

Farm practices must change to protect endangered species and habitats

ZURICH, June 27, 2017 — Sustainable agriculture practices must be widely implemented in order to stem an alarming loss of biodiversity and to protect endangered species.

This is according to the [Standards and Biodiversity](#) report released Tuesday by the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

Agricultural production currently accounts for 40 per cent of global land surface and is responsible for 70 per cent of projected losses in terrestrial biodiversity due to widespread land conversion, pollution and soil degradation.

“What happens in agriculture matters,” said Scott Vaughan, President-CEO, IISD. “Growing demand for certified products presents a major opportunity to protect our natural resources. The market is rewarding efforts to conserve critical habitats, protect soil and water quality, and mitigate the impacts of climate change. But market forces are not enough.”

The market value of certified agricultural products was estimated to be USD 52.5 billion in 2015 for eight major commodities (bananas, cotton, coffee, cocoa, tea, sugar, palm oil and soybeans) according to Standards and Biodiversity. That is up from USD 31.6 billion in 2012, the previous estimate by the [State of Sustainability Initiatives Review](#).

Two other major commodities—fisheries and forestry—also registered significant growth, according to the new estimates. The sustainable forestry market grew to 231.8 billion in 2015 from 200.3 billion in 2012. The sustainable fisheries market grew to USD 8.9 billion in 2015 from 6.8 billion in 2012. The total trade value of the top ten sustainable commodity markets grew to 293.2 billion in 2015 from 238.7 billion in 2012.

Some agricultural commodity markets are now dominated by sustainability standards. Half of global coffee production is standards-compliant, along with 30 per cent of cocoa production, 22 per cent of palm oil production and 18 per cent of global tea production.

The study forecasts that four other agricultural commodities—bananas, cotton, sugar and soybeans—will have compliance rates of at least 10 per cent by 2020.

However, standards remain a negligible force across global agricultural production as a whole. If those eight agricultural commodities became 100 per cent certified, the study found it would still only amount to 12 per cent of global agricultural land area.

“If voluntary standards are to play a major role in reducing the impacts of agriculture on biodiversity loss, they will have to, at a minimum, establish a significant presence among other crops—most notably, staple crops such as wheat, maize and rice,” said study author Jason Potts, a senior associate at IISD.

“The good news is that we can build political will to address biodiversity loss,” Potts added. “Parties of the UN’s Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are leading efforts to identify concrete solutions and immediate actions to achieve their biological diversity targets.”

The IISD study builds upon the CBD’s Biodiversity Impact Indicators for Commodity Production (BIICP), which identifies a core set of biodiversity indicators that can help governments and the agricultural industry understand how best to reduce negative impacts on biodiversity. The CBD Secretariat contributed to the development of the report.

“Voluntary sustainability standards are an important element of the necessary policy mix to redirect funding towards sustainable production practices and reducing biodiversity loss,” said Dr. Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, CBD. “This report makes an important contribution by providing a better understanding of the role and potential of different voluntary sustainability standards, and what policy-makers can do to promote their wider application and their more robust integration into overall policy frameworks.”

The study was released at ISEAL Alliance’s annual meeting—the [2017 Global Sustainability Standards Conference](#)—in Zurich, Switzerland. It identifies a wealth of information about specific commodities, such as:

- Cocoa certification appears to be well positioned to promote improved soil fertility where it matters most through a strong presence in countries facing soil fertility challenges.
- Coffee certification appears to be well positioned to limit the negative impacts on lakes and other water sources because standards are highly active in areas where the threat of eutrophication is most prominent.
- The banana sector may be approaching a “glass ceiling” on growth, as it is currently limited to the small portion of production that is traded internationally.
- Cotton certification appears to be under-represented in countries where cotton-related water use is most problematic: the expansion of certified cotton across Pakistan and India is strategically important.
- Palm oil certification is geographically focused where forest conversion is most problematic but may nevertheless have limited impact due to the scale of demand for conventional palm oil by Asian countries.
- Soy certification is most active in key areas of biodiversity vulnerability but has low adoption rates due to low demand for certified soy from Asia.
- Sugarcane certification is highly concentrated in Brazil, which has lower per-volume fertilizer use than other major producing countries. India, China,

Pakistan and Mexico represent strategic opportunities for the expansion of certified sugarcane aimed at protecting water quality.

- Tea production compliant with standards accounts for 18 per cent of global tea production (by volume) but only 13 per cent of global area under tea production, as it appears to be concentrated in higher-yielding production systems.

Please visit the study's [dedicated webpage](#) to view the full report and additional details. A related policy brief can be viewed [here](#).

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ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Established in 1990, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) is a non-partisan, charitable organization specializing in policy research and analysis, and information exchange. Through their head office in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and their branches in Ottawa, New York, and Geneva, the Institute champions sustainable development around the world through innovation, partnerships, research and communications. It is dedicated to engaging decision-makers in business, government, non-government organizations and academia on issues around economic and legal frameworks, energy and climate change, water, resilience, and knowledge.

IISD contributes to sustainable development by advancing policy recommendations on international trade and investment, economic policy, climate change and energy, natural and social capital, and the enabling role of communication technologies in these areas.

ABOUT THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 196 Parties so far, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing are supplementary agreements to the Convention. The Cartagena Protocol, which entered into force on 11 September 2003, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 170 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies. It entered into force on

12 October 2014 and to date has been ratified by 99 Parties. For more information visit:
www.cbd.int.

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