

Voluntary Standards for Sustainable Food Systems: Challenges and Opportunities

A Workshop of the FAO/UNEP
Programme on Sustainable Food Systems



Voluntary Standards for Sustainable Food Systems: Challenges and Opportunities

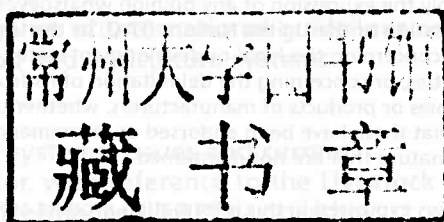
A Workshop of the FAO/UNEP
Programme on Sustainable Food Systems

11–12 June 2013

FAO headquarters, Rome

Edited by

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and
Suzanne Redfern



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Rome, 2014

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Acknowledgements

The joint FAO/UNEP Workshop on Voluntary Standards for Sustainable Food Systems: Challenges and Opportunities was organized by the Sustainable Food Systems Programme and held on 10–11 June 2013 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy.

We would like to extend our special thanks to all the participants for their contributions and papers. Our appreciation is also expressed to the organizers of this Workshop – Fanny Demassieux, James Lomax, Alexandre Meybeck, Suzanne Redfern, Pilar Santacoloma, Allison Loconto, Irene Hoffmann, Sandro Dernini and Maryam Rezaei. Particular thanks are extended to Ren Wang, FAO Assistant Director-General. In addition, we are grateful to the Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture for their generous support in the preparation of this document.

This workshop will try to answer five crucial questions that could facilitate the uptake and implementation of VSS: (1) how to make them work for farmers and small food producers; (2) how can VSS be used to enable green trade opportunities, particularly in agri-food products not currently using VSS; (3) how to make them work for consumers globally; (4) how to make it work for the private sector; and (5) what is the role for public sector.

Monday, 10 June 2013

08:00–08:30 Opening remarks

FAO: Ren Wang, Assistant Director General, Agriculture and Consumer Services Department

UNEP: Fanny Demassieux, Executive Director, Subprogramme

Egyptian: W. El-Had, Responsible Consumption Unit, Division of Technology, Industry and Environment, United Nations Environment Programme

08:30–09:30 SESSION 1: OVERVIEW OF VSS

Chile: Roberto Aguilera, Director of Sustainable Agriculture

Department, President Head Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Costa Rica

• VSS as voluntary specified rules standards

• Definitions and meanings, diversity of standards

• Types and contribution of standards to consumption and production

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Agenda

The FAO/UNEP joint programme is catalysing partnerships among United Nations agencies, other international agencies, governments, industry and civil society whose activities, together, can promote the necessary transition to sustainability.

An Agri-food Task Force (ATF) on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) has been established, comprised of representatives of Member States, United Nations agencies, the private sector and civil society, and clusters of activities are being designed in response to stakeholders' stated needs. In order to provide the members of the ATF with information for preparing the work of the various activity clusters, the FAO-UNEP Programme is organizing workshops on various technical issues.

As a topic in relation with all the activity clusters, a first workshop on voluntary standards for sustainability (VSS) will be organized on 10–11 June 2013 (one day and half), in the Iran room, at FAO headquarters, Rome. The aim of the workshop is to examine various types of standards and labels and to build upon lessons learned from concrete examples to identify issues and challenges to be addressed, discuss their potential contribution to improve sustainability of food systems, and propose measures in order to improve their effectiveness.

The workshop will try to answer five crucial questions that could facilitate the uptake and scaling-up of VSS: (1) how to make them work for farmers and small food producers; (2) how can VSS be used to enable green trade opportunities, particularly in agri-food products not currently using VSS; (3) how to make them work for consumers globally; (4) how to make it work for the private sector; and (5) what is the role for public actors.

