

# **RAINFOREST ALLIANCE**

**Management, Marketing and Certification of  
Non-Timber Forest Products in Latin America**

**Final Report to  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Grant #: LAG-G-00-98-00027-00**

**Covering the Period January 1999 through October 2000**

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**November 2000**

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#### **Introduction**

With appreciation of the generous grant of \$150,000 from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Rainforest Alliance is pleased to submit this final report detailing the final activities of the Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Certification Project: Management, Marketing and the Certification of NTFPs in Latin America.

#### **I. NTFP Guidelines Development and Field Trials in Latin America**

With the assistance of an advisory council made up of NTFP and certification experts, a draft set of NTFP certification criteria and indicators was completed in late 1998. This document uses the format and content of the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) Principles and Criteria as a guiding framework, and contains specific amendments for NTFPs. These draft NTFP certification guidelines were field tested in Latin America in early 1999.

The first field trials took place in Brazil, in collaboration with the Instituto de Manejo e Certificação Florestal e Agrícola (IMAFLOA). Two palm heart producing operations in the lower Amazon basin were assessed. The first site was a large commercial operation, while the second was a small community-run cooperative. The contrast between the two sites provided instructive differences in tenure, social conditions and ecological and economic factors influenced by the size and scale of an operation.

The second field trial was conducted in the remote Pando region of Bolivia, in a quarter million hectare forest dedicated to commercial harvest of Brazil nuts and palm hearts. In-country coordination and assistance was provided by the Centro de Investigación y Manejo de Recursos Naturales (CIMAR). This assessment provided critical information about social relations between large-scale NTFP operations and seasonal laborers. The region is also of great conservation importance, which gave the assessment team an opportunity to evaluate the relevance of NTFP certification as a tool to promote forest protection.

Field work in Mexico was conducted in collaboration with the Consejo Civil Mexicano para la Silvicultura Sostenible (CCMSS). Here, the NTFP certification project evaluated one of the community-owned and operated forests in the State of Quintana Roo on the

Yucatan Peninsula. The Noh Bec community, already certified for timber production under the rules of the FSC, had requested assessment of their chicle gum production. The assessment team was favorably impressed with the chicle operation at Noh Bec. Noh Bec was nominated for certification and its production of chicle has been approved by the FSC. Jungle Gum, a manufacturer of natural base chewing gum, now offers certified gum from the Noh Bec ejido for sale in Europe and the U.S.

The field trials allowed the draft NTFP certification guidelines to be tested and revised according to experience. At each site, personnel from organic certification organizations accompanied teams, and in Mexico, a Fair Trade representative also evaluated the Noh Bec operation. Comparing the different evaluation processes and focuses of the FSC, organic and Fair Trade programs strengthened the field testing process and improved the draft guidelines. For example, aflatoxin (a mycotoxin) contamination was found to be a significant issue in Brazil nut handling and processing due to sanitation quotas for imports set by the European Union. Hence, production issues not normally covered by FSC certifications were found to be important areas warranting further attention.

The field trials showed that social issues and social evaluation criteria are the most challenging issues in NTFP certification. Interestingly, community-run operations (Brazil and Mexico) scored better than industrial operations (Brazil and Bolivia), although both communities in the field trials received significant external support from donors and local organizations. The field testing strengthened the draft NTFP certification guidelines and provided valuable feedback to the FSC's NTFP working group and other NTFP certification efforts under organic and Fair Trade auspices.

A number of NTFP assessments have taken place in Latin America and Southern Europe as a result of the USAID-funded NTFP certification project, and additional interest has recently been shown in Canada and the U.S. The NTFP certification guidelines have now been translated into Spanish and serve as a framework for the creation of species-specific checklists in all regions of the globe. For example, the first species-specific guidelines for maple syrup were created in late 1999, using the draft guidelines created for the Latin America field trials. The maple syrup checklist was field tested in North America in early 2000.

## **II. NTFP Manuscript**

In order to disseminate experiences gained from Rainforest Alliance's NTFP certification project, a manuscript was compiled. Several publishers were approached in 1999 and 2000. The manuscript was recently accepted for publication by Earthscan in the United Kingdom as part of the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature's People and Plants series. It will be printed sometime in early to mid-2001. The book will examine the lessons learned from the certification field trials in Latin America and present the draft NTFP certification guidelines as well as the species-specific example of the maple syrup checklist. Profiles of additional non-timber forest product species from North America, Central and South America, the Mediterranean, Asia and Africa, written by field-seasoned experts, will augment the field trial experiences and provide rich background

for chapters devoted to the analysis of social, marketing, ecological and technical issues of NTFP certification.

The NTFP certification project team is grateful to the 25 plus contributors as well as the advisory council (see December 1998 report for a full list) who reviewed and commented on the material produced. A great deal of time went into the editing and peer review process during 1999, which ultimately strengthened the book's content and tone.

*The Management and Marketing of Nontimber Forest Products: Certification as a Tool to Promote Sustainability* will provide one of the few examples of field-based evaluations of non-timber forest product management with additional analysis supplemented by information provided by respected non-timber experts. The book aims to bridge field-based practical evaluations with scientific theory. The book profiles both northern and southern species to present a global picture of the social, ecological and economic dimensions of non-timber forest product management, harvesting, importance, usage and marketing. While not exhaustive, the book provides a unique portrait of the idiosyncratic nature of non-timber forest product management and marketing, focusing on the various ecological, cultural and marketing considerations inherent in such products. The book will serve as a valuable reference for policy makers, members of the certification community, academics and NTFP researchers.

### **III. Conclusion**

NTFP certification is a new and controversial forest policy tool. USAID's grant to the Rainforest Alliance permitted the development of comprehensive criteria and indicators for NTFP management and the field testing of those guidelines. Initial results indicate that certification may be appropriate for a limited number of high profile NTFPs that are traded within established, formal market channels. Certification entails a high level of organization and technical sophistication among producers, and thus may have limited application to the vast number of NTFP users, i.e. individuals and families who gather NTFPs for personal consumption or informal trade in local markets.

Whether or not certification is the end goal, NTFP certification criteria and methods will benefit forest managers, companies and donor agencies by providing reputable standards of sustainability against which local performance can be measured. Such standards should be particularly useful for management of NTFPs within protected areas and community forests. Raising the visibility of NTFPs also helps move the forestry industry in general, and the Forest Stewardship Council in particular, toward a greater awareness of the need to analyze and account for these critical resources. The Rainforest alliance is grateful to USAID for its support of the NTFP Certification Project.