Sustainability standards and the SDGs: sustainable agriculture

A snapshot of ISEAL members’ contribution

Research shows that sustainability standards help build productive, resilient and sustainable food systems that directly contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2.

SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Agricultural productivity
The adoption of sustainability standards can boost farm productivity in many sectors that are vital to smallholder livelihoods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UTZ, Indonesia</th>
<th>RSPO, Indonesia</th>
<th>BCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average cocoa yield in kg</strong>¹</td>
<td><strong>Average yield increase for certified palm oil smallholders in tn</strong>²</td>
<td><strong>Cotton yields for BCI farmers compared to non-BCI farmers</strong>³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certified</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-certified</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pakistan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>687 per ha</td>
<td>322 per ha</td>
<td>9% higher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How?
Standards provide farmers with access to training and knowledge about better agricultural practices and access to inputs that help boost productivity.

Farmer incomes and profitability
Certified farmers who adopt sustainability standards can receive higher incomes and profits than non-certified farmers in the same region and sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RA/SAN, Nicaragua</th>
<th>Fairtrade, Colombia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual coffee income for farmers in USD</strong>⁴</td>
<td><strong>Average income increase for banana farming households since joining Fairtrade</strong>⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certified</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-certified</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,256 per ha</td>
<td>2,025 per ha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The profitability of certified farms is significantly higher than non-certified.⁶

| 13% higher profitability | 49% higher profitability | 52% higher profitability |
| Certified coffee from Vietnam | Certified cocoa from Côte d’Ivoire | Certified cotton from India |

How?
Certified farmers often have higher farm productivity, better quality yields, lower production costs, access to niche markets and receive a higher price for their products.
Ecological conservation

The adoption of standards can reduce the ecological footprint of farming by preserving soil quality, water and conservation areas around certified farms.

LEAF, Global

Certified crop with Soil Management Plan

Certification has led to

190,516 ha

364 million litres of water saved between 2011 and 2014

Global Coffee Platform

Coffee farms treating water used in production

Certified 40% Non-certified 3%

How?

Sustainability standards support farmers to preserve local habitats and conserve species, reduce or prohibit the use of harmful chemicals, promote organic farming and implement tangible soil and water management techniques.

Partnering to address key challenges

Research also indicates that some challenges remain in the field of sustainable agriculture:

Yield and quality improvements not always translating into income improvements for farmers

Some commodity prices remain low, which can dis-incentivise farmers

Improved measurement and evidence needed of the conservation impacts of standards

More sales of certified agricultural products needed to scale up farmer revenues and profits

More efforts to address issues facing women farmers and agricultural labourers

Standards are working with governments, businesses and NGOs to address these challenges and drive improvements. For example, ISEAL members and many businesses that rely on their standards are seeking to understand whether smallholder farmers are actually earning a ‘living income’ and, if not, what it would take to get them there. ISEAL is working with The Sustainable Food Lab and GIZ to develop living income benchmarks and explore what a decent standard of living could be for farming households.

http://www.isealliance.org/LivingIncome

ISEAL represents the global movement of sustainability standards.

To find out more about our members visit www.ISEALalliance.org

For more evidence on the impacts of standards visit www.standardsimpacts.org

Data sources: Evidence in this summary is based on publicly available data and research produced by ISEAL members and others with specific references available in the endnotes. All evidence is specific to the standard, product and country/region stated with limited generalisability. The nature of evidence varies according to research design and methodology used and not all evidence presented here has a counterfactual. Where a comparison is made the ‘certified’ refers to the standard in the sub-title.

List of acronyms used: RSPO: Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil; BCI: Better Cotton Initiative; RA: Rainforest Alliance; SAN: Sustainable Agriculture Network; LEAF: Linking Environment And Farming; GCP: Global Coffee Platform


November 2016