Monday, 10 June 2013

- 09.30 – 10.00 Opening remarks
 FAO: Ren Wang, Assistant Director-General, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department
 UNEP: Fanny Demassieux, Resource Efficiency Subprogramme Coordinator & Head, Responsible Consumption Unit, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, United Nations Environment Programme
- 10.00 – 11.30 SESSION 1: OVERVIEW OF VSS
 Chair: Roberto Azofeifa, , Director of Sustainable Agriculture Department, Extension Head Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Costa Rica
- What are voluntary sustainability standards?
 - Definitions and meanings, diversity of standards
 - Targets and contribution to sustainable consumption and production

- Comparison and assessments of voluntary sustainability standards through examples from partner projects
- 10.00 – 10.15 Nexus between private and public food standards: main issues and perspectives (Pilar Santacoloma, FAO, Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division)
- 10.15 – 10.30 Objectives and challenges of the UN forum on sustainability standards (UNFSS) (Frank Grothaus, UNCTAD, on behalf of UNFSS)
- 10.30 – 10.45 Lessons from the past and the emergence of international guidelines on sustainability assessment of food and agriculture systems (Nadia El-Hage Scialabba, FAO, Department of Natural Resources)
- 10.45 – 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.00 – 11.15 Common metrics of sustainable food systems: issues and current developments in the livestock sector (Pierre Gerber, FAO, Livestock Information, Sector Analysis and Policy Branch)
- 11.15 – 11.45 Questions and Answers
- 11.45 – 13.00 **SESSION 2: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD: PROJECTS RELATED TO FOOD VOLUNTARY STANDARDS**
Chair: Li Xiande, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Institute of Agricultural Economics and Development
 - Success stories, challenges and areas needing specific actions that should be undertaken at various levels
- 11.45 – 12.15 Lessons learned from field projects on voluntary standards (Pilar Santacoloma, Allison Loconto, Nadia Scialabba, Carmen Bullon, Emilie Vandecandelaere, Cora Dankers and Anne Sophie Poisot, FAO).
- 12.15 – 12.30 Stories behind quality labels around the Mediterranean countries (Annarita Antonelli, International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, CIHEAM-IAMB)
- 12.30 – 13.00 Questions and Answers
- 13.00 – 14.30 Lunch
- 14.30 – 15.30 **SESSION 3: HOW TO MAKE SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS WORK FOR FARMERS AND SMALL FOOD PRODUCERS**
Chair: Sávio Jose Barros de Mendonça, Director for Production Systems and Sustainability, Ministry of Agriculture, Brazil
 - How to make voluntary standards inclusive and efficient (ensuring social and economic sustainability) for smallholders? What is needed to facilitate the implementation of these tools, especially how to make them accessible to farmers and small-scale food producers, including possibilities to facilitate mutual recognition of schemes?
- 14.30 – 14.45 Voluntary standards: impacting smallholders' market participation (Allison Loconto, FAO, Agribusiness Economist, Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division).

- 14.45 – 15.00 Geographical indications as a tool for sustainable food systems: importance of territorial approach (Emilie Vandecandelaere, FAO, Economic and Social Development Department. Food Safety Unit)
- 15.00 – 15.30 Questions and Answers
- 15.30 – 17.15 **SESSION 4: WHAT INTEREST AND ROLE FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR**
Chair: Sávio Jose Barros de Mendonça, , Director for Production Systems and Sustainability, Ministry of Agriculture, Brazil
- What are the incentives for the private sector stakeholders to come on board. Examples of use of these tools by private sector or initiatives by private sector to optimise their use
- 15.30 – 15.45 FAO's vision on how to engage the private sector (Annamaria Pastore, FAO, Office of Communications, Partnership and Advocacy).
- 15.45 – 16.00 Development and use of FAO guidelines of eco labelling of fish and aquaculture certification (Iddya Karunasagar, FAO, Products, Trade and Marketing Service)
- 16.00 – 16.15 Survey on (private) voluntary standards in the livestock sector (Irene Hoffmann, FAO, Animal Genetic Resources Branch)
- 16.15 – 16.30 Coffee break
- 16.30 – 16.45 Sustainable nutrition and consumer communication (Anne Roulin, Nestlé)
- 16.45 – 17.15 Questions and Answers
- 17.15 – 18.15 **SESSION 5: WHAT INTEREST AND ROLE FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR**
Chair: Krishna Kumar Singh, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Department of Agricultural Research and Education, India
- How to ensure the provision of reliable and valuable information to consumers in relation to the voluntary standards?
 - How to increase consumers' awareness and trust in voluntary standards and labels to foster more sustainable food consumption patterns?
- 17.15 – 17.30 PDOs' role in reassuring consumers: the "Parmigiano Reggiano Terremotato" (PR-T) case (Corrado Finardi, Coldiretti).
- 17.30 – 17.45 Voluntary standards and ecolabels as information tools for consumers (Alexandre Meybeck, FAO, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department)
- 17.45 – 18.15 Questions and Answers

