BONSUCRO BENCHMARKING PROTOCOL v2.0
(October 2023)

There are many sustainability tools and frameworks that sugarcane farmers and millers can use to guide and measure their sustainability performance with some degree of overlap. Benchmarking the Bonsucro Standard to these different frameworks promotes enhanced interoperability between these different tools and frameworks and creates value across the supply chain. More specifically, benchmarking can enhance collaboration and reduce unnecessary duplication. While our 2021– 2026 Strategic Plan sets out our broad approach to benchmarking, this document provides a detailed framework for how this process will be followed in practice.

Background to version 2.0 of Bonsucro's Benchmarking Protocol

The Bonsucro Benchmarking Protocol Version 1.2.1 was published in September 2018. Its main purpose was to recognise credible schemes already operating in the sector as equivalent, increasing the scale and potential impact of sustainable production.

In 2023, Bonsucro launched its new Production Standard v5.2, which presented the opportunity to review and adopt a more flexible approach to benchmarking, allowing for different purposes and users whilst managing risks to Bonsucro and its stakeholders and ensuring credibility through a robust approach.

Inputs for this version 2.0 include a review of documents, a survey, and a workshop with key internal stakeholders across the Bonsucro Secretariat. The document uses the ISEAL Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide v1.1 as a framework.

Benchmarking Version	Purpose	Scope
1.2.1 September 2018	Recognise other schemes	Standard and Calculator
2.0 October 2023	Range of internal and external purposes, including recognition protocol	Standard credibility requirements (governance, assurance, claims, data)

Contents

1   Getting Started

The Bonsucro Benchmarking Protocol takes a flexible approach to benchmarking in that it allows benchmarking to be conducted for different purposes. The protocol includes using an Excel-based benchmarking assessment tool (the Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool) to document the process and facilitate transparency of the results.
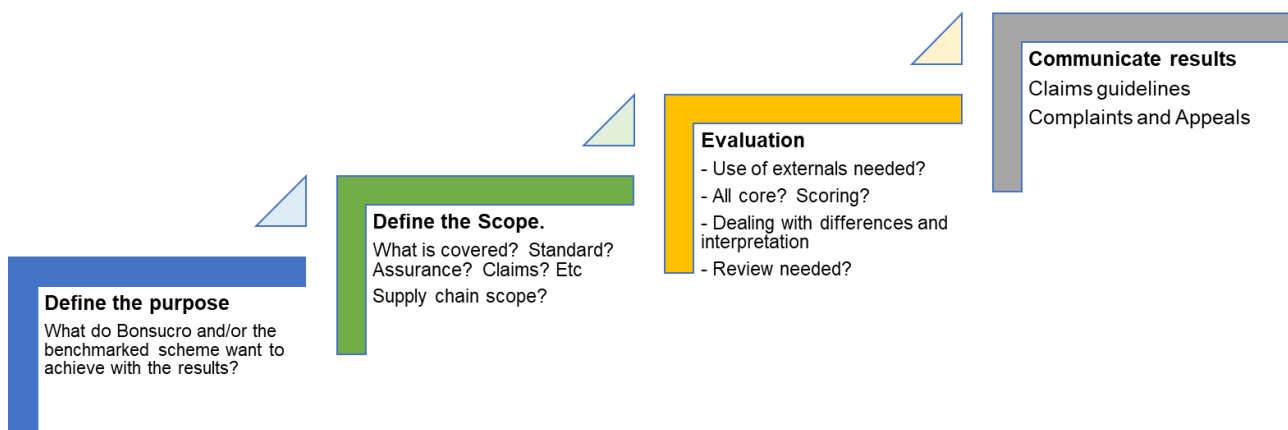
The Tool is comprehensive in that it covers the relevant standard compliance requirements for the scope to be benchmarked, degree of criticality (core/non-core) metrics, as well as system requirements. It is designed to be flexible to suit different motivations behind benchmarking, as will be outlined in the following sections. This Protocol and the Bonsucro Benchmark Assessment Tool must be used when the Bonsucro Standard is the benchmark.

Benchmarking may be carried out by Bonsucro or designated consultants for purposes other than recognition. For recognition benchmarking or external claims, for credibility, the benchmarking process includes an independent/impartial committee for credibility, as described in **Chapter 3. Equivalency Assessment for Recognition**.

A one-off gap analysis that only aims to identify potential synergies or overlaps does not need to follow this protocol.

1.1   Overview of the Benchmarking Process

The basic steps of the benchmark process include:

Communicate results
Claims guidelines
Complaints and Appeals

Evaluation
- Use of externals needed?
- All core? Scoring?
- Dealing with differences and interpretation
- Review needed?

Define the Scope.
What is covered? Standard? Assurance? Claims? Etc
Supply chain scope?

Define the purpose
What do Bonsucro and/or the benchmarked scheme want to achieve with the results?

Adapted ISEAL Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide Version 1.1

While many steps are the same in the benchmarking process, the **purpose** will define the benchmark structure, scope, evaluation model, performance level and communications about the results. This may also affect the management of the benchmark and necessary additional roles. Overall, the purpose defines the intensity, precision, independence, transparency, and other elements of the benchmarking needed. This affects the investment of time and resources. Regardless of the purpose, Bonsucro views the benchmarking process as an opportunity for shared learning.

2   Equivalency Assessment for Alignment

The following describes the basic process regardless of scope or purpose. However, the **intensity** and **some steps** only apply depending on the scope and purpose. These differences are clearly identified in the steps. The **Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool** is the basis for the assessment.

