

EXPERT COMMENTARY

During the last decade, soy production has increased significantly from 210 million tons in 2008/09 to 337 million in 2018/19. Soy is a source of protein for humans and is used in livestock feed and food products. However, it is often not a visible component of the final product neither is it directly used in the manufacturing process as its by-products such as meal, oil and lecithin are.

Along with this fact, awareness of environmental and social impacts increased, as soy is understood to be one of the drivers of deforestation and habitat conversion, as well as a jeopardizer of labour and social rights. As a result of this combination of factors, many players in the soy sector became active in developing strategies and initiatives to ensure that soy used in their supply chains is obtained in a sustainable way.

Sound environmental practices, legal compliance, good business and agricultural practices, responsible labour conditions and community relations are all critical elements associated to commodities production, trade and use, and all should be equally considered if we intend to have sustainable supply chains. Among other initiatives, RTRS certification was envisioned and developed as an enabler to achieve such a comprehensive and central goal.

As players in the supply chain adapt to the requirements for the achievement of this goal, certification standards, at the same time, may play a role in regions that have economic dependencies on nature. For many developing countries, the transition towards sustainability could be strategic and could position them favourably against global standards for sustainable food systems and responsible agriculture and business practices. Additionally, transitioning to sustainable economies will impact countries that rely on land-based natural capital (agriculture and soft commodity trade) for their economy, and certification standards may accompany this transition. Moreover, local and regional governments may play a vital role in creating comprehensive frameworks, including the integration of sustainability standards, such as RTRS', into recommendations and strategies to link supply and demand, to drive and leverage the transformation of soy supply chains (commodities in general) and make them sustainable.

However, if we intend to achieve transformative impacts and to scale up, this cannot occur in isolation. The role of governments, regulations and policies, their close collaboration with existing multilateral organizations, multi-stakeholder structures, regional and national initiatives, the private sector and certification standards, are the key to transforming practices and economies and making them sustainable.

Standardized sustainable agricultural and business practices may provide a tangible contribution to solving sustainability issues by improving and guaranteeing production methods at the farm level and further, enabling all stakeholders in the supply chain to take joint responsibility and be the drivers of the desired transformation.

Our mission at the Round Table on Responsible Soy Association (RTRS) is to promote growth of production, trade, and use of responsible soy through cooperation with players in and relevant to the soy value chain, from production to consumption in an open multi-stakeholder dialogue including producers, suppliers, manufacturers, retailers, financial institutions, civil society organizations and others. RTRS understands that certification is, though not the silver bullet, a valuable and holistic (economic, social and environmental) instrument to promote sustainable agricultural practices on the ground and further, in a transparent manner, preserving them along the entire supply chain.



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Since 2006, RTRS sets the Standard for Responsible Soy Production and Chain of Custody. Particularly the RTRS Standard for Responsible Soy Production scheme is a truly holistic third party-verified approach that ensures that RTRS soy not only meets the highest environmental criteria, but also a wide-reaching set of social and labour requirements. The RTRS certification standard guarantees zero deforestation and zero conversion explicitly stated in its criteria (meaning no conversion of natural land, steep slopes and areas designated by law to serve the purpose of native conservation and/or cultural and social protection is allowed), responsible business and agricultural practices, preserving biodiversity, soil and water, and protecting human and workers' rights, all while respecting the customs and cultures of indigenous peoples and improving the well-being of local communities.

Many were the benefits of the global implementation of RTRS standards and their related impacts during 2021:

- 1,193,400 of soy hectares representing 4,268,000 tons of soy RTRS certified
- 4,974,000 tons of RTRS certified material uptake, representing an increase of 5% vs 2020 (both, via RTRS Credits supporting responsible soy production and Physical soy-Mass Balance), from 25 countries
- 385,000 tons of physical soy-Mass Balance were allocated to the biofuel market
- 300,700 RTRS Credits supporting responsible soy production were allocated to the aquaculture market
- 63 new buyers of RTRS certified material via RTRS Credits supporting responsible soy production and Physical soy-Mass Balance from 20 countries globally
- To date, there are 162 sites and 26 ports RTRS Chain of Custody certified to receive, process and trade RTRS-certified physical soy

RTRS believes that to further leverage RTRS Standards for sustainable outcomes, ongoing work must be enhanced. For this to happen, and to enable a wide adoption and implementation of the RTRS certification standards, a comprehensive approach should be deployed: (i) synergies and collaboration to leverage existing tools; (ii) incentives and instruments to encourage sustainable production and business practices; and (iii) wider policies and regulations to enable and drive transformation at scale.

Moreover, such an approach is also central to the global soy sector agenda for the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, the RTRS Standard for Responsible Soy Production contributes to many of the SDGs (2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16), as several certification criteria and indicators are in line with the associated targets. As one of the enablers to achieve current and future sustainability goals, RTRS encourages joint work with multilateral organizations, governments and the private sector to catalyze actions and collaboration with other associations and current initiatives, using existing and proven tools to drive forward the changes we all strive for.

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