Thirty-six samples of Rainforest Alliance Certified coffees were cupped at the event. The samples originated from eight different countries, with Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Hawaii submitting entries for the first time. Of the eight different countries of origin entered into the running, 11 samples were from Brazil, 10 from Peru, six from Indonesia, four from Kenya, two from Hawaii and one each from Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The panel included twelve experienced cuppers representing coffee roasters, retailers and trading companies who evaluated the samples following the SCAA Cupping Protocol, scoring each coffee on its fragrance/aroma, flavor, aftertaste, acidity, body, uniformity, balance, cleanliness, sweetness and overall impression. At the start of each flight, the cuppers knew only the origin of the coffee; the farm names were not revealed until after the final scores were submitted.

Kigutha Coffee Estate in Kenya (see profile) received the highest score at 86.54, Tunki coffee farm in Peru took second place with 86.00 and Machare Estate in Tanzania received the third-highest score at 85.71. Coffees from Peru performed especially well, with three of the top 10 samples hailing from that country.
of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), a coalition of local conservation organizations that first set the standard for sustainable farming in rainforest areas in the early 1990s. The SAN standards cover ecosystem conservation, worker rights and safety, wildlife protection, water and soil conservation, agrochemical reduction and education for farm children.

Farmers who cultivate these specialty Rainforest Alliance Certified coffees take great pride in the sustainable way in which they grow their beans, and in the quality coffee they produce. By formally evaluating these coffees in cupping, the Rainforest Alliance acknowledges and rewards those who work extra hard to produce the finest possible quality of coffee, in the best possible way. It’s also yet another venue for demonstrating an added benefit of Rainforest Alliance certification — a focus on quality.

“Rainforest Alliance Certified farms implement better farm practices that result in tangible environmental, social and economic benefits, and those methods tend to result in better conditions for growing coffee,” explained Sabrina Vigilante, director of markets at the Rainforest Alliance.

Biologists in the SAN have demonstrated that forested coffee farms can be bio-rich buffer zones for parks, protect watersheds and serve as wildlife corridors. These “coffee forests” are also important sources of firewood, construction materials, medicinal plants, fruits, flowers, honey and other goods. Many farms in the certification program protect native forest reserves and community water supplies. Certified farmers in ecosystems that are not naturally forested, such as the cerrado in Brazil, are required to conserve their native habitat.

**Cupping with Care**

The cuppers – all of them volunteers — represent companies such as Java City,
Gloria Jeans and Allegro Coffee Company. Eight of the twelve cuppers who were in Long Beach are licensed Q Graders, professional cuppers accredited by the Coffee Quality Institute (CQI). The event presents a unique opportunity for the cuppers, many of whom are green coffee buyers, to evaluate a range of Rainforest Alliance Certified coffees all at the same time. They play a key role in helping the Rainforest Alliance recognize the farmers who produce these high-quality cups, and the cup scores and feedback they provide are invaluable to the farmers, who work year after year to improve cup quality, matching it to the taste profiles in demand in leading consumer markets.

In years past, the Rainforest Alliance held just one cupping event each year in March, with samples from all over the world. This year, the organization has split the cupping into two sessions to accommodate the harvest cycles in the various coffee origins. The first was held in December 2009, and the second session will be in May 2010. Farms can choose the session they’d most prefer.

Shawn Hamilton, vice president of plant operations and coffee buyer for Java City, was the lead cupper for the December event. “One of the nice things for me is the fact that I have been involved in this event since its inception and have been able to witness the improvement of quality over the years,” noted Hamilton. “In the beginning there were few coffees that scored in the 80s, and now there are only a few that don’t. Now there are several standout coffees, and we can have discussions on why we think one is better than or different from another. It is very inspiring to see such improvements from year to year in this program.”

“It was definitely a benefit to allow Brazil and Peru to submit coffees in their prime,” said Hamilton. “Coffees from Peru stood out exceptionally well this year compared to past cuppings.” Hamilton is also looking forward to seeing the coffees from Central America in May, as they will be in the prime of their crop and should show even better than they have in the past, he says.

Looking Ahead
The Rainforest Alliance will hold the second cupping on May 19-21, 2010 in New York City at the IntercontinentalExchange cupping lab. The session will feature samples from certified farms in Central America, Colombia and Ethiopia alongside recently certified operations in India, included in the cupping for the first time. Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee farms that would like to submit samples for this session, or those interested in seeing the results from previous cuppings, can contact Petra Tanos, the Rainforest Alliance’s Sustainable Agriculture Marketing Associate, at ptanos@ra.org.

The ten highest scoring coffees from the December cupping will be available for tasting at the Tea & Coffee World Cup in Vienna, Austria on April 25-27. The Rainforest Alliance’s European marketing manager, Marcel Clement, will be at the session.

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event as part of a panel discussion called “Sustainability at Origin.”

The first Rainforest Alliance certificates issued to coffee farms outside of Latin America were in Indonesia, Ethiopia and Tanzania in 2007, and the program has continued to grow in East Africa and Asia. In 2009, coffee farms in India, Vietnam, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia achieved certification and the program now includes both Arabica and Robusta growing operations.

