will be required to state if processing is done at the same location (on-farm) or partially elsewhere.
- If processing is done elsewhere, the exact processing address is required.
- This strict tracking prevents misleading "regional" claims and ensures the economic benefits of production remain within our community.

3. Fair Pricing & Employment Standards

Sustainable businesses must protect their supply chain partners and their workforce.

- **Protecting Farmers:** There must be guaranteed minimum prices for farmers to prevent exploitation by large retailers.

- **Stable Contracts:** Employment contracts must offer stability and fair wages. This specifically includes providing stability for seasonal harvest workers.
- **Transparency:** You must provide written contracts to your employees that clearly state their wages and benefits

Part 2: The Assessment Breakdown – Section by Section

This section details the exact questions, expectations, and point structures you will encounter in the Agricultural Questionnaire. Understanding these metrics in advance will help you gather the necessary documentation and identify areas for operational improvement.

Section I: General Product Information

Before we assess your environmental and social impact, we must establish the precise identity and supply chain of the product you are certifying. This section does not award points but is mandatory for transparency and traceability.

- **Product Identification:** You must provide the exact product name as sold to consumers (e.g., "Spreewald Gurken - klassisch eingelegt").
- **Categorization:** You will classify the product category (e.g., Fresh produce, Processed vegetables, Dairy, Meat/Fish, Honey/Beverages) and its form (Fresh, Preserved/Pickled, Fermented, Dried, Frozen).

- **Protected Designations:** You must declare if the product is sold under a regional or protected name, such as "Spreewälder Gurken g.g.A." .
- **Ingredient Traceability:** You must list the number of ingredients, the percentage of the main ingredient by weight, and crucially, the exact origin of that main ingredient (Own farm, Spreewald, Brandenburg, Germany, or Imported).
- **Production & Sales:** We require data on your annual production volume (ranging from <5 tons to >100 tons) and your main sales channels (e.g., Farm shop, Local markets, Regional or National retailers, Gastronomy, Online).
- **Baseline Packaging:** You must declare the primary packaging type used (Glass, Plastic, Paper/cardboard, Mixed materials, or Reusable system).

Section II: Environmental Impact (Ecosystems & Soil)

This section evaluates how your farming practices directly interact with the Spreewald's unique natural environment. Points are heavily weighted toward active conservation and wetland protection.

1. Wetlands & Water Quality

Protecting the region's water table is critical.

- **Wetland-Compatible Management:** Utilizing Paludiculture (farming on wet peatlands with no drainage) earns the maximum **10 points** . Utilizing a controlled seasonal water table earns **7 points**, while conventional drainage earns only **3 points** .
- **Water-Retention Projects:** Active participation in a local water-retention or peat restoration project earns **8 points**, while participating via a CAP eco-scheme earns **6 points** . Simply planning to join earns **4 points** .
- **Buffer Zones:** Maintaining a vegetated buffer width of 20 meters or more along waterways earns **6 points** . Buffer widths between 10-19 meters earn **4 points**, 5-9 meters earn **2 points**, and less than 5 meters earns **0 points** .

2. Biodiversity & Habitat

Farms must provide safe havens for local flora and fauna.

- **Ecological Focus Zones:** Dedicating $\geq 15\%$ of your area as ecological focus zones earns **6 points** . Dedicating 10-14% earns **4 points**, and 5-9% earns **2 points** .
- **Semi-Natural Elements:** You earn **2 points** for each semi-natural element present on your farm (up to a maximum of 8 points). Eligible elements include hedgerows, ponds, reed belts, orchards, and deadwood piles .

- **Species Monitoring:** Conducting species monitoring with an NGO or research partner earns **6 points**, while self-monitoring earns **4 points**.

3. Soil Health & Carbon

- **Crop Rotation:** A high crop rotation complexity of ≥ 4 crop types earns **5 points**, while 3 crops earns **3 points**. Less than 3 crops earns **0 points**.
- **Organic Amendments:** If $\geq 50\%$ of your nutrient inputs come from organic amendments, you earn **5 points**. 25-49% earns **3 points**.

