

2018 Rainforest Alliance Impacts Report

Executive Summary

Deanna Newsom and Jeffrey C. Milder



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As the year 2018 begins, many environmental and social challenges loom larger than ever: rural poverty remains widespread, deforestation and ecosystem degradation continue nearly unabated, and climate change threatens our ability to feed a growing population. Farmers and farm workers tend to experience these challenges especially acutely.

The Rainforest Alliance was founded in 1987 to address these complex issues in the context of rural landscapes and commodity value chains. The organization seeks to conserve biodiversity and support sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices, and consumer behavior. The Rainforest Alliance's sustainable agriculture certification program is a primary means of doing so. This program includes a sustainability standard, auditing processes, and a consumer-facing label, as well as training and other support to facilitate the transition to sustainable agriculture. These activities are implemented or supported with a wide range of partners, including agronomists, trainers, certification bodies, scientists, government officials, private companies, and other innovators who have joined forces to devise solutions to these urgent problems.

At the close of 2017, the Rainforest Alliance certification program included about 1.3 million farmers in 57 countries, covering a total area of about 3.5 million hectares. Production from Rainforest Alliance Certified farms accounted for approximately 10.2 percent of the world's total production of cocoa, 19.9 percent of the world's tea, 5.6 percent of the world's coffee, and 6.4 percent of the world's bananas, as well as smaller proportions of numerous other crops.

As part of its commitment to monitoring, evaluation, and learning, the Rainforest Alliance regularly takes stock of available evidence to assess the results and effectiveness of its certification program. This work draws on a diversity of information including data on the size, location, and characteristics of certified farms; audit reports that document levels of compliance with the certification standard; independent scientific research that compares certified farms to their non-certified neighbors; and firsthand observations from farmers, scientists, and other experts. We present this information to our stakeholders—including producers, commodity-buying companies, and the general public—and use it to better understand and improve the impacts of this program.

The first comprehensive impacts report on the Rainforest Alliance certification program covered the time period from 2010 through the end of 2014. The current report continues where that one left off, evaluating results through the close of 2017 and incorporating scientific literature up until the date of its publication. This report begins by presenting a snapshot of the distribution and characteristics of Rainforest Alliance Certified farms and identifies trends over time. It then focuses on three topics of special interest: improving the livelihoods of farmers and farm workers; conserving natural ecosystems; and minimizing pesticide use and risk. Throughout the report, we also highlight key partnerships through which the Rainforest Alliance works to address these topics. We conclude by



Workers apply Rainforest Alliance Certified stickers to banana bunches at the Platanera Río Sixaola farm in Costa Rica.

illustrating how the organization uses monitoring and evaluation results to improve its programs and by highlighting some upcoming improvements to the M&E system.

The report draws the following conclusions:

- The certified farm area and crop production volume continues to increase in some sectors while remaining flat in others.** The production of certified bananas increased markedly since 2015, particularly in Colombia and Ecuador, and the production of certified tea continues its steady upward growth. The area of Rainforest Alliance Certified cocoa farms declined in 2015 but has since stabilized, while certified coffee farm area and production volumes both increased in the past three years, recovering somewhat from a dip between 2013 and 2014.
- Africa continues to dominate the portfolio.** By the close of 2017, the top six countries, in terms of number of certified farms, were located in Africa. Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya contained the largest and third largest total certified area, respectively.
- Group certification is widespread within the Rainforest Alliance program.** At the close of 2017, 43 percent of Rainforest Alliance certificates were group certificates, and more than 99 percent of certified farms were members of a group. While 82 percent of group members are smallholder farmers with farms of 2.0 hectares or less, large farms (greater than 50 hectares) make up the majority of certified farm area in Mesoamerica, South America, East and Southeast Asia, and South Asia.
- Banana and tea operations in all regions were widely compliant with the certification criteria we examined**
- related to improving livelihoods for farmers and farm workers (demonstrating average compliance scores of 80 or above, out of 100).** Cocoa and coffee farms also performed well, with average scores above 80 for the vast majority of criteria. Lower compliance (average scores of 60 or less) was observed in some regions for criteria related to annual medical exams for workers conducting hazardous tasks and/or applying agrochemicals, and soil and crop fertilization programs.
- Certificates for all crops in all regions had average compliance scores of 80 or above for six of the 10 criteria we examined related to the conservation of natural ecosystems.** Areas of consistently good performance included the protection of nearby natural areas and wildlife habitat, and the creation of buffers between natural areas and agrochemical-use areas. Many crop-region groupings performed poorly (with average scores below 70) for criteria addressing buffers between crop areas and aquatic areas or areas of human activity, a result that is likely due to the difficulty of smallholders allocating their limited land to such buffer zones.
- Certificates for all crops in all regions had average compliance scores of 80 or above for seven of the 14 criteria we examined related to minimizing pesticide use and risk.** The areas with consistently good performance included the criteria aimed at eliminating the most toxic pesticides, and criteria that seek to prevent excess chemical application and fumigation. Performance was mixed with regard to the storage and transport of agrochemicals, with no clear trends across crop-region groupings.
- Two recent independent studies found that Rainforest Alliance certification was associated with higher house-**

