

FairWild and ISSC-MAP

Wild collection standards under one roof

At the last BioFach in Nuremberg the organisation, FairWild, organised a meeting to present the latest developments and current situation with respect to the implementation of Social and Ecological Standards for Wild Harvested Botanicals that supports the requirements of GACP and Organic Wild-crop Harvesting Practice Standard. These are known as the 'International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (ISSC-MAP) and the FairWild Standard'.

Josef Brinckmann, a member of the FairWild Foundation board, reports for TOS on the history of this initiative, the reasons for its existence, its present and future.

Following the passage of the organic regulations in the EU and USA, respectively, the organic certification of wild collected medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) and other wild plants or 'botanicals' became possible under a legal framework. As a result, in the past decade significant quantities of wild collected botanicals have been entering global commerce with organic certification.

Also over the past decade, Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACPs) for MAPs have been developed by a number of governmental and international governmental organisations, including European Medicines Agency, the Government of India National Medicinal Plants Board, State Drug Administration of the People's Republic of China, and the World Health Organization. In addition, GACP guidelines have been developed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as American Herbal Products Association, European Herb Growers Association, and European Herbal Infusions Association, amongst others.

On the social standards front, Fairtrade standards have been developed and implemented through the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO). However, these are for only a few specified 'cultivated' species (e.g. chamomile, ginger, hibiscus, mint, rooibos, tea, vanilla) that must be produced in certain specified developing countries (e.g. ginger from India or Sri Lanka only) and by certain specified types of producers (e.g. small-holder producers' groups).

As sustainable resource management systems interconnect elements of ecological, economical and social sustainability, it is difficult to evaluate ecological sustainability without considering the economical and social needs of the producer groups. Conversely, it is difficult to assess social sustainability of producer groups dependent on wild collection for their income, unless ecological and economical sustainability efforts are incorporated into the assessment.

Thus, the GACPs, organic and fair-trade standards are not able to adequately cover the regulation of wild harvest. However, there are

two further sustainability standards, specific to wild harvesting, the FairWild Standard and the International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (ISSC-MAP), that are not just complementary but also fill in some of these gaps. Additionally, these standards have useful applications that do not involve certification or products. In some countries, there are partners at provincial and national government agencies adapting the ISSC-MAP to resource management requirements. This is particularly important where collectors of resources on government-managed lands need to demonstrate sustainable levels of harvest in order to fulfil the requirements of collecting permits.

Many observations have been made and lessons learnt during this past decade, by certification bodies, nature conservation organisations, organic herbal medicinal product companies, and regulators. One of these is that implementation of GACPs and/or organic wild-crop standards, respectively, does not necessarily assure effective resource management, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable harvest, trade and use of wild species. Thus, in practice, gaps in the available standards necessitated the need to develop and implement ecological and social sustainability standards more specific to the wild collection of botanicals that are applicable to any plant species, through any type of producer group, and in any country of the world.

GACPs include some general sustainability requirements. For example, they state that the wild collection practices must ensure the long-term

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survival of wild plant populations and their associated habitats; that wild collection methods must not damage the environment, and must ensure optimum conditions for plant regeneration. But none of the available GACPs provide the wild harvesting enterprise with specific guidance on just how to meet these sustainability requirements.

The organic wild-crop standards also require that a wild crop must be harvested in a manner that ensures that the harvesting will not be destructive to the environment and will sustain its growth and production. Thus, for certification purposes, sustainable wild resource management is a legal mandate but no specific guidance is provided for the wild harvester or the inspector on how to demonstrate conformance to this regulatory requirement.

Another point to consider is the experience of the organic inspectors. The majority of inspectors are mainly trained to inspect farms with controlled cultivation and some may not have the requisite experience to inspect and certify sustainable resource management in diverse collection areas such as in deserts, forests, waterways, or alpine meadows. To their credit,

organic certification bodies have developed organic wild crop plan questionnaires and checklists, and some certifiers have also developed their own wild harvesting standards. But the assessing and auditing of certain harvesting sites, particularly sites in megabiodiversity areas, may require a multidisciplinary approach involving specialists in ecology and conservation biology to carry out resource assessments. While some certification bodies may have staff with the required skills, globally the inspection and certification of wild crops is not occurring according to any standardised criteria. Thus, until a standard approach with sufficient rigour for resource assessment is implemented, the organic certification of wild crops constitutes a risk to the integrity of the overall organic brand.

