



**COMMUNICATING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY
CREDIBLY, TRANSPARENTLY & EFFECTIVELY**

Guidelines for Companies

COMMUNICATING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY: AN UPDATED VIEW

Since 1987 the Rainforest Alliance has been working with partners to drive sustainable, responsible business practices. We have also worked with our partners to help them communicate their commitments and positive impacts.

As part of our ongoing promise to companies, we have developed these guidelines that reflect the latest learnings and trends to help maximize the credibility and effectiveness of communicating about sustainability.

-- The Rainforest Alliance Marketing Team



COMMUNICATING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY IN A CREDIBLE WAY

Sustainability is at the core of what we do at the Rainforest Alliance and therefore it is also key for our partner companies. This means that 'sustainable' is a word that occurs regularly in all of our and our partner companies' communication, and rightly so.

Why is it important to communicate about sustainability credibly? First of all, trust in a company or brand is a great purchase driver¹. Commitment to sustainability helps build that trust; 87% of consumers would be more likely to trust a company when it supports a social or environmental issue².

In addition, the media, civil society organizations, and consumers are becoming better informed towards certification³. Therefore, it is crucial to communicate clearly and transparently about certification and your work with the Rainforest Alliance without over-promising.

In summary, credible and open communication helps secure trust and dispel misconceptions. And most importantly, it **adds value to your brand**.

¹ 81% of global consumers rank brand trust ('I must be able to trust the brand to do what is right') as a buying consideration ([Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report 2019: In Brands We Trust](#))

² [Cone Communication 2017](#)

³ [FreedomLab: The evolving landscape of consumer trust, 2019](#)



SIX SIMPLE GUIDELINES

**TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT
YOUR SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT
CREDIBLY, TRANSPARENTLY & EFFECTIVELY**

- 1 EXPRESS SUSTAINABILITY AS A JOURNEY**
- 2 USE THE TERM 'BETTER' OR 'MORE'**
- 3 AVOID USING 'SUSTAINABLE' AND 'CERTIFIED' INTERCHANGEABLY**
- 4 AVOID USING '100% SUSTAINABLY / RESPONSIBLY SOURCED'**
- 5 AVOID THE TERM 'GUARANTEE'**
- 6 COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND PROACTIVELY ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES**

1 EXPRESS SUSTAINABILITY AS A JOURNEY

- Sustainability is not an end-state: there is always more to be done to improve, increase positive impact, and reduce harm.
- Talking about sustainability as an on-going process can help companies express that they are aware there is room for improvement.
- It helps mitigate reputational risks and communicate more transparently.
- When talking about your commitments, vision or long-term goals, there is more freedom to use the term 'sustainable'.



"Sourcing certified cocoa is a key step on our journey towards sustainability."



"We only sell sustainable cocoa products."

2 USE THE TERM 'BETTER' OR 'MORE'

- Using the word 'better' or phrases like 'more sustainable' reflects the focus on continuous improvement.



"Certified coffee is more sustainable because it contributes to better farmer livelihoods."



"Certified coffee is sustainable because it ensures great farmers livelihoods."

3 AVOID USING 'SUSTAINABLE' AND 'CERTIFIED' INTERCHANGEABLY

- 'Sustainable' is general term whereas 'certified' refers to having achieved a specific certification.
- 'Sustainable' suggests that certification is a guarantee and sustainability is an end-state. However, sustainability is a journey and certification is a step on that journey.
- Instead use: 'certified coffee', 'more sustainable coffee', or 'sustainably sourced coffee'.



"We source coffee from certified farms." *

*please note: not applicable for ingredients sourced through the mass balance model, such as cocoa.



"We source coffee from sustainable farms."

4 AVOID USING '100% SUSTAINABLY / RESPONSIBLY SOURCED'

- Claiming that an ingredient was sourced '100% sustainably' or '100% responsibly' implies that all actors in your supply chain have achieved full sustainability. This does not reflect the idea that sustainability is a continuous journey and not an end-state.
- Instead, you can use '100% certified' as certification is an achievement that can be measured and proven.



DO

"Our coffee is 100% certified"



DON'T

"Our coffee is 100% sustainably sourced."

5 AVOID THE TERM 'GUARANTEE'

- Certification is often perceived as a guarantee of sustainability. But this is impossible. No system can monitor every farm 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- It is key to shift towards a more nuanced understanding by emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement.
- A softer alternative is 'you can be sure', but this should still be combined with a 'better' or 'more'.



DO

"When you buy Rainforest Alliance Certified tea, you can be sure that it contributes to a better future for tea farmers and their families."



DON'T

"Rainforest Alliance Certified tea guarantees/ ensures that it was produced without the use of child labor."

6 COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND PROACTIVELY ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

- If you are not going to talk about your company challenges, someone else will (as seen in critical media stories).
- Open communication, as transparent as possible about the challenges, helps you speak from a much stronger position.
- Win trust by explaining your company's challenges on your sustainability journey and how you are addressing these issues.

NEED SUPPORT?

Do you need support to effectively tell the story of your sustainability journey? Would you like to engage your consumers, employees or other stakeholders? Would you like guidance on how to maximize your messaging transparency, credibility and effectiveness? We are here to help!

CONTACT US

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