

WHAT'S IN OUR 2020 CERTIFICATION PROGRAM?

DEFORESTATION

Going even further to protect the world's forests and forest communities



Photo: Mohsin Kazmi

Nearly half of the Earth's original forest cover has already been lost, and each year an additional 12 million hectares (29.5 million acres) are destroyed according to a report from the Global Forest Watch. Not only is this tragic for the local communities and ecosystems deforestation affects, but also for the larger impact it has on one of the world's most pressing issues: climate change.

Trees are a [natural climate solution](#) that capture carbon dioxide (CO₂), preventing it from accumulating in the atmosphere and warming our planet. A new analysis estimates that better management of forests alone could remove 7 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, or 7 trillion kilos, annually (the equivalent of eliminating 1.5 billion cars—more than all of the cars in the world today).



Looking across Finca El Platanillo in western Guatemala, the first coffee farm certified "climate-friendly" by the Rainforest Alliance. Coffee is planted along the mountainside with native plants and trees which provide shade and mitigate the effects of soil erosion.

Photo: Creagh Cross

Over the past 30 years, the Rainforest Alliance has developed a comprehensive, 360-degree approach to protecting the world's forests. In our new [2020 Certification Program](#), we are going even further to safeguard our remaining forests and other natural ecosystems and increase native biodiversity and vegetation on farms—all while supporting the livelihoods of farmers and forest communities who rely on these ecosystems.

WHAT IS OUR NEW APPROACH TO DEFORESTATION?

In line with the approach advocated by the [Accountability Framework Initiative](#)—and other leading environmental NGOs—our new program not only prohibits deforestation but also the destruction of all natural ecosystems, including wetlands and peatlands—meaning more land will be protected.

The new Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard does not allow the destruction or conversion of natural ecosystems since January 1st, 2014. In preparation for audits, the GPS locations of certified farms will be checked for any evidence of forest conversion based on a customized forest baseline map. This automated risk assessment will help auditors more effectively detect deforestation and farmers better address their deforestation risks. If cases of conversion after the cutoff date are found, they are, in general, not eligible for certification, except for minor cases, which can be remediated.

The new standard also requires farmers to increase native tree cover on existing farms and in agroforestry systems or conservation lands to ensure that farming not only has a minimal negative impact, but that it also generates positive impacts on biodiversity, climate, and the long-term sustainability of the landscape.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS STANDARDS?

The UTZ Code of Conduct has prohibited deforestation or degradation of primary forests since 2008 as well as that of secondary forests unless under certain conditions. The 2017 Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard has prohibited destruction of High Conservation Value areas since 2005 and destruction of all natural ecosystems since 2014. The new Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard follows this broader approach, aiming to conserve both forests and all natural ecosystems.

We chose 2014 as the cutoff date for several reasons:

- In our reimagining of certification, we are pushing for more data-driven insights. With this in mind, the year 2014 allows for much better checks with remote sensing, since satellite data is more readily available from 2014 onwards. This will provide more robust data for improved, data-driven assurance.
- Previously, the Rainforest Alliance and UTZ systems had different cutoff dates for different forests. Choosing one rule for all makes the requirements and implementation clearer.
- The 2014 cutoff date is in line with market and sector commitments, such as The New York Declaration on Forests and others, as well as more rigorous approaches to deforestation by similar standards.

WHAT OTHER RAINFOREST ALLIANCE INTERVENTIONS SUPPORT THIS WORK?

Certification is just one of our tools embedded within a holistic approach to create deforestation-free supply chains. Beyond certification, we support this mission through our tailored programs that work with companies to implement no-conversion commitments in supply chains where certification is not an option.

We also drive for landscape approaches that engage all producers of different crops and suppliers in one geographical area to ensure that a deforestation-free certified supply chain doesn't inadvertently increase deforestation in other crops or uncertified supply chains.

Public policy and advocacy are crucial as well to bring all actors together on this issue. In consuming countries, the Rainforest Alliance supports a mix of regulation, partnerships, and voluntary commitments. In production countries, we work to ensure national public institutions have the capacity to enforce forest protection policies and that these policies are supportive of vulnerable

groups, since ultimately, this is the only way that forest protection measures can be fully successful.

IS THIS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT FOR CERTAIN CROPS OR COUNTRIES?

Deforestation is most concentrated in, and highest on the agenda of, the cocoa sector. In the coming years, we also expect more attention on the topic in other sectors, namely coffee, as climate change drives coffee production upslope into forested areas. The Rainforest Alliance is currently developing a risk-based approach for monitoring and preventing deforestation. In priority countries, this approach will be based on custom-made forest layers in an effort to provide the most accurate data on risks of deforestation to allow auditors and farmers to address the issue better. Special attention will be paid to the deforestation hotspots in Nicaragua, Honduras, Peru, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Indonesia.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Read more about deforestation and what to expect in our new certification program. For specific questions, email us at cs@ra.org.

REIMAGINING CERTIFICATION

Reimagining certification is our long-term vision for the future of certification. It is part of our wider strategy at the Rainforest Alliance to drive change through our four main areas of work.

In June 2020, the Rainforest Alliance takes the first step on its journey towards "reimagining certification" with the publication of its 2020 Certification Program. We've been working on this new program since 2018, when the Rainforest Alliance and UTZ merged.

The 2020 Certification Program—including a new Sustainable Agriculture Standard—is a unique opportunity to really change the way that certification works and how it delivers value to the many people and businesses around the world that use it.

Between June 2020 and mid-2021, the Rainforest Alliance will roll out the new program around the world, including a comprehensive training plan. Audits against the new program will begin in mid-2021.

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