The FLO Standards for Herbs and Spices, and FLO Standards for Tea, respectively, were not developed in consideration of wild collected crops. Thus, for fairly traded wild collected medicinal plants, the existing Fairtrade Certification Standards are non-applicable. The FLO standards are species and region specific, and

are limited to only certain types of producer groups. In addition the wild collection of botanicals in European and North American countries, among other countries, falls outside of the scope of the FLO standards.

Why not just cultivate the herbs?

There are an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 MAP species used in traditional systems of medicine but only about 3,000 occur in global trade. About two-thirds of these are wild collected and are likely to continue to be wild collected in the future for various agronomic and economic reasons.

Most species that are easy to cultivate, about a thousand species, are already in cultivation, though many of these also continue to be wild-harvested if still available in their native habitats. For other species, cultivation would be costly in research and technical input, as well as land and agricultural inputs. Some medicinal plants take several years to reach maturity, for example, many require over four years and some over ten years before a first harvest is possible. A farmer would need to conduct a crop rotation over a few decades before it would

Principles of the ISSC-MAP

Wild collection and conservation requirements

- Maintaining wild resources
- Preventing negative environmental impacts

Legal and ethical requirements

- Compliance with laws, regulations, agreements
- Respecting customary rights

Management and business practices

- Applying good management practices
- Applying good business practices

Principles of the FairWild Standard

Preconditions to be fulfilled

- Sustainable harvesting practices (according to ISSC-MAP and/or organic principles)

Relation between collectors and collecting station

- Fair contractual relationship-company/collectors
- No discrimination
- Avoiding child labour
- Respecting customary rights
- Fair trade benefits for collectors' communities

Fair labour conditions for workers in the collection company

- Fundamental principles and rights at work
- Good and healthy working conditions

Obligations of FairWild companies towards their suppliers and buyers

- Fair and quality conscious trading behaviour

Obligations for buyers (importers, traders)

- Fair trade practices
- Fair prices and fair trade premium

be possible to determine whether a sustainable system, which is feasible and profitable, is possible. In addition, in the early years there would be no return on investment. Thus, such systems are unlikely to occur because farmers cannot generally afford such long-term speculation. In fact, it is unlikely that most MAP species will ever be cultivated on a commercial scale; therefore enabling sustainable wild collection is essential to the survival of these species. Moreover, cultivation may provide fewer environmental, social and economic benefits than wild collection of some MAP species. Wild collection of MAP secures valuable income for many rural households, especially in developing countries, and is an important factor in the source countries' local economies. Wild collection can also provide incentives for conservation and sustainable use of forests and other important plant areas.

Why the FairWild and ISSC-MAP standards are useful for demonstrating sustainability

Joint implementation of the FairWild Standard and ISSC-MAP addresses ecological, social, and economic requirements for sustainable wild collection of botanicals in a more comprehensive manner than any of the existing standards. The two standards can be applied individually or jointly as requested by the client and according to the collection situation. Box 1 summarises the principles of the ISSC-MAP and Box 2 the FairWild principles.

Inception of ISSC-MAP and FairWild Standards

The genesis of ISSC-MAP can be traced to 2004 when many of the founding members participated in the process to revise and update the 1993

WHO/IUCN/WWF Guidelines on the Conservation of Medicinal Plants. In the previous year many had also reviewed and commented on the WHO Guidelines on Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP) for Medicinal Plants, published in 2003. The 1993 Guidelines directly addressed ecological and socio-economic, and equity issues related to sustainable wild harvest. However, by 2003 they were recognised to be out of date. Also it was clear that 'guidelines' are not 'standards'.

Thus, in 2004, two separate groups, with common interests and cross memberships, began the development and test implementation of the:

- International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (ISSC-MAP), primarily an ecological sustainability standard with supporting elements of economical and social sustainability.
- FairWild Standard, primarily a social standard with supporting elements of ecological and economical sustainability.

The founders of the FairWild Standard all served as members of the ISSC-MAP advisory and/or decision groups throughout the development and implementation phases so there was much cross over. Right at the start of the process, some overlaps became apparent. For example, applicability of the FairWild Standards included the ecological requirement that operations must be certified organic and show progress in activities for compliance with ISSC-MAP requirements. The FairWild Standards also have an absolute requirement for operations to initially comply with ISSC-MAP Principle 4, which is to respect customary rights and benefits sharing. The process of developing

the ISSC-MAP initially focused on ecological sustainability (species and habitat requirements), but it was soon realised that ethical issues (land tenure, access and benefit sharing, fair business practices) profoundly influence the success of ecological objectives. Thus, Principles 4 and 6 of the ISSC-MAP (Respecting customary rights; and Applying responsible business practices) overlap with fairtrade principles. For example, ISSC-MAP Criterion 6.5 specifies worker safety and compensation with four indicators, including equitable payment between men and women.

