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Biodiversity in Standards and Labels for the Food Industry

Background

The loss of biodiversity is one of the biggest challenges of our times. Human activities are driving species loss 1000 times faster than it would have been under normal circumstances. Many ecosystems, which provide us essential resources, are at a risk of collapsing.

Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is not simply an environmental issue but it is a key requirement for our nutrition, production processes, services and the overall quality of life. In combination with the agricultural sector, food producers and retailers have a great impact on biodiversity. Unfortunately, biodiversity protection does not lie in their main interests yet. In general, the interactions between human activity and biodiversity are complex. And due to this complexity, reducing negative effects on nature in the complete supply chain of a food product - from the field to the shelf - poses a challenge.

Standards and labels for the food industry help qualify certain attributes of a product and the process of production itself. They guide consumers with information about the quality of products, their footprint and impact on nature.

The environmental foundations Global Nature Fund and Lake Constance Foundation analyzed 19 standards and labels in the food sector. The results show a clear need for action. So far, biodiversity related criteria rarely go beyond the common approach of good agricultural practices; they are often unclear in their formulation and take into account the causes of biodiversity loss only partially. Often, auditors and certification companies do not have the necessary knowledge needed to classify and supervise the measures taken for biodiversity protection. Plus none of the analyzed standards monitor the effect of their measures.

Project Objectives

The main project objective is to improve the biodiversity performance of standards and labels within the food industry by a) supporting standard-setting organizations to include efficient biodiversity criteria into their schemes; and b) motivating food processing companies and retailers to include biodiversity criteria into their sourcing guidelines.

This is achieved through

- Trainings for certifiers and auditors as well as the responsible personnel in companies.
- Development and implementation of a universal monitoring system for biodiversity.
- Dissemination of results and information to the food sector and standard-setting organizations.

A European-wide initiative on “Biodiversity in Standards and Labels of the Food Sector” will continue working on the topic even after this project ends in 2020.



Actions and means involved

Forty standards and food labels will be evaluated for their biodiversity criteria and a **baseline report** will be formulated. The report will be discussed with different actors of the food business and **recommendations for the improvement of the criteria** will be given. Interested standards organizations and companies will be advised in the revision of their criteria. In addition, an "Easy Guide" will be published on biodiversity criteria in standards, labels and corporate guidelines in Spanish, French, Portuguese, English and German.

With the help of a newly developed **Biodiversity Performance Tool (BPT)**, the current situation and the further development for biodiversity protection on farms will be analyzed. Through a pilot project involving farms in cereal cultivation (Germany), tomato cultivation (Spain), olive production (Spain), in grasslands used for meat production (Portugal) and grasslands used for milk production and dairy products (France), the BPT will be tested. The final version of the BPT will be made available for **certifiers, assessors and product managers**. They will also be involved in a **training program** to strengthen their knowledge and expertise on biodiversity.

Finally, a **monitoring-system and database** tracking the biodiversity performance at farm level will be set up. Standard-setting and label organizations will be informed and invited to join the common monitoring approach. Using this database, standard-setting organizations and companies will be able to monitor the positive effects and improve upon their criteria and measures. Agreements will be made with standard-setting organizations and companies to implement the monitoring system.

The project results will be disseminated to standard-setting organizations, companies with own specific requirements, food processing companies, environmental organizations and authorities at the national and European level. Amongst other means, trade fairs and events will be used to further advocate the tool, and the need to set up biodiversity based monitoring systems.

Furthermore a sector specific initiative called "**Biodiversity Performance in the Food Sector**" will be created until 2020. The aim of this initiative is to raise the biodiversity performance by using commonly accepted and implemented priority criteria for biodiversity within the whole food sector. This initiative will help facilitate regular exchange among representatives from the food industry, standard-setting organizations and other stakeholders. The monitoring system will be eventually handed over to the coordinators of the Biodiversity Performance Initiative.

Contact

Global Nature Fund
Stefan Hörmann
Kaiser-Friedrich Str. 11
53113 Bonn
+49 (0)228 - 1848694-11
hoermann@globalnature.org

Bodensee-Stiftung
Marion Hammerl
Fritz-Reichle-Ring 4
78315 Radolfzell
+49 (0)7732 - 9995-45
marion.hammerl@bodensee-stiftung.org



www.food-biodiversity.eu

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