In line with ISEAL Benchmarking Good Practice, the first step is to determine the purpose and audience of the benchmarking results.

2.1   Define the Purpose

The first step is to define the purpose, which will determine the overall process and resources needed. Often, there are assumptions about the purpose across stakeholders. The purpose should be made explicit and reported in all communications.

The purpose of the benchmark can be alignment or recognition. The alignment benchmark is a comparison exercise to determine the level of alignment between the Bonsucro requirements and the requirements of the benchmarked scheme, covered in Chapter 2. The benchmark for recognition will require the steps described in Chapter 3 in addition to Chapter 2.

The definition of scope also includes defining the motivation for benchmarking, the audience, and the use of results. This will help users understand claims about the results.

Questions to ask and discuss include:
- What does Bonsucro want to achieve with the results?
- Who will be seeing and using the results?
- How will those results be used? In what format level of detail? What's "good enough"?
- Are there any risks? How will we mitigate and/or manage them?

Based on that:
- Who will need to be involved?
- What is the timeline?
- Is a budget needed? Internal staff time estimate? External consultants?

☐   **Step 1 in the Bonsucro Benchmarking Tool: fill in the purpose**

2.2   Define the Scope of the Benchmark

A benchmarking process can cover any and all aspects of a sustainability scheme, including the standard content, standard setting and revision processes, and implementation (e.g., governance and assurance processes).

Defining the scope is important to delineate what aspects of the standard system will be included in the assessment. Having a clear purpose will determine this. For example, only certain parts of the standard will be benchmarked, e.g., environmental, or solely a specific aspect such as labour requirements to recognise a labour standard such as SA8000. Alternatively, the benchmark may

only look at the agriculture phase and not the mill activities.

☑ The Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool enables the assessment of different scopes. These include the Standard Content Requirements, the Standard Development Requirements and Other System Elements requirements.

Questions to ask include:
- What aspects are relevant for the assessment: Standard, Calculator, system elements? All or partial?
- Focus only on core requirements or all?
- Does the other scheme even have outcomes, data or reporting requirements?
- What is the supply chain scope? Limit to indicators applicable to Agriculture only? Or include the Mill requirements? Chain of Custody?
- What are the claiming requirements and market benefits?

> ☐ **Step 2 in the Excel Benchmarking Tool: define scope**

Standard **Content** Requirements
Benchmarking the content explores how well the other standard aligns with the scope, principles and intended performance level and outcomes of Bonsucro. The Benchmark Tool covers the sustainability standard requirements, the indicators, the expected performance level that must be met to be considered certified, who it applies to and the degree of criticality.

Standard **Development** Requirements
Benchmarking the development of the standard ensures the other standard was developed with a similar purpose and approach, using good practice for standard setting and development.[1]

Standard development benchmarking criteria include requirements around stakeholders, public consultation, decision making and interpretation activities that take place in the context of standard setting and revision processes. These are **optional** to include in the benchmarking, **except for equivalency** assessments, which must be retained for Standard Content Requirements. This is in line with the interpretation note for the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice 6.4.3 on Equivalency and is required for ISEAL Code-Compliant members using equivalency mechanisms.

System Elements Requirements
Benchmarking other system elements that support the credible implementation of the standard can significantly impact the results of the benchmark. This aligns with ISEAL Codes of Good Practice, including Governance, Assurance, and Claims. ISEAL Code-Compliant members can be fast-tracked.

2.3   Preparing for the Assessment

Once the purpose and scope are clear and agreed upon, the roles, budget, and timeline should be developed. These will be based on the scope, degree of precision needed, need for quality control,

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[1] ISEAL recognizes ten principles of standard development including (1) sustainability, (2) improvement, (3) relevance, (4) rigour, (5) engagement, (6) impartiality, (7) transparency, (8) accessibility, (9) truthfulness and (10) efficiency.

and use (purpose) of results.

☑ Where relevant and feasible, the assessment should be done in **collaboration** with the scheme to be benchmarked. The other scheme knows the intent of its requirements and may have other normative documents that might not be public. These additional documents include implementation guidance and other policies and procedures that may be relevant to the assessment. This collaborative approach builds knowledge within respective organisations about how each standard works and will better position both organisations for harmonisation discussions should they be desired.

Even if for internal purposes, it is recommended to have one person conducting the initial assessment (assessor) and another person (reviewer) cross-checking the work as a consistency check and addressing questions. Depending on the purpose, these roles may be taken on by Bonsucro, consultants, the standard seeking to benchmark against Bonsucro or an independent third party.

Preparation and organisation will save time and resources overall.

☑ Sufficient staff time should be allocated. If the other scheme is collaborating, their staff can do an initial self-assessment or, at a minimum, provide the necessary scheme documents and be available to answer questions of interpretation. The time needed for the benchmark assessment will depend on the scope of the assessment, the complexity of the other scheme and the availability/interest to support the process. If the benchmark is being done without the collaboration of the other scheme, then the familiarity of Bonsucro staff or an external consultant will need to be factored in. With the Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool and available scheme documents, a minimum level of effort would be 5–8 days. This will again depend on the purpose and use of the results.

The assessor should assemble and compile all documents relevant to the defined scope. These should be saved on the Bonsucro central filing system for documentation and future reference.

〉 The assessor should familiarise themselves with the other scheme and create a basic overview of the scheme to be benchmarked. Templates in the Excel Tool should be used to note down key elements of the scheme.
〉 The assessor should define and map the criticality of the scheme to Bonsucro that will be used in the assessment. Generally, the compliance levels will be different from Bonsucro, including definitions. For example, the other scheme may include basic, intermediate, and advanced levels, with only basic levels considered "core".