hold incomes and lower rates of poverty for coffee-farming households, compared to non-certified farms. One study, conducted in Ethiopia, attributed these differences to the price premium paid to certified farmers, while the other, conducted in Uganda, attributed it to the significantly higher productivity of certified farms. A third independent study found that certified cocoa farmers in Ghana reported positive change in income, savings, and numerous other financial variables since achieving certification, in contrast to non-certified farmers, who reported either no change or negative change over the same time period.

- **Three recent independent studies found that Rainforest Alliance certification had a positive effect on forest quality.** Two studies examined the “forest coffee” region of Ethiopia. One found improvements in forest quality on certified forest coffee areas over a five-year period, and drastic forest degradation on non-certified areas over the same time period, with the positive changes extending beyond the boundaries of the certified coffee areas. The other study found that the premium associated with certified coffee helped incentivize farmers to maintain forest production systems that are valuable for biodiversity. In the third study, conducted in Ghana, certified farmers reported increases in the number of native shade trees and the presence of vegetative barriers, while non-certified farmers reported no change or a decrease in these variables over the same time period.
- **One recent independent study found that Rainforest Alliance certification had a positive effect on pesticide**

safety and the use of alternative pest-control practices, while a separate study found that certification had no effect on pesticide use patterns. The first study found that certified cocoa farmers in Ghana reported improved recordkeeping related to pesticide and fertilizer use, improved agrochemical storage practices, and an increased frequency of alternative pest-control measures since certification; non-certified farmers reported no change or a decrease in the adoption of these practices over the same time period. The second study found that pesticide usage patterns and bird species composition on certified banana farms in Costa Rica were comparable to those on non-certified farms, while insect diversity was lower. The similarity between certified and non-certified farms may reflect the widespread implementation of certain sustainable farming practices across the entire Costa Rican banana sector.

- **The Rainforest Alliance certification program is supporting continuous improvement among farms and farmer groups that remain certified for multiple years.** When compliance scores were averaged across all crop-region groupings, we found that certified operations increased their scores by at least 10 points for five of the 41 certification criteria that we examined in this report (and decreased their compliance scores by at least 10 points for two of the criteria). The focus on continuous improvement is now being advanced further with the implementation of the new Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard, which went into effect in July 2017. This standard codifies continuous improvement by requiring time-bound changes related to key elements of sustainability.

A woman sorts coffee beans on a farm in Ethiopia.



The positive results described above are the direct result of years—and sometimes decades—of collaborative effort, but there is much more to be done. The new 2017 Rainforest Alliance Standard brings a more rigorous, science-based, and farmer-centric approach to addressing key topics, including ecosystem conservation and restoration, living wage and living income, pesticides, and worker wellbeing. New and existing partnerships support efforts to address complex sustainability issues by working collaboratively with industry, government, producer associations, and other certification programs. And new upgrades to the certification program’s monitoring and evaluation system will bring new data and insight to better document on-the-ground impacts, and support sound decision-making and continuous improvement by certified producers and the program itself. As we learn more about the successes and challenges of our certification program, we work to strengthen it on a continual basis, together with forward-looking farmers and partners around the world.

To read the full text of the Rainforest Alliance Impacts Report, please visit rainforest-alliance.org/impact-studies/impacts-report-2018



233 Broadway, 28th Floor
New York, NY 10279-2899
tel: 212.677.1900
fax: 212.677.2187
rainforest-alliance.org

The Rainforest Alliance is an international nonprofit organization working to build a future in which nature is protected and biodiversity flourishes, where farmers, workers, and communities prosper, and where sustainable land use and responsible business practices are the norm. We envision a world where people and nature thrive in harmony.