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“Can agroecological farming feed the world?  
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

## Analysis of the potential of environmental and social standards for strategy and economic performance of food processing SMEs in Central Asia

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### Abstract

Natural forests of Central Asia (CA) play an essential role in the livelihoods of surrounding populations. The products harvested from those forests, such as walnuts, mushrooms, wild fruits, berries, firewood, medicinal plants, hay, and other non-timber forest products (NTFP), constitute a primary source of income and livelihood for many private households in the region. Because of this, rural communities often extract NTFPs in high amounts, thus, overexploiting and destroying local forests. Integrating agroforestry (AF) practices could be a worthwhile alternative to bring significant environmental and economic benefits. Especially within the context of the growing global trend toward the consumption of properly grown and processed healthy food and a rising standard of living and awareness of the population of CA. However, small and medium farmers and processing enterprises (SMEs) often do not fully exploit and benefit from such opportunities due to limited knowledge and funding, uneven value distribution, uncoordinated public policies, and the absence of standards for most local AF and NTFP food products. A solution that can benefit and bridge environmental and social goals in AF integration is integrating environmental and social standards. Based on the above, the current research aims to analyse the extent and economic benefits of environmental and social standards for the strategy and economic performance of AF and NTFP food processing SMEs in CA.

This paper consists of several sections. First, the paper will provide a literature review to understand how various environmental and social standards affect different participants in the food value chain. Then, the analysis of the current situation related to environmental and social standards in CA will be presented. Last, the empirical part will provide the analysis of local NTFP and AF producers based on the comparative case study method and the research of demand for the AF environmentally and socially sustainable products based on a market survey.

Based on the findings of the research, theoretical and practical implications are expected in the form of developing 1) a model for the certification of agri-food SMEs according to selected standards and 2) a basis for monetizing selected standards for the benefit of AF systems.

**Keywords:** Agri-food processors, agroforestry, Central Asia, certification, environmental and social standards, non-timber forest products, SME