

RTRS – Round Table on Responsible Soy - insights

Thank you very much for the invitation to participate in your TV program Zembla. We are happy to learn that you will be making a program on soy, deforestation, and land conversion. As we understand you will focus on the Cerrado, to show what the impact of soy production is and how this soy is used in the Dutch production chain of foodstuffs like meat and dairy products. We believe this to be a very important topic.

RTRS – The Round Table on Responsible Soy has been working on promoting responsible soy production and uptake since its establishment in 2006. We do this overarchingly acting as a global multistakeholder platform on soy, and additionally and complementary, through our production standard, which covers a wide range of environmental, social, legal, economic and Good Agricultural Practices issues.

Our voluntary standard has already since several years been a transparent and accountable “zero deforestation and zero conversion” certification that additionally, guarantees responsible business and agricultural practices, preserving biodiversity, soil and water and protecting human and workers’ rights, all while respecting the customs and cultures of indigenous people and improving the well-being of local communities.

Although there is much more to do and deliver, and much more at scale, the impact of responsible production practices and management is tangible and visible.

RTRS offers the market and companies a number of options to source responsible soy for their operations. We work to promote the production, trade, and use of responsible soy facilitating and supporting stakeholders in making their transition to use responsible soy in their operations.

Our philosophy is to work together with all stakeholders in and outside the production and supply chains. We understand that not having all organizations and sectors, even countries, on board does not help the transition.

We believe the full contribution and potential of voluntary certification schemes should be interpreted in a broader context, as a complementary instrument in a mix of more comprehensive and representative multisectoral approach. RTRS believes that by looking at the certification initiatives in isolation, much of their impact is undervalued, while in fact much has been accomplished since we started.

In 2020, almost 5 million tons, that is 5 billion KGS of soy was in fact produced in a responsible way under the RTRS production standard. In terms of land size, that equals +/- 1,4 million hectares. To compare, the total land size of the Netherlands is +/- 4,2 million hectares, of which +/- 1,8 million hectares is farmland.

In 2020, the European uptake of RTRS certified material reached +/- 3,8 million metric tons. To compare, the total European consumption of soy meal in 2019 reached 29,58 million tons (IDH European soy monitor 2019), which means that already a substantial portion of the European consumption is supporting responsible production.

In addition, many companies from all over the world have joined RTRS and commit to responsible sourcing according to our standard (almost 180 YTD, 25 new members in 2021).

But of course, we also recognize that there are still many challenges. Voluntary certification schemes, as part of a multi-stakeholder approach, are an important part of the solution but cannot be viewed as the silver bullet to tackle the deforestation challenge.

All organizations coexisting in this ecosystem have a valuable role to play; involvement and support from companies and NGO's, policy makers, and media and consumers is needed; we must work together. That is the only way forward. But we must not forget, responsible production must be recognized and supported, with the involvement and expertise of governments, NGO's and with the support from companies and financial institutions. Incentives and economic instruments will be key to motivate farmers' in producing countries and actors of the supply chain efforts to produce and conserve.

There is an increased recognition that integrating voluntary certification schemes as complementary instruments in comprehensive approaches can support governments in achieving their sustainability goals, as seen across initiatives under the Green Deal, amongst others.

We believe in solutions.

We believe in being critical, not criticize

We believe in collaboration, because that's the way to move forward, to make transition possible.

We wish you a very successful program on this complex, but very important topic.