Tuesday, 11 June 2013

- 9.30 – 10.45 **SESSION 6: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC ACTORS?**
 Chair: Unati Speirs, Director: Agro-Processing, Department of Trade & Industry, South Africa
- Which role public (international and national) actors can potentially play in improving governance (two main of its principles transparency and participation) in the standards setting process
 - What can public actors do to improve impacts of voluntary standards? The enabling conditions necessary to allow voluntary sustainability standards to work and to facilitate stakeholders's engagement
- 9.30 – 9.45 How can voluntary sustainability standards play a role in South-South food commodity supply chains? The case of the rice sector (James Lomax, UNEP).
- 9.45 – 10.00 Ongoing experiences in Costa Rica: the Ecological Blue Flag Program (Roberto Azofeifa, Ministry of Agriculture, Costa Rica)
- 10.00 – 10.15 Sustainable public procurement and sustainability standards: challenges and strategies (Norma Tregurtha, ISEAL)
- 10.15 – 10.30 Roles of public actors in the voluntary standards (Dominique Barjolle, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL and Emilie Vandecastelaere, FAO)
- 10.30 – 10.45 Questions and Answers
- 10.45 – 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.00 – 12.30 Discussions on priority actions for sustainable food systems
 Chair: Erizal Jamal
- 12.30 – 12.45 Conclusions

Summary report and main conclusions

The sessions of the workshop considered voluntary standards from points of views in order to better understand and address the needs of the various stakeholders in order to facilitate the uptake and scaling up of voluntary standards for sustainable food systems. This approach is grounded on the idea that for voluntary standards to work for sustainability they have to work for all stakeholders.

The first session considered an overview of voluntary sustainability standards. Presentations stressed the multiplication of schemes, the growing importance of the private sector as a standard setter, increasing linkages between the private and public sectors and the need for more coordination including at international level. They also showed the need for an integrated holistic assessment of sustainability, including its three dimensions and backed up by strong evidence-based analysis, agreed upon by all stakeholders. The discussion focused on the standards adoption process and the need to involve all stakeholder and particularly smallholders. It also questioned certification procedures and ways to reduce costs, including by facilitating mutual recognition and self-certification. It finally recognized the need to better understand drivers of adoption and to assess the various impacts of the standards.

The second session was devoted to analyses of lessons learned from projects related to the implementation of voluntary standards. The session enabled to identify critical points for success with a focus on implementation and adoption of the standard by farmers. Identification of market opportunities is a crucial preliminary step. It should include local markets, often more easily accessible. Farmers capacity to engage in the process is key at every stage, from the initial design to implementation. It is facilitated by the existence of organisation of farmers and by appropriate training and capacity building. A bottom up approach, with a dialogue involving local stakeholders is essential as well as adaptation to local contexts. The discussion stressed the need to have a long term approach and to clearly identify support needs, which could include specific incentives. It was also mentioned that in some cases there is a need to include a food cost accounting analysis as a means to move forward and show that some actions and practices which could be perceived as costly, in the short run, also generate long term benefits, including for instance reduction of environmental impact and employment generation.

The third session considered relations between voluntary standards and smallholders. A literature review of the impact of voluntary standards on smallholders' ability to participate to markets found that most empirical evidence is limited to the analysis of mainly three standards GlobalGAP, fair trade and organic. Most studies focus on two commodities: coffee and horticulture products. While there is an acceptable range of geographic cover, the majority of studies focus on a handful of countries: Mexico, Kenya, Peru, Costa Rica and Uganda. The results can be summarized as follows: first, equitable and sustainable supply chain linkages, increased access to assets and support for cooperative development

are incentives for complying with standards. Second, both public and private actors have comparative advantages for supporting voluntary standards and are most effective when combined. Finally, governments can provide services, for example infrastructure and proper legislation, that facilitate the inclusion of smallholders in certified value chains. The example of geographical indications shows how a strong involvement of producers and especially smallholders can enhance positive impacts and adoption. The discussion stressed that benefits of voluntary standards for smallholders are very much context dependant and that price effects are only part of them. Direct benefits of the implementation of the practices themselves have to be factored in. It also emphasized the need to involve producers in standard setting to have it fit their needs and capacities. A key question is then to have these national standards recognised by export markets. The contribution of geographical indications to sustainability was extensively discussed. There is no doubt that they are voluntary standards. Strictly speaking they do not present themselves as sustainability standards but generally encompass elements that are meant to preserve natural resources. Moreover, they explicitly involve producers in their design and implantation, which contributes to social and economic sustainability.

