

IT'S (SUSTAINABLE) TEA TIME

First Steps in Transforming the Tea Industry

From its origins in China to its iconic status in the UK, Japan and many other countries, tea has long been one of the world's most popular drinks. Around the globe, more than six million acres (2.4 million hectares) of land are used for growing the *Camellia sinensis* plant, whose leaves are brewed to make black, green and other varieties of tea. The plant thrives in tropical and subtropical regions — which is why countries such as India, China, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Indonesia are among the leading producers of tea leaves. Tea is cultivated on both small farms and large plantations called “estates” or “gardens.”

Tea gardens — dense emerald carpets shimmering in the tropical light — please the eyes, but upon closer inspection, all is not so green. Like any tropical crop, tea farming can have a downside — both for the environment and for workers. Biodiversity-rich tropical forests have been replaced with a single-species monoculture. Tea cultivation can lead to soil erosion, competition for water and pollution from fertilizers, and the need for firewood to fuel tea dryers can result in further deforestation. Also, many tea workers lack employment security, health care, decent housing and the right to organize.

The global tea industry is also beset with problems. As demand has fallen behind supply, the price of tea has been dropping steadily for more than two decades, making it difficult for farmers to earn a living.



On Rainforest Alliance Certified farms, workers and their families have access to health care, schooling and decent housing.

In response, the Rainforest Alliance is working with tea growers and packers to put the industry on the path to sustainability. Following the model of our successful programs in coffee, bananas and other crops, we are introducing the standards of the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) — a coalition of leading conservation groups in which we are a partner — to tea growers, so that they can meet the social and environmental challenges of tea farming.



Tea is cultivated both by smallholders and on large plantations.

An Unprecedented Commitment

We began in Kenya, the world's largest exporter of black tea, which is cultivated on both small farms and large estates.

In 2007, Unilever, which buys close to 12 percent of the world's black tea supply, committed to purchasing all of its tea from sustainable sources. Unilever's major tea labels are Lipton, the world's best-selling tea, and PG Tips, the most popular tea in the UK.



OUR MISSION

The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior.

www.rainforest-alliance.org

Unilever's Kericho estate in Kenya is the world's first Rainforest Alliance Certified™ tea farm. This status was easy to achieve — the Kericho plantation has been using sustainable farming practices for more than a decade:

- Maintaining strict guidelines in areas such as pest management, tree planting, and use of renewable resources.
- Moving to protect workers from political and ethnic violence, paying them more than the minimum wage, and giving them and their families access to health care, schooling, decent housing and other benefits.
- Caring for area wildlife by conserving large forests and a monkey sanctuary and not using pesticides.

Two other estates — owned by Eastern Produce Group, a leading tea producer for whom Unilever is the biggest buyer, and Finlays, a prominent British tea producer — have also been certified.

“Unilever asked Eastern Produce to get certified to help build the supply of certified tea,” explains Edward Millard, the Rainforest Alliance's senior manager for sustainable landscapes, “because they want to have the highest possible percentage of certified



Local wildlife, like these Vervet monkeys, benefit from our comprehensive certification criteria.

tea in their blends.” Millard adds that like Unilever, Eastern Produce was able to quickly meet the SAN's standards because they had been developing sustainability for ten years, working with the Ethical Tea partnership, an industry association.

Unilever's first certified tea was made available to restaurants and caterers in Europe in August 2007. The company aims to have all of its Lipton Yellow Label and PG Tips tea bags sold in



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Western Europe certified by 2010, and all Lipton tea bags sold globally, by 2015.

Higher Earnings and Other Benefits Through Certification

The rewards of sustainable tea farming are not only environmental, but also economic. A key benefit of the certification program is to enable growers to obtain higher prices for their tea, thus raising their incomes and significantly improving their quality of life.

Most small farmers in Kenya sell their tea for a low price. The Rainforest Alliance is planning to work with the 218,000 members of the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA), an association of small tea farmers, to ensure that large estates are not the only beneficiaries of certification.

Unilever estimates that Rainforest Alliance Certified™ tea will command prices 10 to 15 percent higher than the current average, and that farmers will receive around \$2.69 million more for their tea by 2010 and around \$6.71 million more by 2015.

And to meet the rapidly growing interest in Rainforest Alliance Certified tea, other farms in Kenya, as well as in Tanzania, Indonesia, India and Argentina, have started to implement the SAN's standards.

“This has the potential to improve the livelihoods of nearly one million tea workers in Africa,” says Unilever CEO Patrick Cescau, “and eventually, of up to two million people around the world.”

Photos: D. Oliver

For more information about the Rainforest Alliance's sustainable agriculture program, please visit www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/agriculture



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