Summary of New Research on the Impacts of Rainforest Alliance Programs

Deforestation rates in the Rainforest Alliance certified “multiple use zone” of the Maya Biosphere Reserve were lower than deforestation rates in the neighboring protected area

This new analysis used satellite imagery to compare deforestation rates in the three zones of the Maya Biosphere Reserve: the core protected area (where logging is off limits), the multiple use zone (which includes FSC-certified community-managed forestry concessions) and the buffer zone (which allows a broad range of activities). The analysis showed that deforestation rates were 1% in the protected area, 0.04% in the multiple use zone, and 5.5% in the buffer zone.

In other words, FSC-certified forestry enterprises did a better job of keeping forests standing than the nearby protected area.

The full report (Hodgdon et al. 2015) can be downloaded from the RA website.

Rainforest Alliance certified coffee farms reduce forest degradation, increase on-farm forest cover, and enhance tree species diversity

The scale of these recent analyses suggest that RA certification can provide landscape level benefits in addition to on-farm benefits:

- In Ethiopia, forests surrounding RA-certified coffee farms were significantly less likely to be deforested than those around farms producing noncertified coffee or forest coffee (Takahashi & Todo 2013).
- On small RA-certified coffee farms in Santander, Colombia, in seven years farmers increased the area of on-farm tree cover by six hectares on average, compared to no change in tree cover on noncertified farms (Rueda et al. 2014).
- In Nicaragua, a study comparing two coffee producer organizations with a control group found that RA-certified producers had more trees per acre, more native species and more tree layers than large conventional farms (Haggar et al. 2012).
Compared with conventional farms, Rainforest Alliance certified cocoa farms had higher yields, better protection of water bodies, and improved farmer access to credit and education

Researchers examined the effect of RA certification on Ghanaian farmers through interviews and analysis of farm production data (Borg and Selmer 2012). They found that:

- RA-certified farmers experienced important improvements in productivity after certification. Cocoa farms with the longest certification history had the highest productivity.
- RA-certified farmers reported large decreases in deforestation, biodiversity loss, slashing and burning, soil depletion and cocoa disease.

In the interviews and discussion groups, non-certified farms did not report any improvements and said most of these issues were still challenges for them.

- RA certification led to progress in qualifying for credit, attracting workers, collaborating with other farmers, developing local communities, and improving training/education. Farmers on uncertified farms report no improvements in these areas and said that they faced challenges in all of them except collaboration.

Researchers compared RA-certified, UTZ and conventional cocoa farms in five communities in Ghana (Addae-Boadu 2014). They found that:

- RA-certified and UTZ farms protected water bodies better than conventional farms, due to more protective buffers.
- Profitability was highest on RA-certified farms, followed by UTZ and then conventional farms.
- Use of personal protective equipment and safe storage practices were similar on RA-certified and UTZ, but higher than conventional.

Researchers compared conventional farms in Ghana with four certification schemes: Rainforest Alliance, UTZ, Fair trade and Organic. They held interviews with 112 certified farmers, 69 non-certified farmers, and 47 laborers, along with focus groups and expert interviews (Deppeler et al 2014). They found that yields were higher on RA-certified farms than on uncertified farms (394 kg/ha vs. 251 kg/ha). Fairtrade and organic yields were slightly higher than RA; UTZ was slightly lower.

Citations:


Borg, J., & Selmer, J. K. (2012). From Ghana to Magnum Ice Cream : Chalmers University of Technology