Section III: Resource Use & Circularity

This section measures your operational efficiency, focusing on your transition to clean energy and your commitment to a zero-waste, circular economy.

1. Energy & Emissions

- **Renewable Electricity:** Sourcing $\geq 70\%$ of your electricity from renewables earns **7 points**. 40-69% earns **5 points**, and $< 40\%$ earns **2 points**.
- **Energy Programmes:** Actively using renewable or low-impact energy programmes (e.g., KfW) earns **4 points**, while planning to do so earns **2 points**.

2. Circularity & Waste

- **Packaging End-of-Life:** Using a refillable glass or reusable crate system is highly rewarded with **8 points** . Utilizing compostable or recyclable plastic earns **6 points**, while minimal recyclability earns **0 points** .
- **Food Loss:** Implementing 2 or more food loss reduction measures earns **5 points**, while one measure earns **3 points** .
- **Organic Waste Handling:** Handling organic waste on-farm via anaerobic digestion or composting for sale earns **5 points** . Relying on landfill removal for organic waste earns **0 points**.

Section IV: Social & Community Impact

This section ensures that your business operates ethically and acts as a pillar of support for the local Spreewald community. Strong governance and social commitments enhance your overall sustainability profile.

- **Workforce Protection & Rights:** We require transparency regarding worker rights. You will be assessed on whether employees are covered by formal written contracts (Yes/Mixed/Casual). Furthermore, we evaluate how often workers receive safety and training briefings (Monthly/Quarterly/Annual/None). You must also indicate if you have a documented fair wage policy and specify the channels through which

workers can raise concerns or share feedback (e.g., formal grievance systems vs. informal discussions).

- **Community Integration:** Local employment reinforces social benefits. You must report the percentage of your workers (0-100%) that are from the local community. We also assess whether you regularly, occasionally, or never partner with local community groups or events.
- **Cultural & Environmental Advocacy:** Storytelling helps consumer engagement. You will be evaluated on how local culture or environmental values are reflected in your product communication (e.g., whether it is a central part of your branding, mentioned in select materials, or not communicated). Additionally, we ask if your business contributes to local environmental education/conservation projects, publicly reports community benefit outcomes, or shares local cultural sustainability stories online.

Part 3: The 50-Point Sustainability Performance Matrix

While baseline compliance proves you are operating responsibly, the Spreewald Ecolabel is designed to encourage continuous, measurable improvement. This 50-point matrix rewards producers who actively reduce their environmental footprint year over year.

To earn points in these categories, you must be able to provide data comparing your current performance to your previous year or demonstrate specific, measurable infrastructure upgrades.

A. CO2 Reduction (12 points maximum)

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a critical climate goal. You are scored on both your year-over-year emission reductions and the implementation of specific low-carbon business practices.

- **Year-Over-Year Reduction:**
 - Reduced CO2 by 30% or more compared to last year: **3 points**
 - Reduced CO2 by 20-29%: **2 points**
 - Reduced CO2 by 10-19%: **1 point**
 - No reduction or no data available: **0 points**
- **Additional Action Points:**
 - Completed a formal carbon footprint assessment in the last 12 months: **2 points**
 - Operating a low-emission vehicle fleet of 50% or more: **1 point**

B. Energy Consumption (10 points maximum)

Efficiency means doing more with less. We reward producers who actively lower their overall energy demands and invest in highly efficient equipment.

- **Year-Over-Year Reduction:**
 - Reduced energy consumption by 20% or more: **3 points**
 - Reduced energy consumption by 10-19%: **2 points**
 - Reduced energy consumption by less than 10%: **1 point**
 - No reduction: **0 points**
- **Additional Action Points:**
 - Upgraded facility so that 70% of lighting is LED/low energy: **2 points**
 - Utilizing EU-standard energy-efficient machinery: **3 points**

C. Renewable Energy Usage (10 points maximum)

Transitioning away from fossil fuels is a cornerstone of the Ecolabel. We evaluate both the percentage of clean energy you purchase and your capacity to generate it on-site.

