

Protecting Against Forced Labor and Other Forms of Modern Slavery in Agricultural Supply Chains Through Rainforest Alliance Certification



There is no place in responsible business practice for modern slavery, forced labor, or human trafficking. The Rainforest Alliance is committed to working with stakeholders to protect workers from these grave human rights abuses.

The general term “modern slavery” covers a set of concepts including forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, human trafficking, slavery, and other slavery-like practices. Our approach to tackling these issues focuses on the numerous forms of involuntary work and coercion—such as degrading working conditions, intimidation, and threats—that underlie these forms of exploitation. We use the term “forced labor” when describing this work, consistent with the definitions and framework of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

In recent years, international frameworks, such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, have affirmed that companies have an obligation to respect the rights of all workers in their operations and supply chains. This includes protecting them from forced labor. In the past decade, these voluntary norms have been supplemented by laws in numerous countries mandating companies to take action on these issues. These include Modern Slavery Acts in the United Kingdom and Australia, the Transparency in Supply Chains Act in the state of California, the United States’ Trade

Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act, and France’s Duty of Vigilance law, among others—and the list is growing. These laws focus on two key types of action: **due diligence** and **transparency**.

The Rainforest Alliance Certification Program: A Due Diligence Approach

The Rainforest Alliance Certification Program is a key pillar of our work to drive sustainability transformation in the agricultural sector. We work in more than 70 countries, supporting producers to implement our rigorous environmental and social standards across the supply chains of some of world’s most popular commodities—including cocoa, coffee, tea, and bananas. **Our standards, in combination with an assurance framework that includes independent third-party auditing, provide a strong foundation for due diligence on forced labor.**

Certification Standards on Forced Labor

Since the 2018 merger of the Rainforest Alliance and UTZ—which brought together two of the world’s leading sustainability certification organizations—we have maintained certifica-

tion programs under both the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard and the UTZ Codes of Conduct. These standards include criteria on forced labor, which will remain in effect for certain certificate holders until June 30, 2021:

- Rainforest Alliance, Criterion 4.1: “All forms of forced, compulsory, or slave labor are prohibited, including use of trafficked and bonded labor, labor by prisoners or soldiers, or the use of extortion, debt, threats, monetary fines, or penalties.”
- UTZ, Criterion I.C.72 and G.C.76: “No forced, bonded, trafficked, or other involuntary labor is used at any stage of production and processing. Workers are not required to lodge deposits or identity papers, nor are salaries, benefits, or properties retained to force workers to remain on the work site. Workers are free to leave employment after giving reasonable notice. Spouses and children of workers are not required to work, unless separately and voluntarily contracted.”

Our **2020 Certification Program**—published June 30, 2020, and mandatory for audits beginning July 1, 2021—replaces both pre-merger programs. The new standard adopts an “assess-and-address” approach to tackling human rights issues such as forced labor, which will not be tolerated on certified farms or in companies. Rather than imposing a simple prohibition, which often drives the problem underground, the “assess-and-address” approach goes much further by requiring that specific measures are in place to **identify and mitigate labor risks**, to **monitor** them on an ongoing basis, and provide meaningful **remediation**.

The **risk assessment** process is two-fold: first, the Rainforest Alliance has developed risk maps, based on independent data sources, which rank forced labor and child labor risk in each of our key certification countries and sectors. Second, certified farms/agricultural processors must complete a risk self-assessment, using our [Farm Risk Assessment Tool](#). If higher risks are identified at either stage, they are required to take stronger measures to **mitigate those risks**. **Monitoring** requirements also vary with the nature and level of risk, as described in the [Assess and Address Guidance Document](#) and [Monitoring Guidance Tool](#). **Remediation** actions must be guided by our [Remediation Protocol](#) and can range from small corrections—like repaying a couple of weeks’ wages for a worker whose pay was miscalculated—to longer-term steps, such as investing in better housing conditions for migrant workers.

The new standard requires farms to register key employment data for all their workers, such as whether they are permanent or temporary, and requires that most workers have written contracts. The new standard also requires certificate holders to do rigorous oversight of labor providers (labor brokers/recruiters)—who are often a key factor in forced labor risk—and to ensure that all recruitment-related fees and costs are paid by farms, not by workers.

Auditing and Assurance

The Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal is an internationally recognized symbol of high standards. We are a member of the [ISEAL Alliance](#), a membership organization for sustainabil-



Workers wash and pack bananas on a Rainforest Alliance Certified farm operated by Chiquita.



Harvesting cocoa pods on a Rainforest Alliance Certified farm in Costa Rica.



Workers on a Rainforest Alliance Certified farm in Vietnam pick coffee cherries.

ity standards, which sets the criteria against which the Rainforest Alliance must operate both in standard setting as well as in providing assurance.

