



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

Guidelines for Companies

COMMUNICATING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY CREDIBLY, TRANSPARENTLY & EFFECTIVELY

Since 1987, the Rainforest Alliance has partnered with companies to promote sustainable business practices and effectively communicate their positive impacts. These guidelines reflect the latest trends and best practices for communicating about sustainability with credibility and impact.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREDIBLE SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION

At the Rainforest Alliance, sustainability is at the heart of everything we do, and it should be central to your company's messaging as well. Clear and honest communication not only strengthens your brand's credibility and adds value, but it also helps ensure your company remains compliant with increasingly stringent sustainability regulations. By transparently sharing your sustainability efforts, you build trust with consumers while staying ahead of regulatory demands.

By following these guidelines, you'll communicate your sustainability commitments in a way that resonates with consumers, builds trust, and showcases the genuine efforts your company is making toward a more sustainable future.



FIVE KEY GUIDELINES

**FOR CREDIBLE AND EFFECTIVE
SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION**

- 1 EXPRESS SUSTAINABILITY AS A JOURNEY**
- 2 DON'T USE 'SUSTAINABLE' AND 'CERTIFIED' INTERCHANGEABLY**
- 3 AVOID '100% SUSTAINABLY / RESPONSIBLY SOURCED'**
- 4 AVOID THE TERM 'GUARANTEE'**
- 5 COMMUNICATE OPENLY 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.
- Use phrases like “a key step on our journey toward sustainability” instead of suggesting sustainability is a final destination. This approach acknowledges ongoing improvement and helps manage expectations.
- Ensure that any claim is supported by a time-bound commitment for improvements within your own operations and supply chains.



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



“We only sell sustainable cocoa products.”

2 DON'T USE 'SUSTAINABLE' AND 'CERTIFIED' INTERCHANGEABLY

- “Sustainable” is a very general term, while “certified” specifically refers to meeting specific standards. Use terms like “certified coffee” or “sustainably sourced” to accurately convey your achievements.
- “Sustainable” suggests that sustainability is the end-state, but sustainability is a journey, and certification is an important step on that journey.



“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.”

3 AVOID '100% SUSTAINABLY/ RESPONSIBLY SOURCED'

- Claiming a product is “100% sustainable” suggests that every part of your supply chain has achieved full sustainability which is unrealistic.
- Instead, use “100% certified,” a claim that can be independently verified and aligns with the idea of continuous improvement.



DO

“Our coffee is 100% certified”



DON'T

“Our coffee is 100% sustainably sourced.”

4 AVOID THE TERM 'GUARANTEE'

- Certification isn't a guarantee of sustainability; this is impossible as no system can monitor every farm 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Use language that emphasizes continuous improvement, like “you can be sure we're dedicated to ongoing improvements.”



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.”

5

COMMUNICATE OPENLY ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

- If you don't talk about your company's challenges, chances are that someone else will, as often seen in critical media stories.
- Transparency about challenges helps you speak from a much stronger position and strengthens trust in your brand. For example, communicating upfront about the level of traceability in your supply chains helps mitigate reputational risks.
- Addressing issues candidly demonstrates your commitment to solving problems and enhances your credibility.

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

Please contact the Rainforest Alliance Marketing team via marketing@ra.org.



rainforest-alliance.org