

FSC® PROMOTIONAL LICENSING VS. CHAIN OF CUSTODY CERTIFICATION FOR BRANDS & RETAILERS



Occasionally, integrated manufacturers, brands, and retailers will find themselves with the option of either becoming FSC Chain of Custody certified or obtaining an FSC Promotional License. The table below provides a baseline of comparative information to aid in the decide between these two pathways.

	Chain of Custody Certification	Promotional License
Who is eligible?	Companies that want to place the FSC label on products they manufacture, pass along the FSC product claims, and promote off-product (website, social media, reports, etc.).	Intended for brands and retailers who sell finished products to end users and want to promote using FSC trademarks off-product (website, social media, reports, etc.).
Which products can be promoted?	All FSC-certified products can be promoted, regardless of if they carry the FSC label or not.	Products must be purchased directly from an FSC-certified company and must carry the FSC label to be promoted as FSC-certified (off-product promotion).
Whose FSC License Code can be on the product?	Certified companies can enter into labeling agreements to apply the FSC label with the FSC license number of a different certificate holder in the supply chain on the product, which is approved by both Certification Bodies - this allows brands a way to keep their suppliers anonymous, if desired.	Labeling agreements are not permitted for Promotional License Holders; products must carry the license number of an FSC Certificate Holder. Promotional License Holders only receive a promotional license number to be used in off-product promotion, which is not allowed to be used on-product.

	Chain of Custody Certification	Promotional License
Length/Fees	5-year certification with annual audits and fees (certification can be terminated at any time by the certified company, and certified company can choose to change their Certifying Body at any time).	5-year agreement with annual fee (agreement can be terminated or amended at any time by license holder).
What is the fee?	Fees depend on certifying body engaged, size and complexity of company's operations, and other factors. Contact a few Certification Bodies for price quotes.	In most cases, Promotional Licensing is simpler and less expensive, but not in every case. Contact FSC for a price quote – annual fees are determined by national vs. international scope and company annual revenue.
Trademark Approvals	All trademark use must be submitted to the Certificate Holder's Certification Body (CB) for review and approval. CBs can grant blanket approvals. Each CB has their own system/mechanism, so check with each CB on their specific FSC trademark approval procedure.	Products intended to be promoted must carry the FSC label and be submitted with proper verification documentation (either a supplier letter of a copy of the invoice). All trademark usages must be submitted to FSC for approval.

Other considerations

- CoC certification is typically a longer, more intensive process, but it can also provide more operational/strategic flexibility.
- Brands that sell to retailers must be FSC-certified for any retailer to use an FSC Promotional License to promote their products as FSC certified using FSC's trademarked assets. FSC trademarks: a) the FSC "checkmark and tree" logo, b) the initials "FSC", and c) the name "Forest Stewardship Council".
- CoC Certification can be a preferable option for brands who want to streamline their labeling for one product that is manufactured by multiple suppliers.