

Food Alliance Grievance Policy and Procedure

Policy

Certification complaints and appeals, collectively referred to as “grievances”, may be presented to Food Alliance by certification applicants, certified entities, or other stakeholders (e.g. community members, adjoining landowners, retailers, consumers, environmental organizations, etc.). **Complaints** may relate to entities holding a certificate issued by Food Alliance, activities or decisions of Food Alliance, Food Alliance staff, members of the Board of Directors, or contracted auditors. **Appeals** are direct requests by certification applicants or certificate holders for reconsideration of an unfavorable certification decision.

With all grievances, Food Alliance strongly encourages the involved parties to attempt to address the grievance in an informal way. For example, a stakeholder who has a complaint about a certificate holder is encouraged to first contact the certificate holder and attempt to resolve the matter directly. Similarly, a certification applicant or certificate holder wanting to appeal a certification decision is encouraged to first contact Food Alliance for additional information on how and why the certification decision was made. If the grievance is not resolved informally, the complainant or appellant may submit a formal grievance, following the procedure outlined below. The Food Alliance procedure for processing and reviewing such formal grievances is also described below.

Food Alliance will confirm receipt of all grievances within 10 working days. Grievances received by Food Alliance, both informal and formal, will be documented in the Food Alliance grievance log. The log will include a description of the grievance, including names and contact information of those involved, dates and steps taken to investigate the grievance, and final decision. Food Alliance will attempt to resolve all grievances within 90 days of receipt.

Formal Grievance Procedure

Submitting a Formal Grievance

Formal grievances must be submitted to Food Alliance in writing, and must include the following information:

- Name and contact details – for both the person or entity submitting the grievance and the subject of the grievance
- Description of the grievance, including supporting evidence (e.g. copies of records, marketing materials, newspaper articles, photographs, etc.)
- Description of steps taken to address the issue in an informal manner
- Expected outcomes

Written grievances may be submitted to Food Alliance via postal mail or email:
Food Alliance, P.O. Box 86457, Portland, OR 97286, info@foodalliance.org.

Food Alliance Review Process

A. Preliminary Review

Upon receipt of a formal grievance, the Food Alliance Executive Director or designated member of the Board of Directors will perform a preliminary assessment of the validity of the grievance. The preliminary assessment will strongly consider the amount, source, and nature of the supporting evidence submitted with the grievance. If the grievance is found to be invalid or lacks supporting evidence, Food Alliance will document this decision in a reply to the person or entity submitting the grievance, and a more formal

review will not ensue. The complainant or appellant will be given 10 working days to send additional evidence to support their claim. The validity of the grievance will be re-assessed considering any additional evidence which is submitted.

If the preliminary assessment indicates the grievance is valid, a review committee will be designated, per the following guidelines.

B. Designation of Grievance Review Committee

Food Alliance Executive Director or assigned staff member will designate a review committee of at least three people. A member of the review committee will contact the person or entity submitting the formal grievance, and describe the course of action and timeline for investigation.

The review committee may consist of a combination of Food Alliance staff members, Board members, or contract auditors. Members of the review committee must be impartial and not directly involved in activities related to the grievance. If the grievance is an appeal against a certification decision, neither the initial auditor nor certification decision maker(s) may be on the designated grievance review committee. However, they may be interviewed by the review committee as part of the appeal investigation process.

C. Methods of Investigation

Investigation of grievances will be made confidentially and will be based only on documented evidence. Costs related to the investigation of formal complaints, in which a grievance review committee has been designated, will be covered by Food Alliance.

Complaint Investigation Methods: The review committee may use a variety of methods to investigate the complaint, including (but not limited to) interviews and/or request for documentation from the complainant or subject of the complaint, request for information or testimony from additional stakeholders, or on-site investigation.

Appeal Investigation Methods: The review committee will review all audit and certification paperwork, and will schedule an interview with the applicant or certificate holder filing the appeal. The review committee may also interview or request additional information from the auditor and/or certification decision maker(s) involved in the certification decision being appealed. Costs related to the investigation of formal appeals, in which a review committee has been designated, will be covered by Food Alliance.

D. Resolution

Complaints: The review committee will attempt to resolve all complaints in a manner which is fair, consistent with prior complaint resolutions, and in accordance with certification policies and procedures (when the complaint is against a certification applicant or certificate holder). Methods and findings of the review committee's investigation and final determination will be shared with both the complainant and subject of the complaint.

Appeals: If the review committee determines the audit or certification decision was biased or inaccurate, re-evaluation of the appellant's operation will be performed at Food Alliance's expense (utilizing an auditor or certification decision maker who was not involved in the initial evaluation or decision). If the review committee determines the original certification decision will be upheld, re-evaluation will be made only at the appellant's request, and the appellant will be responsible for all costs associated with the re-evaluation.