PROFILES IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE Daterra, Brazil's First Rainforest Alliance Certified Coffee Farm

Biologists have found rare macaws, owls, jaguar tracks and a giant anteater in the protected areas of Daterra, a Rainforest Alliance Certified farm in southeastern Brazil known as much for its superior beans as its commitment to conservation. The famous *fazenda*, in Minas Gerais — an enormous, flat, plateau in an area known as the *cerrado* — is owned by philanthropist and coffee expert Luis Norberto Pascoal, who in 1986 added coffee to the family agribusiness that was established in 1974. While Daterra has always been guided by a strict environmental ethos, today Pascoal is widely regarded for his innovative research, sustainable farm management and application of agricultural technology.

Sustainable Farming

In March, 2003 the extensive Daterra farm — which is in fact made up of a number of small farms divided by coffee variety — became the first farm in Brazil to be certified by the Rainforest Alliance and its nonprofit partner group, the Forestry and Agriculture Management and Certification Institute (IMAFLORA) for meeting the rigorous standards of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN). The network is a coalition of eight leading conservation organizations that in collaboration with scientists, NGOs and government representatives have established comprehensive guidelines for sustainable agriculture. SAN partners are in an ideal position to manage certification programs as they are familiar with local culture, politics, language and ecology. SAN standards cover a full range of issues including: smart farming practices that conserve forest, water, soils, wildlife and other natural resources; collaborative community relations; fair treatment and good living and working conditions for workers; and recordkeeping and monitoring to ensure continual progress in all areas. The standards are



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concrete, measurable, practical and applicable to farms of all sizes, from large estates to cooperatives to small, family gardens. Farms that meet the group's requirements are awarded a seal-of-approval, which provides leverage at the time of sale, as more and more buyers want coffee from responsibly managed farms.



Daterra At-a-Glance

Established: 1974

Acres Certified: 7, 425 acres (3,005 hectares)
Crops Cultivated: Coffee and avocados

Local Wildlife: Jaguars, giant anteaters, macaws and owls



In addition to Rainforest Alliance certification, Daterra was the first agribusiness to be granted an ISO 14001 certification for environmental management and has since received EurepGAP and UTZ Kapeh certifications and one farm is now certified organic.

Cerrado Cultivation

While most Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee grows beneath overarching shade trees, Daterra is located in an area where the natural vegetation is grass, shrubs and low trees. Because the ecosystem does not lend itself to shade coffee, the beans here are grown in sun and planted in tight rows. The high altitude, stable temperature and defined rainy season of the farms create the perfect conditions for sustainable Arabica coffee farming. According to studies conducted by IMAFLORA ecologists, it would be inappropriate to plant shade trees in this region; instead the certification should promote conservation of the natural ecosystem called *cerrado*. "Because of the questions about appropriate forest cover and other social and environmental issues on a farm this size and in this area, it took us six years to certify Daterra," notes Laura de Santis Prada, sustainable agriculture program manager for IMAFLORA. "The seal of approval is recognition of Daterra's efforts over the years."



Daterra is known for its outstanding social and educational programs.

The *cerrado* is Brazil's second largest ecosystem after the Amazon rainforest and is also threatened with imminent destruction. Like the Amazon, it is a biodiversity "hotspot" that boasts an astonishing array of species, many found nowhere else on Earth. Only 1.5 percent of the *cerrado* is protected, which means that its survival depends on private conservation efforts like Daterra's. "The *fazenda* is 6,000 hectares in total," says general manager Leopoldo Santana, "and 3,000 of that is natural area preserved and protected."





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According to Daterra's owner, Rainforest Alliance certification has not only resulted in improved environmental protection, but re-energized and engaged the people living in or near the *cerrado*. "The Rainforest Alliance has helped people to understand the need to conserve every detail of the natural habitat of the *cerrado* region," says Pascoal.

To complement its conservation efforts, Daterra supports the use of the farm for environmental restoration and education in collaboration with a local college. Research is conducted with partners including the Instituto Agronomico de Campinas and Sao Paulo University's School of Agronomics. While Pascoal notes that Daterra's work with the University of Sao Paulo helped to prepare the farms for ISO 14001 certification, the Rainforest Alliance helped them to integrate a comprehensive approach to sustainability.

As an article in *Coffee & Cocoa International* notes, "The entire Daterra operation spares no expense in its devotion to achieving the optimum in plantation care: nursery selection, cultivation, organic composting, irrigation to reduce tree stress and promote growth and the use of other trees as wind breaks to shield the coffee before hand picking." Daterra's next step is to spread the philosophy behind sustainability and the value of Rainforest Alliance certification to neighbors and cooperatives in the surrounding areas. "We have welcomed farmers from many regions of Brazil and explained the importance of environmental protection of wildlife and water," explains Pascoal, "It's our mission."

Photos: R de Vicq

For more information about the Rainforest Alliance's sustainable agriculture program, please visit www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/agriculture