Compliance is assessed by [authorized third-party Certification Bodies](#) (CBs) whose auditors perform audits at the farm and supply chain level, and issue certificates if compliance is verified. Certified farms/agricultural processors are audited regularly to verify that they are complying with the standard's comprehensive requirements. Certification Bodies have the discretion to not issue, suspend, and/or withdraw certificates in severe cases of forced labor, as described in our [Auditing Rules](#), including violations of applicable criminal law.

To ensure high performance, the Rainforest Alliance has a thorough approval process for CBs, allowing only those whose staff have the required competencies to perform certification against our standards. The independence and integrity of audits is controlled by the Rainforest Alliance through a rigorous and transparent CB monitoring and oversight process. A sanction system is in place, allowing the Rainforest Alliance to take measures in case of insufficient CB performance.


Transparency on Forced Labor

Several of the recently enacted laws on forced labor and modern slavery require companies to publish statements describing the steps they have taken to address these issues in their operations and supply chains. Buying Rainforest Alliance Certified products is an important step, as compa-

nies using our seal source ingredients from certified farms or farm groups (cooperatives) that are required to comply with our standards. Certification Bodies provide a deeper level of transparency to their clients by reporting all audit data to the farm/group holding or seeking a certificate. The Rainforest Alliance does not make full audit reports publicly available, but we publish some certification data on our [Certificate Search and Public Summaries](#) page and Certification Bodies publish public summaries of audit reports.

Beyond Certification

Thousands of companies use Rainforest Alliance certification to help implement their responsible sourcing commitments. But certification alone cannot solve the deep-rooted, socio-economic issues that are endemic to agriculture and can lead to labor exploitation. As an international non-profit organization working in more than 70 countries around the globe, we employ various strategies and partnerships to reduce the risk of human rights abuses while driving positive social and environmental change. These include [Tailored Programs](#), working directly with companies to help them shape and meet sustainability commitments on forced labor and other issues; landscape-level interventions that support both environmental and social outcomes; and advocacy with governments, NGOs and other stakeholders.

We invite you to learn more and partner with us by visiting [our website](#), or contact our lead on forced labor, Rachel Rigby, at rrigby@ra.org. 

Appendix: Requirements of the Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainability Standards Related to Forced Labor and Modern Slavery

The Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainability Standards contain several requirements that are directly related to protecting workers from forced labor and other forms of modern slavery. These include:

1.5	Requires that a grievance mechanism be available to workers.
5.1	Requires that an “assess and address” system be in place to assess risks of forced labor, mitigate them, monitor, and remediate as needed.
5.3	Includes requirements related to written contracts, minimum wages, deductions from wages, timing of wages, and record-keeping related to wages.
5.3.9 and 5.3.10	Requires farms to provide oversight of labor providers, and that all recruitment fees and related costs be paid by the farm or group management, not by workers.
5.5	Includes requirements related to working hours and overtime.
5.6.12	Provides that workers may leave situations of imminent danger without seeking the employer’s permission and without being penalized.
5.7	Includes requirements for safe, clean and decent living conditions in cases where employers provide workers housing.

The Rainforest Alliance defines forced labor as follows: All work or service required of any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered herself or himself voluntarily.

A person is classified as being in forced labor if they are engaged in work that is involuntary (without the free and informed consent of the worker) and is exacted through threats, penalties, or some form of coercion.

Forms of involuntariness can include, but are not limited to:

- Recruitment through a transaction such as slavery or bonded labor;
- State-imposed labor, such as by the military, that does not meet the exceptions provided in ILO Convention 29;
- Involuntary prison labor;
- Unpaid or extremely low-paid work;
- Changes to working conditions (employer, wages, hours, nature of work, conditions/hazards/exposures, time period) without the worker’s consent;
- Degrading working or living conditions imposed by employer or recruiter;
- Involuntary and excessive overtime; and
- Limited freedom to terminate the work contract or agreement.

Forms of coercion can include, but are not limited to:

- Physical or sexual violence;
- Physical confinement;
- Restrictions on movement or communication;
- Fines or other financial penalties;
- Deprivation of food, water, toilets, sleep, or other basic needs;
- Isolation;
- Forced use of drugs or alcohol;
- Debt bondage or manipulation of debt, including manipulation of advances and loans;
- Requiring monetary deposits, financial or collateral guarantees, or personal possessions as a condition of employment
- Withholding or delay of wages or other benefits;
- Retention of identity or other important documents without the worker’s consent and/or without providing workers easy access to them; and
- Threats of dismissal, deportation, legal action, or reporting to authorities.



The Rainforest Alliance is an international non-profit organization working in more than 70 countries at the intersection of business, agriculture and forests. We are building an alliance to create a better future for people and nature by making responsible business the new normal.

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