The fourth session was devoted to the interest and role of the private sector. It looked at the various incentives that encourage private sector stakeholders to participate and provided examples of the tools available. Session Four started with a presentation on UN Global compact on how to engage private sector. The presentations provided information with regard to the certification guidelines for the fish and aquaculture sector; they discussed surveys that have been conducted within the private sector on available standards in the livestock sector; and Nestle's tools on sustainable nutrition and consumer communication (RISE and ECODEX and QR code) and also provided detailed information with regard to databases that are available to try, by working together with suppliers, to share practices in sustainability and to ensure that the activity of long-term supply of agricultural materials is safe, quality tested and complies with rules and regulations. The discussion stressed the need to devise information tools which are adapted to the various stakeholders. For example how could the tools being designed by the European roundtable be used in other contexts. Interventions highlighted in particular the need to adapt the information given to consumers to enable them to use it.

The fifth session focused on the role of voluntary standards as information tools for consumers. It considered the drivers of consumer choices. Schemes focused on very diverse issues are opening choices for concerned consumers. But the multiplication of standards along with ambiguous information about them can be confusing. Therefore there is a need to provide reliable and usable information on standards and labels themselves to build trust and enable consumers to make effective choices. The discussion stressed the need to avoid multiplication of schemes and facilitate their convergence. It was mentioned that some retailers are creating their own sustainability labels. This could transform some schemes from business to consumer types of communication to business to business, retailers assuming the communication to consumers.

The sixth session considered the role of public actors in the design and implementation of voluntary standards for sustainability. Public actors can play a crucial role to provide an

enabling legal framework, convene stakeholders to initiate action, and provide support and incentives. Interventions highlighted the importance of a participatory approach supported by adequate capacity building. Public procurement can play a decisive role, directly as a form of incentive and also indirectly to recognize and promote specific schemes. The discussion mentioned the need to consider also other tools and incentives than voluntary standards. It emphasized the importance of policy congruence and public/private dialogue and approaches.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

The various sessions of the workshop considered voluntary standards for sustainability from different points of view. They enabled the identification of some major points:

- There is a multiplication of voluntary standards in the food sector. This multiplicity can be a source of additional costs and barriers to trade. It calls for greater coordination, including mutual recognition. Public actors, national and international, have a role to play to facilitate such coordination.
- Most of the voluntary standards labelled as “sustainability standards” include only some aspects of sustainability. There is a need to assess food chains more holistically. There is also a need to better understand and assess impacts of a specific voluntary standard in a specific context. The implementation of a specific voluntary standard has often other impacts, both positive and negative, than the one it is explicitly aiming for.
- In particular voluntary standards do not always provide positive economic and social impacts for smallholders. First of all it is not always the best tool to be used. It depends on products and contexts and requires analysis beforehand including the identification of potential markets. Their implementation then requires an enabling legal framework, capacity building and appropriate adapted support. A crucial element is the involvement of producers in the very design and implementation of the scheme. Key to it is organization of producers and smallholders, including women.
- Voluntary standards are key tools to share information with consumers in order to enable them to drive production by their choices. Their effectiveness depends on better understanding the drivers of consumers’ choices and on providing consumers with clear information both through the schemes and about the schemes. It also very much depends on business models that are product and context specific.

Opening remarks

Ren Wang

Assistant Director-General

Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department, FAO, Rome

Excellencies,

Honorable Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to open this first workshop organized by the FAO-UNEP Sustainable Food Systems Programme (SFSP).

As you know, sustainable food systems will be discussed next week during the FAO Conference, and it is also the theme of World Food Day this year. Last year, the Committee on World Food Security requested its High Level Panel of Experts to prepare a report on food losses and waste in the context of sustainable food systems.

