

EXPERT COMMENTARY

Rainforest Alliance – Sustainability Standards as Part of a Smart Mix Towards Sustainable Development.

For over 30 years, the Rainforest Alliance has been working to make agriculture and forestry more sustainable through crop certification and landscape management. Today, more than two million farmers follow the Rainforest Alliance agricultural standards in more than 70 countries around the world.

Voluntary sustainability standards are a powerful, proven tool for advancing best practices for land use, farm management, and the stewardship of natural resources. The Rainforest Alliance alongside other sustainability standards has played an important role in connecting market demand to sustainable practices. Helping to create incentives for farmers to invest in sustainable practices, ensuring those products produced sustainably are recognized and differentiated in the market and work towards a system where the responsibility for sustainable production is more equitably shared throughout the supply chain.

Certification has had a huge impact in bringing sustainability to the forefront of business thinking, but it must continue to evolve to provide more value to farmers and companies and ensure that people and nature can thrive in harmony.

Reimagining Certification

In June 2020 we launched our new Sustainable Agricultural Standard. This new standard is rooted in several key principles that we believe are critical to supporting producers, supply chain actors and governments in achieving sustainable development.

Continuous improvement - in order to ensure changes to ways to produce are lasting, enable investments to be targeted and regulation is implemented when needed we must recognize that sustainability is a journey, not an end in itself. Accordingly, we are moving beyond the classic pass/fail model and adopting an approach that incentivizes continuous improvement.

The power of data - our new certification program embraces the power of data—meaning better analysis of risks and measurement of performance, new digital tools for farmers, clearer performance insights for companies, and more. This digital shift to a more data-driven approach, in turn, supports our new risk-based assurance model as geospatial technologies, among others, will help certificate holders, auditors and companies make better-informed decisions.

Contextualization - we also want to provide a program that is context adaptable, reflecting the vastly different on-the-ground realities between different types of farms and supply chain actors, and the countries and production sectors we work in. Shared responsibility - finally, our new certification program promotes a greater sense of shared responsibility across the entire supply chain and encourages companies to invest in and reward more sustainable production through different mechanisms.

We believe that through these developments our certification will continue to bring together incentives to implement more sustainable practices and enable actors to continue to contribute to the sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda.



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However, that is not the full story. We know that in order to drive deeper sustainability transformation, many issues that are covered in our sustainability standard need more than just a market incentive. Problems such as child labour, deforestation and harmful pesticide use do not occur because farmers do not care about people or the environment, they happen because the root causes that drive these issues are systemic in nature. In addition, due to power imbalances in the supply chain, it is not farmers who determine the price for their crops, and thus their ability to invest in more sustainable practices is limited. Systemic issues require the involvement of multiple stakeholders and larger investments than individual farmers can make.

Therefore, through our advocacy with key companies and public sector policymakers, we aim to promote the development and adoption of better policies, bringing us to our goal of making responsible business the new normal. We believe that regulation is an important step to achieve more sustainable supply chains, and therefore we advocate for the development, adoption, and implementation of legislation that can bring positive impacts for the people and the planet, both in producing and consuming countries. This translates into our support for human rights due to diligence legislation and non-deforestation commitments, for example.

Finally, as the Rainforest Alliance, we aim to help consumers make better choices, inspiring them to do as much as they can and join the Alliance. One way we do this is through the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal, which helps identify items on the supermarket shelf that come from more responsible sources. We firmly believe that the road to a more sustainable future depends on our ability - as individuals, as organizations, as governments - to partner up with others who have similar objectives in order to maximize our impact, and ultimately create a better future for people and nature.

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