Development of the ISSC-MAP was supported by a partnership that included the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), the Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (MPSG) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission (SSC), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Germany), and TRAFFIC (the wildlife trade monitoring network and joint programme of IUCN and WWF), plus industry associations, companies, certifiers, and community-based NGOs. Development of the FairWild Standard was initiated by SIPPO (Swiss Import Promotion Programme) and financed in cooperation with Forum Essenzia e.V. The Institute for Marketecology (IMO) was significantly involved in professional support to the development of the Standard.

Although IMO is the only certification body authorised to audit and certify thus far, FairWild Foundation intends to accredit other interested and qualified agencies to conduct inspections to both standards. IMO has invested significant resources towards developing a strong certification system that will benefit other certifiers. Certification is based on resource

assessment, the management plan, sustainable collecting practices, cost calculation along the supply chain, traceability of goods and finances, and documented fair trading practices. Currently the criteria/indicators are being translated into control points/checklist defining entry-level and next steps required to fulfil the criteria. The steps needed to assist enterprises seeking certification to gradually improve practices are under development.

Launch of the standards

In February 2007 at BioFach Germany, WWF-Germany and BfN officially launched the ISSC-MAP Version 1 at a press conference. Also at BioFach, SIPPO hosted a seminar titled 'Facing the Challenges of Implementing Wild Collection in a Socially and Ecologically Sustainable Way', wherein the FairWild Standard and certification requirements were presented. The following month, ISSC-MAP was introduced in the USA at the AHPA General Membership meeting during Natural Products Expo West.

Under one roof

In October 2008, at the IUCN IV World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain, an agreement was signed between the four founding institutions of the ISSC-MAP to endorse global implementation of the standard through the newly established FairWild Foundation. The FairWild Foundation Board of Trustees (BoT) has since been established, the secretariat is provided by WWF Germany and TRAFFIC International, and the technical committees are being organised. While there are BoT members and technical committee members associated with the founding organisations for both standards, they now serve as individuals and do not represent the founding organisations. It was BfN

that initially provided the idea of a standard for sustainable wild collection of MAPs and provided the funding to develop ISSC-MAP version 1.0. At this time, BfN continues to support the secretariat. MPSG members contribute much of the technical input to ISSC-MAP and facilitate links between ISSC-MAP/FairWild to international organisations/conventions such as WHO, the Biodiversity Convention, and CITES.

First certified products

A few wild harvest enterprises, from Europe to Central Asia, have met the minimum entrance criteria for FairWild certification, meeting the fairtrade requirements for the social certification component and organic wild-crop certification as the minimum indicator for the ecological component. While some sites have undergone preliminary ISSC-MAP audits, a checklist with a rating system is presently under development with the aim of helping enterprises move from the minimum of organic-wild towards the more rigorous ISSC-MAP.

As a result, certified finished herbal products should begin to appear in the European and North American markets by late 2009. These initial products will be certified on the basis of meeting the fairtrade and organic wild requirements. As the checklist for ISSC-MAP compliance is still in development, this module will be gradually implemented in a stepwise approach over a few years. The companies that have made a license agreement with FairWild Foundation have agreed to pay not only a 'fairer' price

– above the normal organic wild price – for the harvested crop, but also pay an annual license fee based on turnover of FairWild products as well as an annual fair-trade premium to encourage social development of the wild collectors' communities. Products that contain at least 75% FairWild Certified ingredients may bear the FairWild logo. Product containing less than 75% can declare 'contains FairWild ingredients'.

The FairWild Foundation hopes that the major beneficiaries from the application of the standards are the wild collection communities, who will be supported and rewarded for implementing these sustainable collection practices in partnership with their trade partners up through the supply chain. The marketing of FairWild certified ingredients and finished products will benefit companies who support ecological and social best-practice throughout the supply chain from processors and wholesale ingredient distribution companies to finished product marketers and manufacturers, finished product distributors and retailers of certified products. ■

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For more information see: www.fairwild.org

*The FairWild Standard is available at:
www.forum-essenzia.org/PDFs/FairWild-Standards.pdf*

The ISSC-MAP is available at: www.floraweb.de/proxy/floraweb/MAP-pro/Standard_Version1_0.pdf

A follow-up article on the FairWild certification and the development of the ISSC-MAP certification system will be published in a future issue of TOS.

Ethical issues profoundly influence the success of ecological objectives. ■