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Third Party Socio-environmental Certifications: A New Perspective for Small-scale Coffee Producers in Honduras?

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Abstract

The coffee value chain has evolved rapidly over the past decades. On one hand, the consumers in industrial countries have become more aware and educated on social-environmental concerns. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of companies and corporations promoting clean production, enforcing the compliance with social and environmental regulations among coffee producers. These third party certifications have an impact on the price of the coffee, usually favouring small-scale producers. Nevertheless, many coffee producers in Honduras consider the process of complying with standards and acquiring certifications as complex and all the requisites and costs involved seem too confusing. The study focused on identifying the main causes that limit the participation of coffee producers in western Honduras in the process of third-party socio-environmental certification of their farms. The results indicate that the limited information on the characteristics of these markets, the high implementation costs, the lack of a national policy promoting certifications and a cultural weakness of keeping records and registries at the farm level are the main causes hindering the acquisition of certifications (ej. Organic, Fair Trade, Utz Certified, Rainforest Alliance, Starbucks C.A.F.E. Practices). Coffee producers regard these causes as external to their production activities, but recognise that there is an internal responsibility that must be undertaken in order to find solutions or options in order to participate in these markets. Because the monetary benefits are not immediately palpable, they do not consider acquiring certifications a priority. Finally, the promotion of the Participatory Guarantee System as a tool to access local and international coffee markets in substitution of third-party certification programs was explored.

Keywords: Coffee, Honduras, participatory guarantee system, third-party certification