To date, over 302,962 hectares (748,635 acres) of coffee farms worldwide are Rainforest Alliance Certified, accounting for nearly 2% of the world's coffee exports. The organization estimates a quarter-billion dollars were paid to Rainforest Alliance Certified farms for their coffee via farmgate prices in 2009.

The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. For more information, visit www.rainforest-alliance.org

A Profile in Sustainability: Kigutha Estate
Located on 303 acres (122.82 ha) in the Kiambu District of Kenya, just north of Nairobi City, Kigutha Coffee Estate is a shining example of sustainable farm management. And it's paid off in the quality of its product: Kigutha Estate received first place ranking at the Rainforest Alliance's cupping in December 2009.

Managed by Tropical Farm Management, part of the Neumann Kaffee Gruppe, since 1976, the estate received Rainforest Alliance certification in 2009, a process that took them just over eight months. With prior expertise in safety and environmental practices, soil erosion control measures and integrated pest management, Tropical Farm Management had little trouble in implementing the criteria required for Rainforest Alliance certification.

“Our major challenge though was the shade tree issue,” explained Jerida Sinange, of the environmental & certification office for Tropical Farm Management. “Kenya has a long tradition of growing coffee without shade, and changing that was a big problem. At the moment we are still increasing trees per hectare, using indigenous species.”

As part of the certification process, the farm had to increase the number of tree species cultivated in its nursery from four to 12 species. And the farm now aims to have a tree shade coverage of 30%, which will create a habitat for wild animals and birds. Because hunting, capturing, extracting or trafficking any wildlife is prohibited on Rainforest Alliance Certified farms, these animals will have a better chance of survival.

Water conservation has been another major concern for the Kigutha Coffee Estate. A borehole provides domestic and

Cupping Rainforest Alliance Certified coffees.

The cuppers
- Michael Boyd, Boyd’s
- Jeffrey Chean, Supreme Bean Coffee Roasters*
- Chris Davidson, Atlas Coffee*
- Nathalie Gabbay, RGC Coffee
- Fernanda Hernandez, Elan Organic*
- Alexandra Katona, Coffee Quality Institute*
- Stephen Leach, Gloria Jeans
- Rocky Rhodes, Rocky Roasters*
- Keita Matsumoto, Wataru*
- Alex Russan, Castle and Company*
- Christy Thorns, Allegro*
- Ted Vautrinot, Kean Coffee

*Licensed Q Grader accredited by the Coffee Quality Institute

Farms in the Cupping must follow the 10 Principles of Sustainability of the Sustainable Agriculture Network
1. Farm Management System
2. Ecosystem Conservation
3. Wildlife Protection
4. Water Conservation
5. Workers’ Rights
6. Occupational Health and Safety
7. Community Relations
8. Integrated Crop Management
9. Soil Conservation
10. Waste Management

Cupping Rainforest Alliance Certified coffees.
coffee processing water while water for irrigation comes from dam in the Kiu River. The dam is only filled using surface runoff from higher grounds. Basins are dug between coffee rows and blue grass is interplanted to reduce soil erosion and conserve water. Rainwater is also harvested from the factory area and sent directly to the dam. The basin irrigation system in Kigutha Estate is not only cost-effective but uses about 45% less water compared with overhead irrigation. The farm has installed water meters to measure water usage and a water recycling system to reduce consumption. The dam on the farm provides habitat for hippopotamuses, which are protected by the government in this area.

The Kigutha Estate has social policies aimed at protecting workers’ rights, preventing discrimination and promoting safe working conditions. The farm also works to continuously improve workers’ living standards and invests in the skill development of workers.

In addition to taking care of workers, Kigutha Estate also provides clean water to the neighboring school and has established a kindergarten that now enrolls 30 children from the neighborhood and the farm itself. Kigutha employs many workers from the local community and provides all employees with transportation and food. The farm manager also heads a social committee that meets regularly with the local villages to discuss mutual concerns.

“The Rainforest Alliance’s entry to the coffee sector has made the producers think more about sustainable use of the natural resources and conservation,” said Sinange. In addition to the certification of the Kigutha Estate, Tropical Farm Management and Neumann Kaffee Gruppe have achieved Rainforest Alliance certification for many of their operations in Central America, Asia and elsewhere in Africa. “This represents not only our commitment to sustainable coffee production but also our belief that adhering to the Rainforest Alliance standards implies a farmer’s understanding of and willingness to adopt sustainable practices,” said Jason Green of Tropical Farm Management. “This in turn increases his competitiveness and thus improves his livelihood, whilst benefiting the community and environment around him.”

The company offers sustainable coffee farming and agronomy expertise to commercial farms and smallholders alike and partners with the coffee farming community in the provision of inputs, finance, access to markets, certification and sustainable quality improvement. In Kenya alone Tropical Farm Management (Kenya) Ltd manages over 40 coffee estates and operates smallholder coffee projects for over 30,000 smallholder farmers.

Petra Tanos works to create market linkages for Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee, tea and cocoa. Through events like the Rainforest Alliance Cupping for Quality, she builds bridges between those who grow sustainable coffee and the quality-driven importer and roaster community.