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New report finds voluntary sustainability standards on the rise

The *State of Sustainable Markets 2018* points to the need for producers, processors, brands, retailers and consumers to move towards a consensus on sustainability.

(Frick/Geneva) – Voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) are experiencing significant growth across the world in response to consumer, buyer and producer demands, according to ‘The [State of Sustainable Markets 2018: Statistics and Emerging Trends](#)’ report.

Launched today at the Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) Forum in Geneva, the report outlines data on global production volumes and areas, as well as certified producers, for 14 major VSS. These standards, which provide consumers assurances that their purchases support sustainability, can enhance market connections and price premiums for producers, but potentially come with substantial compliance costs.

The *State of Sustainable Markets 2018: Statistics and Emerging Trends* is the third joint report by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), and the International Trade Centre (ITC). The report is the most comprehensive global data source available for certified agricultural commodity markets. It presents data that helps small firms take advantage of trends to supply consumers with products that are environmentally sustainable and socially responsible.

The report shows that agricultural land on which certified commodities are grown continues to increase. For some products, such as coffee and cocoa, more than 20% of global cultivation is certified as sustainable. Certified cotton is witnessing the highest growth rate, with the area under cultivation trebling between 2011 and 2016. Certified cocoa also almost trebled in area; while oil palm and tea-certified areas more than doubled during the same five-year span.

The report finds that in 2016, more than 57.8 million hectares of agricultural land across the world were organic-certified, including land that is in the process of becoming certified as such. This represents 1.2% of all agricultural land worldwide.

In terms of individual standards rather than crops, the State of Sustainable Markets finds that the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) experienced the greatest jump, with the certified area covered expanding more than seven-fold. The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) area increased nearly five times, while that of Cotton made in Africa (CmiA) nearly quadrupled.

Commenting on the report, ITC Executive Director Arancha González said: ‘Business and consumption as usual is no longer an option. Both producers and consumers need to build and promote sustainable value chains. Our production and consumption decisions are what brings about positive change.’

‘To make informed decisions, consumers and producers need access to information which comes from good quality data,’ Ms González added. ‘Voluntary sustainability standards are increasingly enabling and guiding more people and companies to choose which products to buy with a clear understanding of where and how they were produced.’

Urs Niggli, Director of FiBL, said: ‘Reliable data on sustainability trends is invaluable. The trends presented in the book demonstrate positive steps taken toward achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and show that consumers, buyers and producers are increasingly taking environmental and social factors into account.’

State of Sustainable Markets 2018 highlights

Cocoa: the largest growth in terms of certified area

Between 2015 and 2016, certified cocoa demonstrated the strongest growth with a 28% increase. However, over the same period, most other commodities experienced single-digit growth or even saw a decline in certified area.

Coffee: 26% of the world's coffee is certified

In 2016, over a quarter of the global coffee was certified by at least one of the following standards: 4C, Fairtrade International, Organic, Rainforest Alliance and UTZ.

This is a conservative estimate, as the figure could be as high as 45%, if the coffee is not certified by multiple initiatives.

Single-sector standards continue to dominate

Market uptake is largely driven by standards directly targeting mainstream adoption within a specific sector. In each of the sectors discussed, where single-commodity standards have been developed (coffee, cotton, forestry, oil palm, sugarcane and soy), they are by far the largest standards. The dominance of single-commodity standards is particularly remarkable given that they tend to be the newest standards on the market, with the exception of the forestry sector.

Notes for the Editors

About The State of Sustainable Markets 2018: Statistics and Emerging Trends

The [State of Sustainable Markets 2018: Statistics and Emerging Trends](#) is the third joint report FiBL, IISD, and ITC. It offers a comprehensive snapshot of the market performance of global sustainability standards operating in eight products: bananas, cocoa, coffee, cotton, palm oil, soybeans, cane sugar, and tea. The report also covers forestry. The report funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

This report covers the following standards: 4C, Better Cotton Initiative, Bonsucro, Cotton made in Africa, Fairtrade International, Forest Stewardship Council, GLOBALG.A.P., IFOAM – Organics International, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes, ProTerra Foundation, Rainforest Alliance, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, the Round Table on Responsible Soy, and UTZ.

An interactive database featuring this information is available on ITC's [Sustainability Map](#) allowing policymakers, businesses, standards bodies and researchers access to customized, updated data on these markets.

About ITC - The International Trade Centre is the joint agency of the [World Trade Organization](#) and the [United Nations](#). ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the Aid-for-Trade agenda and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

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