- **Share of Energy Used:**
 - Renewable energy share of 50% or more: **3 points**
 - Renewable energy share of 30-49%: **2 points**

- Renewable energy share of 10-29%: **1 point**
- Renewable energy share of less than 10%: **0 points**
- **Additional Action Points:**
 - Generating 10% or more of your energy on-site from renewable sources: **3 points**
 - Having a documented plan to increase renewables by 20% within 2 years: **2 points**

D. Water Consumption (10 points maximum)

Freshwater is a precious resource in the Spreewald. Points are awarded for significantly cutting down on usage and implementing circular water systems.

- **Year-Over-Year Reduction:**
 - Reduced water consumption by 20% or more: **3 points**
 - Reduced water consumption by 10-19%: **2 points**
 - Reduced water consumption by less than 10%: **1 point**
 - No reduction: **0 points**
- **Additional Action Points:**

- Implementing systems for 25% or more water reuse/recycling: **3 points**
- Conducting a formal water audit in the last 2 years: **2 points**

E. Waste Reduction & Recycling (18 points maximum)

The transition to a circular economy requires rigorous waste management. This section offers the highest potential points for producers who prioritize recycling, material reuse, and landfill diversion.

- **Year-Over-Year Reduction:**
 - Reduced total waste by 15% or more: **3 points**
 - Reduced waste by 10-14%: **2 points**
 - Reduced waste by less than 10%: **1 point**
- **Additional Action Points (3 points each):**
 - Diverting 60% or more of total waste away from landfills: **3 points**
 - Recycling 50% or more of total waste: **3 points**
 - Using packaging that is 100% recyclable or biodegradable: **3 points**
 - Incorporating 20% or more recycled materials into your products: **3 points**

- Operating a customer take-back program for used packaging/products: **3 points**

Part 4: Verification, Transparency & Audit Readiness

The Spreewald Ecolabel is built on a foundation of trust. For consumers to value the label, they must trust that the standards are rigorously upheld. Therefore, self-assessment is only the first step; transparency and the willingness to be audited are mandatory.

1. Required Documentation & Traceability

You must be able to prove the claims made in your self-assessment.

- **Evidence Uploads:** As part of the application process, you are required to upload concrete evidence for at least one section of the assessment.
- **On-Demand Records:** You must maintain supporting documents that are available upon request at any time. This includes batch codes, facility photos, and operational records.
- **Traceability:** Detailed traceability documentation covering your supply chain and ingredient origins must be readily available.

- **Metric Testing:** You must confirm that your product has been accurately measured or tested against the environmental metrics reported, such as energy, water, and soil data.

2. Public Commitments & Marketing

Transparency extends to how you communicate with your customers.

- **Public Scoring:** To increase the label's credibility, you must agree to publicly share your product score or a summary of your assessment.
- **Truth in Labeling:** Any environmental claims printed on your product packaging must strictly match the data provided in your self-assessment.
- **Sales Platforms:** Product impact information should be clearly included on your sales platforms (e.g., your online shop or farm store signage).

3. The Audit Agreement

Because our ecolabel principles highly value third-party checks, external verification is a core component of the program.

- **Independent Verification:** By applying, you formally agree to submit to future independent, third-party verification audits.

- **Accuracy Confirmation:** You must formally confirm that all submitted answers in the questionnaire are accurate, which serves as the required baseline for trust.
- **Understanding the Framework:** Finally, you must declare that you have read and understood how this self-assessment works. Both consumer and producer understanding matter for the success of transparent labels.

Conclusion: Ready to Apply?

By completing this manual, you now understand the rigorous standard set by the Spreewald Ecolabel. Our criteria are challenging by design—they ensure that only the most dedicated, sustainable, and community-focused producers carry our seal.

If your operations align with these Ecological, Economic, and Social pillars, you are ready to begin the formal assessment. Gather your documentation, review your baseline requirements, and take the next step toward certifying your commitment to the future of the Spreewald.