☐ **Steps 3a and 3b in the Excel Benchmarking Tool: fill in Overview of the Benchmark and Overview of the Scheme tabs**

Overviews of the benchmark and scheme document the key aspects and differences in scope, assessment, approach, and methodology that are not captured in the requirements assessment. These are important aspects used in the interpretation and assessment of alignment. Having the

overview information organised in one place will facilitate an understanding of the assessment by others, as well as contribute to dialogue with the other scheme as differences are negotiated.

☑ If the assessment is being done in collaboration with the other scheme, the overview templates can be filled in by the other scheme. The mapping of criticality should be agreed upon as a first step to "get on the same page".

2.4   Conducting the Assessment

The Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool includes a separate tab for each of the scopes for assessment: Standard Content Requirements, the Standard Development Requirements and Other System Elements Requirements.

☐   **Step 4 in the Excel Benchmarking Tool: fill in the assessment**

The completion of details facilitates the assessment of how well the other standard aligns with the expectations of Bonsucro. Documenting the rationale and follow-up questions is important for the review and eventual sharing of results.

The Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool has a separate tab for each of the following sections to be filled in (depending on the scope):

☑ Assessment of the Standard **Content** Requirements

Fields to be completed per Bonsucro indicator for the benchmarked scheme include:
1. **Reference document**. What is the document name of the benchmarked scheme that covers the Bonsucro requirement?
2. **Clause, reference, or page number**. Where can those be found in the document? This facilitates consistency checks and transparency for the review. For Bonsucro indicators that include more than one element, there may be multiple indicators in another system that should each be referenced in the cell.
3. **Reference text**. An extract from the document that enables a reviewer to assess the accuracy of the assessment. For long texts, highlighting the essential elements or noting only the relevant clauses facilitates transparency and consistency checks.
4. **Degree of criticality**. Is this a core or non-core requirement? The mapping will have been done in step 3a.
5. **Reporting metric**. It should be noted if the other scheme requires a metric for the Bonsucro indicator and, if so, what.
6. **Comments**. Optional field for any explanatory comments or questions.
7. **Assessment of alignment**. Using the drop-downs, the assessor should indicate the level of alignment. As systems are different, there will seldom be a straightforward yes or no but variations of alignment. These include:
   - ✓   Not applicable
   - ✓   Does not meet requirement/intent
   - ✓   Partial or weaker content
   - ✓   Content covered/meets intent but weaker criticality

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7

✓ Content covered/meets intent but unknown criticality
✓ Content covered/meets intent and criticality
✓ Exceeds content

8. **Rationale and justification**. This field should always be filled in by the assessor if there is no full alignment or noted where additional evidence is required.

The Bonsucro Production Standard is largely **metric** – for these indicators, assessment is based on alignment with the requirement in the other scheme in terms of measurement methodology and thresholds and whether the indicator achieves the same objective.

☑ Assessment of the Standard **Development** Requirements

If in scope, the assessment of the standard development is completed in the spreadsheet under the tab entitled "4b. Standard Development".

The reviewer assesses the Bonsucro criteria and desired outcomes for each of the ten requirements. The levels of alignment are extracted from ISEAL Codes Checklists and include:
✓ Does not meet criterion
✓ Partially meets criterion
✓ Fully meets criterion

A clear justification with sources, such as weblinks, should be recorded by the assessor. Questions and additional comments can be noted. Full ISEAL Code Compliant membership can be used as a **proxy** for alignment with these indicators, as they have been independently evaluated for compliance with these requirements.

For recognition assessments, clear documentation by the assessor is required to ensure compliance with the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice 6.4.3 on Equivalency. This may be requested or checked in ISEAL Code Compliance assessments.

☑ Assessment of **System** Elements Requirements

If in scope, the assessment of the Scheme's Other System Elements is completed in the spreadsheet under the tab entitled "4c. Other System Elements".

The reviewer assesses the Bonsucro criteria for each of the requirements. The requirements were extracted from Annex 3 of the ISEAL Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide v1.1. Some requirements may not be applicable depending on the scope of the benchmark.

The levels of alignment are extracted from ISEAL Codes Checklists and include:
✓ Does not meet criterion
✓ Partially meets criterion
✓ Fully meets criterion

A clear justification with sources, such as weblinks, should be recorded by the assessor. Full ISEAL

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8

Code Compliant membership can be used as a **proxy** for alignment with these indicators, as they have been independently evaluated for compliance with these requirements.

2.4.1 Identification of Assurance Model

The **type of assurance** used by the Improvement Scheme (in Table 1 below) affects the level of independence used to assess compliance with the scheme.

Table 1: Models of Assurance

Assurance Model	Description
Self-declared	Scheme users state they meet requirements but do not provide evidence to the scheme owner to support the claim.
Self-assessed	Scheme users assess their own performance and provide evidence to the scheme owner to support the claim.
Peer reviewed	A similar entity (for example, another mill) assesses compliance with the scheme.
Second-party verified	Assessment is carried out by a third party associated with (or related to) the user – such as a customer, industry association or government body.
Third-party certified (independent certification)	Assessment carried out by an independent third party, unrelated to the user and scheme owner.

Increasing in the principles of assurance (consistency, rigour, competence, impartiality, transparency, accessibility)

The credibility of third-party certification increases with the level of oversight of the independent assessor or certification body. This can be:
- No oversight mechanism.
- Proxy accreditation: The third party (certification body) is ISO17065 accredited against another scheme, and the third-party monitoring is carried out by the scheme owner or a subcontracted entity.
- Full accreditation: The third party (certification body) is ISO17065 accredited according to the scheme owner certification system, and the third-party monitoring is carried out by an independent accreditation body.

