

## Participant questions and the relevant responses

### EvfalforEarth Webinar May 2025: Learning from what matters: Monitoring and evaluation for resilience and sustainability in the tropical fruit sector

#### 1. What dimensions are being considered when evaluating sustainability, and how is it evaluated in practice?

A1: From FAO's position, it is important that all three dimensions of sustainability – namely economic, environmental and social – are considered. Without taking a holistic approach, actions to address sustainability challenges are unlikely to succeed in the long term.

FAO's guide "[Monitoring, evaluation and learning – Generating evidence on resilience and sustainability in the tropical fruit sector](#)" (the MEL guide) does not prescribe specific methods for evaluating or measuring each dimension of sustainability, as evaluation practices vary depending on the information needs and reporting requirements of producers, associations, and businesses. For example, many export-oriented businesses rely on indicators, methodologies, and tools provided by the certification schemes they adhere to, or they align with the expectations of customers and retailers.

Instead, the MEL guide offers information and resources to help users identify appropriate methods, tools, indicators, and analytical practices to generate evidence for tracking and assessing progress toward sustainability- and resilience-sensitive interventions. For instance, to evaluate environmental performance in the production, packing, and transport of tropical fruits, the MEL guide highlights the use of carbon and water footprint tools to assess greenhouse gas emissions and impacts on water use and quality. For the social dimension, evaluation methods might include focus group discussions and stakeholder consultations to gather insights on how business activities support livelihoods and promote well-being.

#### 2. As MEL practitioners often face challenges in adapting general frameworks to sector-specific contexts, it's encouraging to see a tailored approach for the tropical fruit value chain. Could you elaborate on how the guide addresses capacity constraints among smallholder producers and local businesses, especially in low-resource settings, to implement and sustain effective MEL systems? Additionally, does the guide provide examples or case studies of how MEL insights have led to tangible improvements in sustainability or resilience within fruit value chains?

The MEL guide acknowledges the limited practical support available for smallholder producers and local businesses in the tropical fruit sector to implement effective systems. To address this, the guide provides a structured starting point tailored to low-resource settings. It helps stakeholders define sustainability and resilience goals, track and assess progress, evaluate successes and setbacks, and make informed decisions to improve operations. By focusing on practical, goal-oriented guidance, the MEL guide empowers actors with limited capacity to build and sustain MEL systems.

FAO has also published complimentary training material that can be used by companies or producer association to train staff and producers on how to develop and implement MEL systems for their operations and building on existing processes (e.g. certification compliance). The training materials are *Monitoring, evaluation and learning in the tropical fruit sector to generate evidence for sustainability and resilience – An introductory guide for trainers* for download at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd3325en>. These materials were designed to be used independently by an experienced trainer or in a learning environment. FAO is also using these materials in its own capacity development activities.

The MEL guide does not include full case studies but offers illustrative examples showing how specific MEL practices can support sustainability and resilience in tropical fruit value chains. For example, it explains how choosing appropriate tools—such as interviews, stakeholder consultations, carbon and water footprint assessments, or geospatial data—can help businesses evaluate whether their actions align with intended goals and deliver expected outcomes. These examples aim to demonstrate how evidence-based decision-making can strengthen long-term sustainability and resilience performance.

### **3. How are the monitoring and evaluation frameworks adapted to account for both short-term shocks and long-term stressors?**

The MEL guide illustrates how producers and businesses can design their own resilience and sustainability strategies by considering both short- and long-term goals, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of their operational context—including the shocks and stressors that may arise over different timeframes. With this contextual insight, they can prioritize the risks they aim to address, select appropriate activities, and determine the timing of their implementation. These activities can be layered and sequenced to effectively respond to evolving challenges.

In addition, FAO has published sector-specific guides on Responsible Business Conduct that offer further support in identifying key risks, including shocks and stressors, that affect tropical fruit operations. They also provide a user-friendly tool to help with risk prioritization. Both the risk identification and prioritization processes are aligned with international corporate responsibility frameworks, ensuring that the strategies developed are consistent with globally recognized standards.

- *Responsible business conduct in the pineapple industry: a guide for producers and exporters:* <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1292en>
- *Responsible business conduct in the avocado industry: a guide for producers and exporters:* <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0963en>

### **4. What makes this approach specific to the tropical fruit sector?**

The MEL guide is closely aligned with a collection of publications and practical tools developed by FAO's Responsible Fruits Project that are all tailored to the avocado and pineapple industries. These directly support tropical fruit businesses in the design of their own resilience and sustainability strategies.

