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# TOPIC BRIEFING

## Sustainable forest products standards: The example of the FSC

**Forest products include timber, as well as non-timber forest products such as honey, rattan, bamboo, cork, nuts, mushrooms, essential oils, pharmaceutical ingredients, etc.**

### Some key URLs:

FSC: [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

FSC-certified forests directory:  
[www.certified-forests.org](http://www.certified-forests.org)

WWF Global Forest and Trade Network: [www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org), search keyword GFTN

[www.forests.org](http://www.forests.org)

(Forest conservation information portal)

### DISCLAIMERS:

*This is a simplified, non-technical briefing for informational purposes. It has not been reviewed or approved by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) or any other organizations cited herein.*

*This topic briefing does not constitute or imply USAID endorsement of the FSC standards, the FSC itself, or any organization cited herein.*

*Statistics cited are from FSC sources.*

**Overview.** There are two key types of Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) standards:

*Forest management standards* define what constitutes a sustainably managed forest. "Sustainability" includes social, not just environmental, aspects.

*Chain of custody standards* set out how to verify that a forest product offered for sale comes from a sustainably managed forest.

The FSC accredits 3<sup>rd</sup> party organizations as certifiers. These bodies certify forest managers and forest product producers to FSC standards.

**Governing organization.** Formally founded in 1993, the FSC is an independent, membership-based, international non-profit organization.

The FSC's more than 500 individual and organizational members include environmental groups, companies, forestry professionals, social scientists, and groups representing labour, church and indigenous people's interests. Members are divided into three chambers: social, environmental and economic, depending on their primary orientation/mission. A commitment to FSC principles is a requirement of membership.

The FSC's Board of Directors is comprised of 3 members elected from each chamber for 3-year terms. FSC primarily operates through its network of national initiatives.

**Extent of adoption.** As of October 2004, more than 116 million acres of forest in 61 countries have received FSC certification. About 58 percent of these certifications are located in Europe, 21 percent in North America, 13 percent in Latin America, and 4 percent each in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

More than 3,366 chain-of-custody certificates, in 68 countries, have been granted.

Some of the largest wood and paper products companies in the world, including Potlatch Corporation in the United States, Stora

## Are there other sustainable forest product standards?

Yes, several sustainable forest product standards exist.

The FSC system was chosen for this fact sheet because it is the largest international certification system, has a robust multi-stakeholder membership and standards development process, and uses 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification. As noted in the course presentation, these are all characteristics of robust, successful standards.

The FSC does receive strong endorsement from a number of key environmental organizations. WWF, for example, states:

*“Currently WWF considers the FSC certification system to be the only credible system to ensure environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of forests.”\**

However, this view is not universal. As with other “green standards,” the FSC system has received criticism, particularly that the standards are not sufficiently protective of old-growth forests and ecosystem integrity.

\*WWF website, [www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org), 22 Dec 2005.

Enso in Sweden, and Domtar Forest Resources and Tembec, Inc. in Canada, are FSC-certified.

There are now thousands of FSC certified products on the international market. Some of the major U.S and European companies with FSC certified wood procurement preferences are:

Sector	Companies*
Home Improvement/ Do-it-yourself	The Home Depot, Lowe’s Home Improvement Centers, B&Q PLC
Furniture and Household Goods	IKEA
Shoes and clothing	Patagonia, Gap, Inc. Norm Thompson Outfitters
Personal care & Household products	Johnson & Johnson, The Body Shop, Seventh Generation
Food	Starbucks Coffee Company
Personal care	Johnson & Johnson, The Body Shop
Technology	3M

(\*All companies cited are among the market leaders in their sectors)

The number of companies with explicit policies that give preference to procurement of FSC-certified products is increasing.

**Basic requirements of FSC standards.** FSC forest management standards are intended to assure that:

- Harvesting rates and clearing sizes do not exceed a forest's natural capacity to regenerate
- Natural forest conditions needed for wildlife and healthy ecosystem function are maintained
- Rare, threatened and endangered species and forest types are maintained and protected
- No natural forests are cleared and replaced by tree plantations. (However, new plantations can be established on agricultural and pasture lands.)
- Adequate conservation zones exist
- Chemical use is minimized or eliminated
- Streams and rivers are protected from soil erosion that degrades water quality and fish habitat
- Workers, communities and indigenous people benefit from the forestry operation, and their rights and interests are protected.

For a forest to become certified, the certification body assesses the management plan, interviews stakeholders, and conducts an on-the-ground assessment of the forest. Certified forests are generally audited each year to maintain their certification.

**Potential benefits of adoption.** Certified forest products from developing countries may sell at a premium, both to international buyers, and to domestic customers such as donor-funded development projects, who are often required to obtain sustainably-sourced timber.

Enterprises managing certified forests may be eligible for preferential financing and other assistance.

**Note: Organic and Fair Trade standards can also apply to forest products**