2.4.2 Consistency Check

A consistency check is required to bring a level of consistency to the interpretation of the requirements by different assessors. For internal benchmarks, a qualified individual such as Bonsucro staff or a consultant conducts a review of the assessment to determine alignment, highlighting any additions or differences in interpretation. Knowledge about the benchmark, Bonsucro system and the sector is necessary.

For benchmarking for external purposes, a more formal process is needed to ensure technical

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9

expertise and independence. The role of the review is to check the accuracy and completeness of the assessment to ensure it is ready for public scrutiny.

For external facing benchmarks, if the benchmarked scheme is not involved in the process, they must be notified in advance of publishing any results, providing them the opportunity to discuss the findings and clarify any interpretations.

2.4.3 Presentation of the Results

Summary tables are automatically generated once the benchmark assessments are completed in the Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool. The Excel Tool Summary tab includes a table to summarise the results of the benchmarking for each of the scopes assessed.

The Final Assessment Table includes an overview of which indicators are met and which are partially or not met.

Table 2: Summary of Benchmark Assessment Results

Scheme name meets or exceeds Bonsucro indicators	Scheme name partially meets Bonsucro indicators	The scheme name does not meet Bonsucro Indicators	Not applicable
Number of indicators	Number of indicators	Number of indicators	Number of indicators
List of indicators	List of indicators	List of indicators	List of indicators

3 Equivalency Assessment for Recognition

One of the purposes of benchmarking is the endorsement or recognition of another scheme, or aspects of, as equivalent to Bonsucro. There are different types and levels of recognition, as highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3: Different Types of Recognition

Scope / Who recognizes who?	Partial Only specific elements of the scheme is recognised	Full The whole scheme is recognised
Mutual Recognition Each scheme recognizes the other as equivalent		Requires most time and resources
One-way Recognition One scheme recognizes the other	Requires least time and resources	

Adapted ISEAL Working Paper SSTI

Bonsucro encourages others to benchmark Bonsucro to review alignment and identify opportunities for collaboration. Benchmarking Bonsucro by other schemes or organisations is not covered with this tool.

The Bonsucro Benchmarking Protocol covers partial or full recognition by Bonsucro of another scheme's standard (one-way partial or full recognition of the standard). To be recognised as partially

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10

or fully equivalent, the benchmarked standard must, at a minimum, meet the content, intent, and criticality of the criteria within the scope of the requirements of the Bonsucro standards.

Recognition of equivalency includes risks because of differences in rigour, transparency and effectiveness of different sustainability systems and programmes. The other scheme recognised as equivalent (full or partial) is not maintained or managed by Bonsucro.

An audit by a Bonsucro licensed certification body is always required to make Bonsucro Certified claims. However, this may be a reduced audit if the audit results of the recognised scheme are positive and shared with the Bonsucro auditor ahead of time.

3.1 Recognition Benchmarking Process

The recognition benchmarking process follows the same basic steps as any benchmark. At the outset, there should be a clear purpose and scope defined. The assessment process introduces a few additional steps and roles. Cooperation is a prerequisite for recognition. Transparency and impartiality are also key to the process.
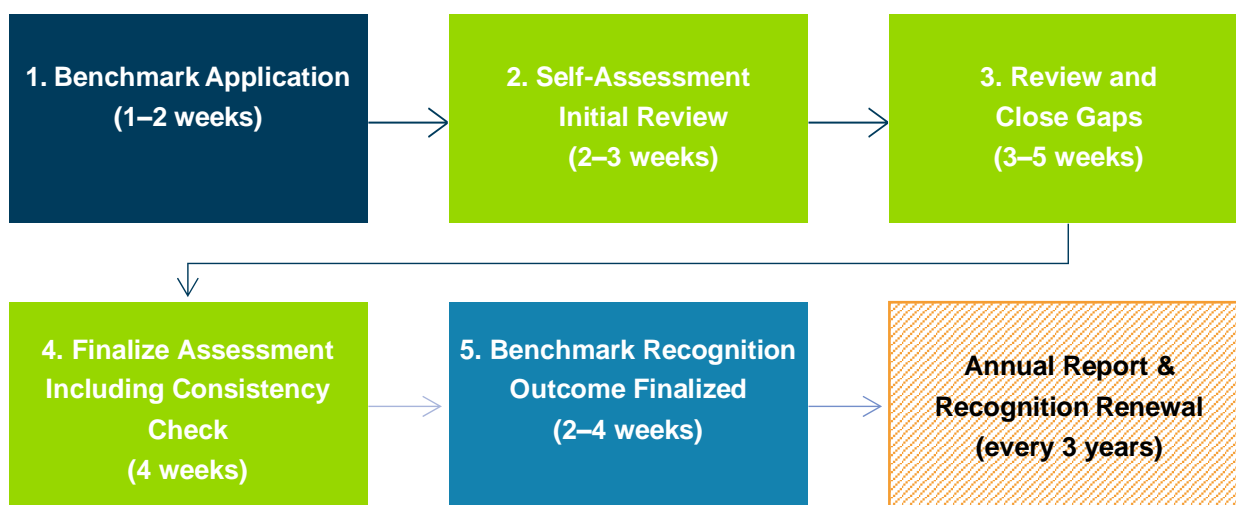
The equivalency assessment for recognition is based on a transparent process where both Bonsucro and the scheme owner carry out benchmarks. This approach builds knowledge within respective organisations about how each scheme works and will better position both organisations for harmonisation discussions should they be desired.

