The Mill Capability Matrix

Here's a template you can use immediately. The matrix includes one sample row to show how a completed evaluation looks in practice.

Criterion	Mill A (Example)	Mill B	Mill C
GSM Range	80-200 GSM		
GSM Tolerance	±3%		
GSM Test Method	ISO 536		
BST Test Method	ISO 2758		
BST Value (kPa)	250-280		
BF (if reported)	32-38		
Moisture Test Method	TAPPI T 412		
Moisture Target	7%		
Moisture Range	±0.5%		
FSC Certified?	Yes		
FSC Cert #	SGS-COC-123456		
FSC Expiry	Dec-25		
FSC Verified?	✓ (checked Jan 2025)		

ISO 9001?	Yes		
ISO Cert #	ISO9001-2024-XYZ		
ISO Expiry	Mar-26		
Lead Time	45-60 days		
MOQ (MT)	20 MT		
Trial Notes	Low curl, good adhesion		

How to Use This Matrix:

Start by sending the blank template to shortlisted mills as part of your RFQ package. Request that suppliers complete it directly, providing certificate numbers and supporting documentation. This approach shifts the verification burden upstream — mills that can't produce valid certificates self-select out of your process.

Normalize test methods first. If methods differ across suppliers, ask one party to retest using the other's method or run your own trials before drawing final conclusions. Pair specifications with evidence by logging the COA date, lot number, lab name, and conditioning conditions alongside each entry.

For mills that submit completed matrices, perform the verification steps in this sequence: First, confirm FSC and ISO certificates against official databases. Second, request tolerance specifications in writing, particularly for GSM and moisture control. Third, ask for recent test reports (ideally from the past 90 days) that demonstrate their stated burst strength performance.

The matrix becomes most valuable during cross-functional review meetings. When procurement, quality assurance, and operations teams can review suppliers side-by-side using identical criteria, conversations shift from subjective preferences to objective comparisons.

Track trial outcomes by adding notes on curl behavior, print quality, bond strength, and waste rate from your line runs. That real-world performance data becomes the ultimate truth.