FAO welcomes such a systemic approach of sustainability. Ongoing work in the various divisions of this department, on crops, on livestock, on food chains and food quality, shows how sustainable consumption can be a driver of sustainable production. It also shows how the various dimensions of sustainability – environmental, social and economic – interact, often in complex ways. Finally, it shows how multistakeholder approaches are crucial to understand and improve sustainability of food systems.

The SFSP is a unique collaboration between the leading intergovernmental agencies in the areas of food, agriculture and the environment. It highlights the catalysing role that UN agencies can play and the importance of UN interagency cooperation in promoting and implementing sustainable consumption and production (SCP) policies and initiatives.

The SFSP brings together a broad coalition of concerned stakeholders, including governments, food and fish producers, agro-industry, retailers and consumers. Activities are being designed by this Task Force in response to stakeholders' stated needs, and individual stakeholders and development partners will select in which activities they wish to engage.

The choice of this theme, "Voluntary standards for sustainability", as a first workshop is particularly significant. It stresses the importance of the link between sustainable consumption and sustainable production and the role of consumption as a driver.

Voluntary standards are very often seen as the solution, the tool to make consumption and production more sustainable. They can deliver positive economic, environmental or social impacts, but they can also present challenges, particularly for small-scale producers.

FAO has a long history of work on voluntary standards.

The aim of our work on voluntary standards is to contribute to mechanisms for ensuring that the interests of the public sector and smaller-scale stakeholders are addressed in the development and application of public and private voluntary standards.

FAO provides expertise on standards for food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry. It works with partners to benchmark, analyse, share knowledge and provide guidance on voluntary standards in the following ways.

Analysing trends in and impacts of voluntary standards.

Disseminating information about voluntary standards through online portals and other communication tools, including Web sites.

Building capacity of policy-makers and private stakeholders through field projects.

Setting up global tools, guidelines and benchmarking systems for use by the private and public sectors.

Providing policy guidance to member countries on identifying priorities related to voluntary standards through advice on national policies, regulatory frameworks and strategies that can enhance food quality.

Building partnerships.

FAO has a long experience in the preparation of standards in the World Trade Organizations' (WTO) Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures.

But most importantly this workshop is focused on lessons learned, on better understanding the needs of all actors, the challenges to be addressed to make voluntary standards work better for sustainability, and work better for all actors. It is a condition for success. I very much welcome the fact that this workshop directly feeds into the work of the Task Force, towards action.

Nexus between public and private food standards: main issues and perspectives

Pilar Santacoloma

FAO Rural Infrastructure and Agro-industries Division

ABSTRACT

The governance of global food safety and quality, traditionally in the hands of intergovernmental agencies, is seen to be challenged by the relative importance and rapid proliferation of private food standards used in global supply chains. Concerns have been raised that this challenge may lead to the exclusion of smallholders and poor countries from market opportunities derived from globalization. However, research has shown that the governance mechanisms that rule private and public voluntary standards are not independent but rather are mutually entrenched as a response to policy, social and economic dynamics (Gulbrandsen, 2012; Bernstein and Cashore, 2007). This paper explores first how these entrenched mechanisms are related at a global level. It then discusses some evidence of the impacts of voluntary food standards on the inclusiveness of certified supply chains and the alternatives that developing countries have put in place to overcome exclusion impacts. The paper concludes with examples of governance interactions between private and public standards found at an international level.

INTRODUCTION

A better understanding of the interactions between public and private food standards requires an examination of the functions that make standards operational and the different governance mechanisms and actors involved in these functions (Henson and Humphrey, 2009). Before that, it will be useful to clarify the meaning of the term “standard”, which may have multiple definitions. For the purpose of this paper, the relevant definition is related to a particular technical meaning: a normative document that lays down rules or guidelines that users must follow in international trade. So, according to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (the TBT Agreement), a standard is defined as a:

“Document approved by a recognized body, that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory. It may also include or deal exclusively with terminology, symbols, packaging, marking or labelling requirements as they apply to a product, process or production method” (WTO, 2013).

In terms of the functioning of standards systems, the following functions are recognized: (i) standard-setting that relates to the formulation of rules and procedures; (ii) standard adoption meaning embracing the standard; (iii) implementation denoting application of