Bonsucro and the other scheme must be clear about their motivations for recognition, including possible claims. These are formalised in the application at the onset. Other key elements include:

- Ensuring internal understanding and alignment on motivations and system implications – this may be done through a briefing that outlines the objectives and outcomes of the process that is shared with internal stakeholders of the scheme to be benchmarked before even initiating the process.
- Identifying a **point person** at each organisation who is responsible for the process and serves as a primary point of contact to coordinate and collate feedback internally.
- **Technical staff** to complete the detailed assessment (self-assessment, review, response to differences in interpretation).
- **Senior management** support of the process and sign-off on the application and reports.
- Ensuring sufficient time and resources are allocated, including for internal discussions, review, and the provision of additional evidence and alignment.

A recognition benchmark on standard **content** requirements must include the **standard development requirements**. This is in line with the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice 6.4.3 on Equivalency.

A summary overview of the benchmarking process for recognition is as follows. Times are given as an estimate but will vary depending on the internal capacity and availability of the scheme owner, the complexity of the standard and different approaches and methodologies that need to be addressed.

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11

1. Benchmark Application (1–2 weeks) → 2. Self-Assessment Initial Review (2–3 weeks) → 3. Review and Close Gaps (3–5 weeks)

4. Finalize Assessment Including Consistency Check (4 weeks) → 5. Benchmark Recognition Outcome Finalized (2–4 weeks) → Annual Report & Recognition Renewal (every 3 years)

These steps for recognition benchmarking are detailed in the table below, including tasks, required documents and roles.

Step 1: Recognition Benchmark Application		
Application Eligibility Criteria ✓ The scheme owner is a legal entity ✓ The scheme owner has been operational for at least 12 months ✓ Scheme owner supports/is committed to the Bonsucro mission		
Task		**Description**
1.1	Initiation of engagement by scheme owner	The scheme owner contacts Bonsucro about benchmarking at standards@bonsucro.com. Bonsucro sends an information pack.
		Benchmarking Information pack to include: • Benchmarking Protocol • Benchmarking Application • Overview of the Scheme Template
1.2	The scheme owner applies for the benchmark.	If the scheme owner wishes to proceed with benchmarking, a signed application is submitted to Bonsucro with a formal request to conduct the benchmark.
		Information sent by the scheme owner to include, at minimum: • Filled in and signed Recognition Benchmark Application that includes legal information, lead contact information, claims and validity • Filled in an Overview of the Scheme that includes scope, reporting tool, assurance model and other relevant information
1.3	The application is accepted by Bonsucro.	Bonsucro reviews information and accepts applications if eligibility criteria are fulfilled: structure/coverage of the scheme is relevant to sustainable sugarcane, scheme standard is publicly available, and scheme owners are willing to actively participate and support the benchmarking process.

Step 2: Self-Assessment and Initial Review		
In this step, the scheme owner conducts a self-assessment using the Benchmarking Tool. Bonsucro conducts an initial review for completeness.		
Task		**Description**
2.1	A consultant is appointed to conduct the assessment.	Bonsucro recruits and appoints a consultant (an independent expert) to conduct the Benchmark Assessment. Payment of consultancy costs to be agreed between Bonsucro and the Scheme Owner.
		Additional information on the Terms of Reference /selection process is to be made available on request. If the scheme owner objects to the appointment, substantiated evidence must be provided to justify a change in a consultant.
2.2	Introductory virtual meeting	Bonsucro sets up a virtual meeting with the scheme owner as an introduction to discuss roles and processes and to walk through the self-assessment tool. In addition, this meeting should be used to define preliminary timelines and ways of working, such as sharing documents. The independent expert, the benchmark leads for Bonsucro, and the other scheme owner must participate in this kick-off call. Ample time should be left for questions and answers.
		Information session to include: • Overview of the benchmarking process • Benchmarking Self-Assessment – walk-through of template, required information and examples • Preliminary timeline – to be discussed and updated
2.3	Scheme owner fills in and submits self-assessment	Scheme owner fills in Benchmarking Self-Assessment The Benchmarking Self-Assessment is submitted to Bonsucro, along with any supporting documents/records such as checklists and reporting tools.
2.4	Completeness check by Bonsucro	Bonsucro conducts a quality control check for completeness.
		Scheme Owner may be asked to resubmit the self-assessment and/or provide additional information if the assessment is incomplete or lacking sufficient detail.

Step 3: Review and Close Gaps		
In this step, the consultant reviews the self-assessment and evaluates the level of alignment for all indicators in scope. The consultant coordinates with the scheme owner for further information and clarification questions. The consultant shares the preliminary independent assessment with the scheme owner, highlighting any critical gaps relating to core criteria.		
Task		**Description**
3.1	Benchmark conducted by consultant	Consultant reviews and verifies the information provided in the self-assessment, evaluating the level of alignment, noting any areas of differences in interpretation, additional evidence needed and questions.
3.2	The consultant provides feedback to the scheme owner	The consultant provides preliminary feedback to the scheme owner via the Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool, highlighting differences and questions. Critical gaps relating to core criteria are identified, along with indicators that are either partially aligned or not aligned with Bonsucro indicators. If needed, a call is organised.
3.3	Differences and critical gaps addressed	Where the consultant identifies differences and/or critical gaps, the scheme owner can: a) <u>Challenge findings</u> – provide additional evidence in support of their claim within two weeks (or agreed time period) or b) <u>Accept findings</u> – partial equivalency The scheme owner will provide additional information to explain gaps and/or set out supplementary actions (if required) to close gaps.
		*The scheme owner may decide to stop the benchmarking assessment at this time to address gaps. *Further analysis/advice on how to close gaps is <u>not</u> within the scope of this exercise. Scheme owners may need to hire outside expertise to assist.*
3.4	Consensus on evaluation of alignment	There may be further back and forth between the scheme owner and consultant to reach a consensus on the evaluation of alignment as per the assessment results. They may also "agree to disagree" on some indicators. Those will be noted for the Consistency Check and Benchmark Committee. The consultant completes the Bonsucro Benchmarking Assessment Tool, with summary results tables on levels of alignment and submits that to Bonsucro.

