



FSC®-certified natural rubber: Deforestation free, socially responsible



Global demand for natural rubber, or latex, is growing, driving the expansion of rubber plantations across the tropics. While the production of this important commodity provides income for millions of people in developing countries, it has also had negative impacts on forests, communities and workers. To correct such problems, FSC principles and criteria are being applied for the certification of socially and environmentally responsible latex production, which provides businesses and consumers with options for purchasing FSC-certified natural rubber, or rubberwood, produced in a way that is good for people and the planet.

A natural forest product

Natural rubber comes from the sap of the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*), native to the Amazon Basin. Unlike synthetic rubber, which is a petroleum product, natural rubber is a renewable resource. Though it has traditionally been harvested from rubber trees scattered through the rain forests of South America, most natural rubber now comes from plantations in other regions, primarily South and Southeast Asia.

Rubber harvesting remains a relevant forest activity in parts of the Amazon Basin, but the latex those rubber tappers collect represents a small fraction of the global supply. As international demand for natural rubber increases, millions of rubber trees are being planted across the tropics. While grown primarily for their latex, those trees also produce high quality wood. There is a growing market for rubberwood – used for everything from furniture and construction to biomass – which adds value to plantations. FSC certification covers both products.

While some rubber plantations have been established on former pastureland or farmland, the expansion of rubber production has been a driver of deforestation, including areas of high conservation value. International organizations have also documented cases of poor working conditions, child labour and social conflicts associated with rubber plantations.

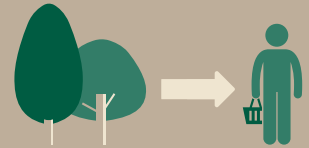


Addressing the problems

In an effort to encourage responsible rubber production, FSC promotes the implementation of its criteria for the certification of rubber farms, forests and chains of custody. Those criteria were developed through a public dialogue and are based on FSC's 23 years of experience in sustainable forestry. As with wood, paper and other FSC-certified products, manufacturers and consumers who purchase FSC-certified latex or natural rubber can do so with the knowledge that it was produced in forests or plantations with safe working conditions and good community relations, without deforestation or other environmental damage.

FSC aims to significantly expand the percentage of the global latex supply coming from forests or plantations that are managed in a responsible manner, within the framework of its broader efforts to promote sustainable non-timber forest products. To accomplish this, FSC is seeking commitments from corporate leaders to source FSC-certified latex, natural rubber and rubberwood. FSC can help corporations to reduce risk in their supply chains and strengthen their corporate responsibility credentials by ensuring that the FSC-certified latex they source is deforestation free and socially responsible.

FSC certification confirms that a product isn't linked to forest degradation or deforestation, and that the producer has implemented best management practices. It ensures traceability from the forest or plantation to the consumer.



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The potential of FSC-certified rubber

Though tyre manufacturers consume about 70% of global natural rubber production, that commodity is used by an array of industries ranging from automotive to healthcare to sporting goods to fashion. Rubber plantations currently cover approximately 11 million hectares worldwide, more than 2 million of which were established in the past decade, and demand is expected to increase by an average of 3% per year through 2024.

About 75% of the total volume of natural rubber production comes from just five countries: Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Vietnam. Most of the remaining 25% is produced in China, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Liberia, Kenya, DR Congo, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala and Brazil. Approximately 20 million people depend on natural rubber production, primarily in developing countries. As a renewable resource, it has the potential to be a driver of sustainable development, especially since smallholders produce 85% of the global latex supply.

Though only 4% of global rubber plantation area is currently FSC certified, the FSC Principles and Criteria for forest management have the potential to affect a positive environmental and social transformation of the natural rubber sector. If properly managed, natural rubber can contribute to poverty alleviation, landscape restoration and the construction of a green economy. In the long run, facilitating a sustainable supply of forest products such as latex for industries and consumers while addressing environmental, economic and social needs in the producing countries will help FSC to achieve its mission of ensuring that there are *Forests For All Forever*.

Table 1. FSC-certified hectares of rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) as of August 2017

Country	No. FSC CoC certificates	Country	No. FSC CoC certificates
Brazil	222,779.00	6	2
China	2,818.40	59	1
Guatemala*	5,783.81	7	3
India*	7,775.00	2	2
Peru*	97,206.00	3	1
Sri Lanka*	17,521.90	9	3
Thailand	23,875.44	1921	8
Vietnam	6,424.00	1	1
Total Ha	384,183.55		

* N7.1 rubber/latex is also included in the scope



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FSC latex in the market

A cadre of forward thinking companies have already committed to sourcing FSC-certified natural rubber, among them Vita Talalay, which produces latex mattresses, pillows and toppers. The certified Natural Vita Talalay latex material carries the FSC 100% label, which identifies products in which all the latex, wood or fibre comes from FSC-certified forests or plantations.

“FSC’s mission to ‘promote environmentally sound, socially beneficial, and economically prosperous management of the world’s forests’ is perfectly in line with what Vita Talalay believes in. One of the values of Vita Talalay is transparency. Vita Talalay believes that trust is an important factor for a good company. Creating trust means taking social and environmental responsibilities, throughout the whole supply chain. An FSC certificate not only allows the production of our latex bedding material to be completely transparent and traceable, it proves that our products comply with the highest environmental and social requirements.”

Mr. Cees Zielman, General Manager, Vita Talalay

More info: <https://www.vitalalay.com/importance-fsc-certificate/>



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