The MEL guide and others including the Responsible Business Conduct guides, offer further support in identifying the key environmental, social, economic and cross-cutting risks facing tropical fruit operations. This includes a user-friendly tool to help with risk prioritization.

Throughout the MEL guide, examples of the different steps to develop MEL systems are customized to the tropical fruit sector based on the experienced shared by companies operating in these value chains. It is this contextualization that the project team has found critical to the uptake and understanding of users.

### **5. How do they see the development of tropical fruits in new areas like Italy?**

While FAO monitors development of trade in tropical fruits, including the European Union (see <https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/commodities-overview/bananas-tropical-fruits/tropical-fruits/en> for more information) the Responsible Fruits Project focused on producers and exporters in developing countries. At the moment, production of tropical fruit in Italy is quite small compared to these producers. It is important to note that over time climatic changes will influence areas where tropical fruit production is possible and sustainable.

## 6. Whose sustainability are prioritized and silenced?

The Responsible Fruits Project worked in a highly participatory manner with upstream value chain stakeholders to identify and prioritize sustainability challenges. The stakeholders also reviewed and validated guidance and technical support designed to address these challenges, insuring relevance and ownership. The participants in the Project included producer organizations that represented thousands of small- and medium-scale growers from each of the largest exporting countries and several upcoming exporting countries.

## 7. What are the strategies to successfully implement recommendations from M&E Results to ensure sustainability of our investments?

- a) **Align MEL recommendations with the business short and long-term goals:** this means ensuring that all the information generated and findings are directly linked to the organization's overarching sustainability objectives. The indicators are key for data, as they will facilitate the tracking of progress and the identification of areas needing improvement.
- b) **Foster stakeholder engagement (senior management, employees, communities, etc.) from the design of the strategy to the evaluation of it:** this participatory approach promotes transparency, accountability, and shared ownership of the resilience and sustainability initiatives.
- c) **Invest in capacity development and allocate budget to MEL activities:** developing internal capacities for MEL activities ensures that the organization can effectively collect, analyze, and utilize data to inform decision-making and adapt to evolving circumstances.
- d) **Utilize data for continuous learning and improvement:** regularly analyze outcomes to identify best practices, lessons learned and areas that may need improvement. This iterative process can help producers and businesses to refine their strategies and contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of investments.

## 8. How would this be incorporated into cereal crops like rice, wheat, etc.?

Although the guide was designed for use in tropical fruit value chains, the MEL practices suggested can be extended to other commodities. Companies in other commodity sectors can design their own sustainability and resilience strategies, define their indicators, select tools, analyse data and report on the progress and results following the steps outlined in the guide. Uptake would be greatly enhanced by revising the contextualization of the MEL guide from tropical fruit to the targeted crop.

### **Additional resources**

FAO's work on responsible tropical fruits, including the Responsible Fruits Project:

<https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/responsible-fruits/en>

*Monitoring, evaluation and learning – Generating evidence on resilience and sustainability in the tropical fruit sector.* <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd3810en>

*Monitoring, evaluation and learning in the tropical fruit sector to generate evidence for sustainability and resilience – An introductory guide for trainers.* <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd3325en>

*OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains.* <https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/areas-of-work/emerging-trends-challenges-and-opportunities/oecd-guidance/en>

Responsible business conduct (RBC) and due diligence in tropical fruit value chains:

<https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/responsible-fruits/rbc/en>

Measuring carbon and water footprints in banana value chains: [https://www.fao.org/world-banana-](https://www.fao.org/world-banana-forum/projects/carbon-and-water-footprint-cwf-initiative/en/)

[forum/projects/carbon-and-water-footprint-cwf-initiative/en/](https://www.fao.org/world-banana-forum/projects/carbon-and-water-footprint-cwf-initiative/en/)

Climate action for tropical fruit value chains: [https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/responsible-](https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/responsible-fruits/climate-action/en)

[fruits/climate-action/en](https://www.fao.org/markets-and-trade/responsible-fruits/climate-action/en)

The World Banana Forum (WBF): <https://www.fao.org/world-banana-forum/en/>