Step 4: Finalize Assessment, Including Consistency Check

The Recognition Benchmark Assessment summary results are agreed upon by the scheme owner and, if applicable, published online for at least four weeks for stakeholder consultation. Bonsucro collects and collates any feedback. Any significant and substantiated comments are shared with the scheme owner to respond to/address challenges (if necessary) within two weeks.

Task		Description
4.1	Bonsucro conducts quality assurance.	Bonsucro conducts a quality assurance check, reviewing any areas of differences in interpretation and requests additional information from the scheme owner or consultant as applicable.
4.2	Optional: Bonsucro convenes Benchmark Committee	Depending on the findings during quality assurance check, Bonsucro may decide to convene a Benchmark Committee for review of the consultant's assessment. Inclusion of TAB members in the committee may be considered.
4.3	Optional: Benchmark Committee reviews and finalises the assessment	The Benchmark Committee reviews the assessment, focusing on any areas of differences in interpretation or areas identified by the Bonsucro Secretariat. If needed, further information is requested from the scheme owner or consultant. Once all questions and clarifications are addressed, the Benchmark Committee decides to: a) Agree with the findings – recommend Benchmark Assessment Summary goes to public consultation b) Agree with the findings – no further public consultation is needed c) Disagree with the findings – Benchmark Assessment Summary goes to public consultation with notes on differences in interpretation
		*The scheme owner may decide to stop the benchmarking assessment at this time
4.4	Optional: public consultation	If as a result of the quality assurance check, or the review by the Benchmark Committee, it is determined that a public consultation is needed, Bonsucro publishes Benchmark Assessment Summary results online for four weeks for stakeholder input. Bonsucro collects and collates feedback.
4.5	Public feedback is reviewed.	Bonsucro sends feedback that is significant and substantiated to the scheme owner for review. The scheme owner reviews feedback received during the stakeholder review period and identifies where challenges need to be addressed by the scheme owner.
4.6	The scheme owner responds to feedback.	The scheme owner addresses/responds to challenges by providing additional detail, supporting documentation, other evidence, etc., in two weeks.
		*In situations where significant corrective actions are required, the scheme owner may suspend the benchmark until improvements are implemented. *In the event of disagreement on the assessed level of alignment, if Bonsucro is unable to resolve it, the issue will be raised with the Technical Advisory Board, and any decision on the results will be shared with the scheme owner.*

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15

Step 5: Recognition Benchmark Outcome Finalized		
The last formal step includes publishing final summary results and equivalency levels.		
Task		**Description**
5.1	Bonsucro finalises Benchmark Assessment Summary	Bonsucro (or the designated consultant) finalises the Equivalency Assessment Summary, integrating any changes from the public consultation. This is shared with the scheme owner for final sign-off.
5.2	The scheme is benchmarked with a degree of equivalency	Bonsucro signs off on final Benchmark Assessment results.
5.3	Benchmark Assessment Summary results published	Bonsucro announces and publishes the Summary Equivalency Assessment Benchmark Results, including how the results can be used and highlighting how producers and others operating within the benchmarked programme can review their performance against Bonsucro requirements.

The recognition assessment is valid for three years unless there are changes to the scheme owner or Bonsucro.

3.2   Monitoring for Continued Alignment

Schemes that have been recognised with full or partial equivalency must have a formal agreement with Bonsucro in place. The scheme owner must also confirm to Bonsucro every year if there are no changes or report any changes in their schemes that were in scope for the recognition assessment.

The scheme owner must inform the Bonsucro Secretariat in writing about any significant changes, updates to its scheme or plans for revision of their standard or systems that are in scope for the recognition assessment and could affect the scheme being considered equivalent. Bonsucro is also required to inform benchmarked schemes of changes in its own standards or systems.

Monitoring for Continued Alignment		
Task		**Description**
A.1	Notification of changes	The benchmarking result and equivalency status are valid for three years. If there are any major/substantial changes to the benchmarked scheme within this time period, the scheme owner agrees to notify Bonsucro within three months of the change(s) being made. Bonsucro will assess if a full re-benchmark is required. *Note: If the scheme owner does not notify Bonsucro of major/substantial changes, the scheme will lose its recognition status.*
A.2	Benchmark review and renewal	After three years, the scheme will be re-assessed for equivalency. A full re-benchmarking may be required if either the Bonsucro Production standard or the benchmarked schemes are revised or updated.

4   Communicating Benchmark Results

The results of the benchmark will be published on Bonsucro's Benchmarking page on the Bonsucro website. Bonsucro will maintain a list of recognised schemes with the Summary Equivalency Assessment results and the level of assurance as per the application, along with the scheme name, logo, website link and contact details.

