



# American Hardwood Assured

Legal & deforestation-free proof of provenance

## An overview of the American Hardwood Assured (AHA) Legal and Deforestation-free platform

*Initiated by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), AHA provides U.S. based companies exporting U.S. hardwood products with a straightforward procedure to quickly prepare standardised AHA statements for their export consignments.*

American Hardwood Assured (AHA) addresses the technical challenges of verifying the legal and deforestation-free status of hardwood sourced from numerous small, privately owned U.S. forests. AHA offers an intuitive online platform, freely accessible to all U.S. hardwood exporters, which draws together data from advanced forest monitoring and jurisdictional risk assessment to facilitate compliance with the EU Deforestation Regulation and other laws and procurement policies demanding legal and deforestation-free products.

The AHA platform will support U.S. hardwood exporters by providing required documentation, including geolocation data, to demonstrate legal and deforestation-free origin. Key components include:

**County-level quantitative assessments**, updated annually, measuring the risk of forest conversion to agriculture land for deciduous and mixed deciduous/coniferous forests;

**Independent third-party assessments** of illegal logging risk in hardwood-producing states;

**An online portal** offering free access to risk data for U.S. hardwood mills and other operators engaged in the U.S. hardwood trade.

AHA's legality assurance gives U.S. forest owners and exporters confidence in meeting global market requirements. One of the most comprehensive series of assessments of the risk of illegal harvesting ever undertaken, so far it has confirmed negligible risk of illegal harvesting across 33 states, covering over 97% of U.S. commercial hardwood production. A further four states, bringing the total to 37 states accounting for more than 99% of hardwood harvesting, will be completed during August 2025.



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Each AHA statement, which is uniquely associated with an individual export consignment, includes all the data needed to confirm negligible risk of illegal harvesting and deforestation at the original source of the U.S. hardwood. The [aha.hardwood.us](https://aha.hardwood.us) website launches on July 31.

The platform is being made available free of charge to U.S. based businesses in the hardwood export supply chain. Access requires a valid EIN federal tax ID.

Visit [aha.hardwood.us](https://aha.hardwood.us) platform to join American Hardwood Assured.

## Meet the team of experts behind the AHA

### Rupert Oliver - Global Strategy Director

Rupert Oliver, an internationally recognized authority on global forest market trends, environmental issues, policies and sustainable hardwood management, brings over 30 years of experience advising government agencies and business associations. As Environmental Policy Director at AHEC, he has led the development and strategic positioning of the AHA platform, guiding its alignment with international regulations and overseeing expert input on legality and deforestation risk assessment.

### George White - Programme Development Consultant

George White is a consultant, advisor, and author with 35 years of experience in the global forest industry. He has worked with leading organizations such as WWF, FLEGT IMM, and the Global Timber Forum. Before contributing to the development of the AHA platform, he authored key reports on FLEGT trade impacts and led WWF's Global Forest & Trade Network, supporting responsible forest management worldwide. He also served as director of the Global Timber Forum, helping to build capacity in forest and timber trade associations globally.

### Ben Gunneberg - International Sustainability Advisor

Ben Gunneberg is an international sustainability advisor with extensive experience across global companies, NGOs, and trade associations. Former CEO of PEFC for over 20 years, he built it into a global certification body active in 55+ countries. He is currently Chair of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard and Trustee of the Institute of Chartered Foresters. At AHA, Ben advises on sustainable procurement, ESG, regulatory compliance (including EUDR and CSRD), climate strategies, and governance, bringing deep expertise in environmental policy and risk management.







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## David Venables - European Director of AHEC

David Venables has a specialist wood background, with a BSc in Timber Technology and more than thirty years experience in the international marketing of hardwood. In his time as European Director for the American Hardwood Export Council, David has transformed it into one of the most dynamic and influential wood promotion bodies globally. He has also spearheaded the American hardwood industry's unique and innovative global environmental strategy, including the AHA, as well as led pioneering efforts in the use of structural hardwoods.

## BWA Design

The AHA website and platform and the suite of AI and other data analysis tools underpinning the regular AHA deforestation analysis have been developed by BWA Design, a multi-disciplinary agency dedicated to inspiring positive change through design. With over 25 years of experience, BWA Design specialises in creating impactful communications and design solutions for clients in the social, environmental, and heritage sectors. They aim to help clients communicate complex issues and drive action and emphasize sustainability, ethical practices, and community support in their work.

## Dovetail Partners

The AHA state legality risk assessments were prepared by Dovetail Partners, a 501(c)(3) organization providing authoritative information about the impacts and trade-offs of environmental management, including consumption choices, land use decisions, and policy alternatives. Dovetail is a collaborative organization that fosters sustainability and responsible behaviors through development of unique concepts, systems, models, and programs. To accomplish the goals of the AHA project, Dovetail Partners drew on more than twenty years of organizational experience with responsible sourcing standards, environmental assessments, and associated expert review and consultation processes.

## AHEC's role in the AHA

AHA was initiated by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), the leading international trade association of the American hardwood industry. All AHEC programs are run through the joint efforts of the U.S. hardwood industry and the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).



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In supporting AHA, AHEC's objective is to ensure U.S. hardwoods are universally recognised as legally harvested, deforestation-free, and climate positive in international markets. AHEC believes there is an opportunity to develop robust jurisdictional risk-based forms of sustainability verification for hardwoods sourced from non-industrial forest owners.

While AHEC has initiated AHA, other interests from amongst the wider potential stakeholder group are expected to support the program and aid its transition to an independent body with its own income streams.

For more information on the platform, contact us at: [info@hardwood.us](mailto:info@hardwood.us)