



Tropentag, September 18-20, 2019, Kassel

“Filling gaps and removing traps  
for sustainable resource management”

## The Food Security Standard: It Fills a Gap but has some Traps

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### Abstract

Sustainability standards address risks and problems in international agricultural value chains. Despite certifying agricultural goods that are produced in food insecure countries, most standards do not particularly address food security. A consortium of the University of Bonn and the NGOs Welthungerhilfe and WWF therefore developed the “Food Security Standard” (FSS) which includes a set of criteria and indicators that can be integrated into any sustainability standard. The FSS is tested in five pilot countries with different crops on plantations and in smallholder settings in Asia, Latin-America and Africa. The accompanying research identifies means to easily measure food security at local and national level. It further analyses the applicability of the FSS, its legitimacy and reliability of results. Over 25 key persons were interviewed, more than 80 farmers and workers and six multi-stakeholder workshops conducted in five pilot countries and Germany.

Results show that the FSS can be integrated into a normal audit of a sustainability standard and does not require significant additional efforts. With structured interviews and clear criteria and indicators, the FSS is able to reliably capture the food security situation of workers, farmers and communities and identifies gaps. While plantations are expected to be able to comply with the FSS requirements, only better-off smallholder farmers are probably able to meet all criteria, though still might need some external support. Plantations, smallholder organisations or their representatives indicated their willingness to implement the FSS but not without market demand and price premiums.

Severely food insecure farmers are not expected to be able to comply with the FSS. To avoid their exclusion from (sometimes lucrative) markets, an option is to set up a “Food Security Sensitive Management”, keeping the idea of the FSS. This alternative approach should include all actors along the value chain to uptake and proof their responsibility for food security when buying sustainability certified products from hungry smallholders. The question of how much the private sector can contribute to increase smallholders’ food security, how to avoid “green washing” on social issues and how compliance with the FSS could progressively be achieved, needs further investigation and stakeholder discussions.

**Keywords:** Certification, plantation, smallholder, sustainability standard