The scheme owner can make reference to its scheme supporting Bonsucro's mission and vision and to the fact that Bonsucro has benchmarked its scheme, with the scope and level of assurance as per the approved assessment clearly described, in line with ISO/IEC 17000 Conformity Assessment and ISEAL "Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide" v1.0 May 2015.

No claims regarding Bonsucro, Bonsucro Certified or Equivalence to Bonsucro can be made by the scheme **on products** in any form.

Isolated claims related to the benchmark are not permitted and must be qualified with the scope, level of assurance and summary results.

However, benchmarked schemes are welcome to inform about the completion of the process by providing a link to the summary results along with the General Reference Statement, according to the template below:

"The *[name of the scheme]* has undergone a comprehensive Bonsucro Equivalency Benchmark on < date of sign-off> <<insert a link to a summary report on the Bonsucro site>>."

Statements/claims regarding the equivalency need to be neutral and approved by the Bonsucro Secretariat in advance of use or publication.

Any reference to the benchmark that is partial, or incomplete is NOT ALLOWED.

Use of misleading terms such as 'Equivalent' or 'Equivalence' to Bonsucro referenced to the certification process or certification is NOT ALLOWED.

For more information on benchmarking, please visit the Benchmarking page and send any questions to standards@bonsucro.com.

ANNEX

A. Rationale of Benchmarking

A1. Introduction

The Bonsucro purpose is:
*To **collectively** accelerate the sustainable production and use of sugarcane.*

Bonsucro's four core principles underpin how we work, specifically for our benchmarking:
- **Collaboration**: collaboration and partnerships with other schemes to add value to producers and supply chain actors
- **Inclusivity**: align and recognise sustainability efforts at different levels of the sustainability journey and geographies
- **Credibility**: using the ISEAL Codes of Practice to underpin system requirements and the ISEAL Benchmarking Good Practice Guide for robust and credible benchmark processes
- **Adaptability**: flexibility in the approach for different contexts and purposes

The last decade has seen a proliferation of multi-stakeholder, industry initiatives and legislation around sustainability. **There is no one-size-fits-all,** as the sustainability issues and challenges are complex and diverse across sectors and geographies. There is a legitimate need for different approaches. Companies, governments, and civil society want tools to assure sustainability performance, drive impact and recognise good practices. However, sustainability initiatives vary significantly in their quality, design, scope, and performance. Benchmarking enables stakeholders to navigate these differences, assessing and qualifying different tools. Additionally, as schemes find themselves overlapping in their sectors, supply chains or geographies, there is an increased need to consider working together, aligning requirements, and even recognising other schemes.

The Bonsucro Production Standard is the most globally recognised framework for sustainable sugarcane production. It is a comprehensive metric tool that enables farmers and millers to improve and certify their practices as sustainable, and offers buyers assurance when sourcing sugarcane and its derivatives. As a full ISEAL Code Compliant member, users of the Bonsucro tools know they are credible.

To facilitate the strategic aims of creating value across the supply chain, Bonsucro continually reviews opportunities for synergies to align and partner with other relevant sustainability standards and initiatives, both within sugarcane and beyond. The **Bonsucro Benchmarking Protocol** is one of the tools to facilitate collaboration and partnerships.

> **Benchmark defined[2]**
> - A benchmark (noun) is the reference point against which something is evaluated.
> - To benchmark (verb) is the act of determining (or judging) alignment with a fixed reference point.

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[2] As per ISEAL Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide v1.1

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18

This document explains the methodology to benchmark other sustainability initiatives against the Bonsucro Standards and Assurance. This protocol uses the ISEAL Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide v1.1 as a framework to ensure good practice in conducting benchmarking and ensure credible and consistent use of results. Benchmarking is the process of measuring the products, services, or processes of one organisation and comparing them against those of their peers or against an industry (or reference) standard.

☑ The **Bonsucro Production Standard** is *the benchmark*, serving as the **global reference framework** against which all other programmes and tools are assessed.

☑ **Recognition** is one possible result of benchmarking, conducted with the purpose to endorse or recognising another scheme as equivalent.

A2. Benchmarking Opportunities/Benefits

Benchmarking is explicitly referenced as part of the Bonsucro strategy,[3] and stakeholders see value, mainly in reducing costs, audit burden and complexity through cooperation and recognition.

The potential opportunities and benefits will depend on the nature of the collaboration and the results of any benchmarks. Stakeholders have identified a range of potential benefits:
- Scaling – expand reach, raise profile and reputation
- Efficiencies – reduce redundancies, complementary
- Improvement and innovation – identify innovation in other systems, gaps, and opportunities => enhancing competitiveness and staying ahead of industry trends and best practices
- Collaboration – exchange knowledge, collective action on tools and projects, avoid duplication
- Sharing benefits that can be achieved by working collaboratively between schemes that can be complementary. Cover some issues that laws and international agreements are asking for.

⇨ Adding value to producers and supply chain actors – scale offers greater market access/benefits, efficiencies in costs and time
⇨ Adding value to Bonsucro – strategic and competitive positioning, focus on value proposition, global recognition, increased impact

While benchmarking offers opportunities to scale sustainable production, recognition also carries significant risks – especially where less stringent schemes stand to benefit more from association with Bonsucro than vice versa.

The Bonsucro Strategic Plan considers two main filters when entering benchmarking for recognition or equivalencies:
- Benchmarking is relevant only as one element of a broader partnership
- Focus on other ISEAL Code Compliant members, where alignment of purpose and principles is more likely, and risks of credibility and competition can be minimised.

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[3] 7.1.5 Align with compatible standards & initiatives.

A benchmarking exercise can cover all or only certain aspects of a sustainability standard. This benchmarking protocol covers the Bonsucro Standard and system elements.

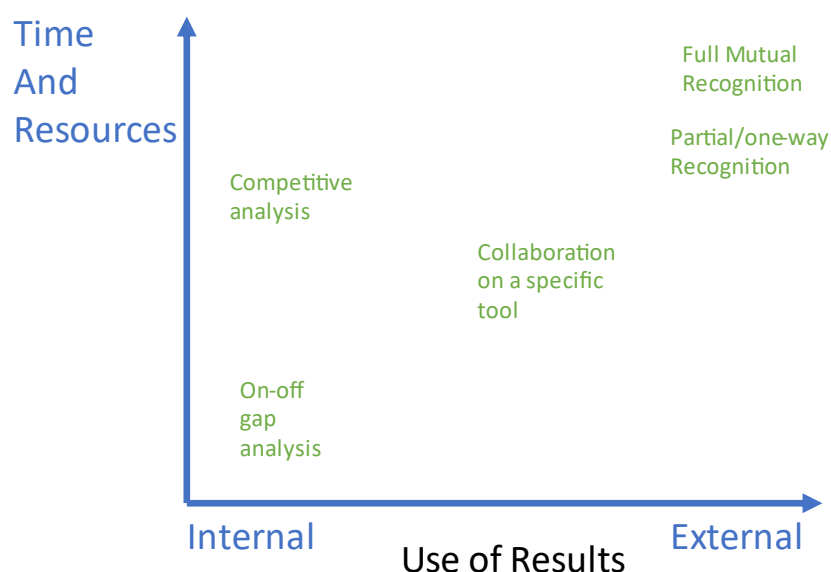## A3. Flexible Framework for Different Purposes

Much of the demand from external stakeholders for benchmarking is for **recognition** of other schemes for efficiencies and reducing audit fatigue.

- Producers or supply chain actors are being asked to comply with multiple sustainability programmes
- End users (or those making a claim) have a variety of schemes across sectors and geographies and supply chains to choose from or comply with

However, there are risks in recognising other schemes for Bonsucro because of differences in rigour, transparency, and effectiveness of different sustainability standard systems. It is not just a simple comparison of the standard content requirements. Equally important is the level of compliance required, of whom and by when. Equally important is understanding the credibility of the systems that developed the standard and supporting the implementation. This will ultimately determine its effectiveness and impact.

There are also many other uses for benchmarking, many of which can serve as a foundation for later recognition processes. A preliminary benchmark can help stakeholders understand the critical differences between schemes, risk factors and the time and resources required for credible benchmarking.

Bonsucro's updated Benchmarking Protocol allows for different purposes for benchmarking, using a stepwise methodology that will ensure the approach is expedient while delivering useful results to different users. Uses can range from a quick internal benchmarking exercise to identify high-level overlap and gaps for strategic conversations with potential partners to an external in-depth independent assessment of another scheme for recognition of equivalency.

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20

These uses of benchmarking results are not mutually exclusive. Often, the first step for building partnerships towards recognition is a quick internal scan to assess alignment and opportunities. A more detailed benchmark might then be done collaboratively as part of the process of "getting to know" the other scheme and building trust. This stepwise approach to building trust is a critical success factor for sustainable partnerships. This process may also reveal opportunities not considered at the outset of the benchmarking. For example, while the systems may be different in some aspects, there may be potential to align or even recognise specific aspects of another scheme, e.g., the GHG protocol. Limiting the scope could affect data collection through the Calculator and, ultimately, the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), so this should be considered when defining the scope.

A4. Dealing with Differences

The challenge of benchmarking different systems is the inherent differences between systems created by different stakeholders for different purposes. The Bonsucro Benchmarking Protocol is designed to be flexible to accommodate different approaches and models; however, it needs to be prescriptive enough to ensure relevance and credibility.

This is particularly important as Bonsucro is an outcome-based standard, while most of the other relevant initiatives operating in the sector are practice-based. Another factor to consider is the level of criticality, i.e., core versus non-core and the consequences for non-compliance.

There can be real risks in recognising other schemes when there are less stringent requirements regarding criticality or metric thresholds. The less the benchmarked system has in common with Bonsucro, the more restricted the results and claims will be at the end of the process. Some basic due diligence on the other scheme regarding shared goals, governance and transparency is required before doing a full recognition benchmark.

B. Reference Documents

Benchmarking Information Pack:
- Equivalency Application
- Benchmarking Protocol

Benchmarking Assessment Report:
To be completed by a consultant. The report will include:
- Summary of benchmark result
- Description of specific gaps from indicators that remain with no (or partial) alignment
- Evaluation of alignment and the model of assurance used

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21

C. Definitions

Assurance:	Demonstrable evidence that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person, or body are fulfilled (ISEAL Assurance Code as adapted from ISO 17000).
Bonsucro Production Standard:	The Bonsucro Production Standard is the standard developed and used to achieve Bonsucro Certification. It comprises principles, criteria and indicators which define metric requirements for sustainable sugarcane production.
Core indicators:	Within the Bonsucro Production Standard, these are critical/essential requirements that address the most important and foundational sustainability matters in the sugarcane sector.
Non-core indicators:	These represent indicators for which full compliance is not required for certification.
Producers:	Users of schemes, tools and/or standards designed to improve and validate the performance of sugarcane farmers and/or millers.
Publicly available:	Accessible online or on request.
Reporting Tool:	The mechanism used to capture data and/or information from a producer participating in an Improvement Scheme.
Stakeholder:	Individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organisation (from ISO 26000).

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22