



Why FSC is the best forest management certification system

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification is the best available forest conservation and market linkage tool. Of the over 90 options available worldwide for forest management certification, FSC is the most rigorous, credible, and valuable system. Here are the reasons why.

FSC THE BRAND

The promise to consumers

The reason FSC is the most trusted label in the certification marketplace is the history of credibility related to claims made within the FSC system. FSC has the most rigorous and consistently implemented chain-of-custody program in the world. This system ensures, through independent auditing, that product claims can be verified from the forest to the customer. The integrity of FSC's promise to customers makes FSC the gold standard.

Global reach

Wood is traded all over the world and FSC has certified forest management operations, manufacturing facilities, and distributors in over 70 countries. With offices in over 30 countries, FSC has set regional standards that reflect local conditions in both developed and developing countries. Thousands of companies worldwide participate in the program providing the full range of wood and paper products to markets everywhere. No other system has this kind of reach, with locally relevant and accepted consensus-based standards combined with global brand recognition that guarantees the rigor and integrity of those standards. Certification systems that focus only on North America or Europe miss some of the most important issues that are happening on the ground in forests around the globe even though this wood is bought and sold around the world every day.

Recognition by credible non-profits trusted by consumers

Other certification systems rest their credibility on expensive ad campaigns supported by the very companies who stand to benefit from customers buying products with that label. While FSC companies also advertise, they are advantaged by an army of stakeholders who publicly endorse and actively market FSC-certified products. Major global environmental organizations have programs where staff members spend their days building demand for FSC-certified products. These organizations include National Wildlife Federation, World Wildlife Fund, Forest Ethics, Rainforest Action

Network, Rainforest Alliance, Green Press Initiative, Tropical Forest Trust, and many others. This kind of advocacy can only be generated by a system that these organizations trust and are willing to rest their own brands on in the market. Market campaigns by NGOs routinely feature FSC as part of the demand placed on campaign targets. Other types of NGOs show their support for FSC through partnerships where companies are urged to move to FSC certification. This community is unique. No other system has generated such broad and deep support.

Used by major brands to protect their own brands

When a major consumer brand chooses to co-brand itself with something like a certification label it becomes either an enhancement or vulnerability. Companies who seek to express their environmental and social values by using forest products from responsible sources increasingly see FSC as a brand enhancement. Whether it's an on product label on an item of furniture, recognition of FSC in a green building standard, or the placement of the FSC logo on an annual report cover, FSC is strengthening brands all over the world. As green building grows, builders and architects proudly specify FSC-certified wood to express their own values that reflect well on their company. The world's largest paper and wood buyers are committing to increasing levels of FSC-certified products in their purchasing practices.

You can find the FSC label on catalogues, reports, marketing materials, consumer products, product packaging, and within the walls of the world's largest retail stores. Even financial institutions are using the FSC tool to guide their investment and lending policies—by screening forestry companies using FSC certification, banks and lenders can reduce their risk by placing their money in responsible businesses and avoiding others who act illegally or destructively.

"We believe that FSC is the gold standard when it comes to forest products certification systems. FSC certification is a key component in our ongoing efforts to deliver on our commitment to our employees, customers and shareholders to operate in an environmentally sound manner."

- Pat Connolly, Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer for Williams-Sonoma, Inc.



FSC THE SYSTEM

Recognition of Social Values

Over 90% of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty around the globe depend on forests for some part of their livelihood. In addition, thousands of people are enslaved in the cattle and timber industry in Brazil. Only FSC explicitly balances the very important social impacts of logging with the environmental outcomes and economic values that well managed forests provide. Not only are social and community values and labor rights reflected in FSC standards, but indigenous peoples and civil society organizations are represented in the FSC membership. Bringing these voices to the table is a distinctive feature of the FSC system. Fundamental issues of resolving who owns the land and full community engagement in decision-making are attributes reflected in FSC's process of stakeholder engagement.

Transparency at every stage

All processes and decisions of the Forest Stewardship Council are open for public review and comment. Even non-members are engaged in the refinement of new policies and standards. Certification assessments are subjected to public review before they become finalized. Transparency is a core value of the system and one of its unique strengths.

Stakeholder diversity and membership

FSC's standards reflect the holistic nature of the membership that comprises the organization—balancing environmental, social and economic concerns in the management of the world's forests.. Major global environmental groups, native tribes, forest products manufacturers, foresters, scientists, and advocates for human and civil rights all contribute to the governance of the FSC system. By bringing this array of perspectives into the fold, FSC strengthens its standards and creates an army of committed individuals and organizations prepared to advocate for the importance of the system in the marketplace.



FSC'S STANDARDS

Protection of high conservation values

FSC standards include set asides and special measures related to managing forests with high conservation values. The most significant forested eco-systems are identified in every certified operation and care is taken to ensure that values such as biodiversity, sensitive aquatic habitats, unique species and plant and animal communities are all protected. The model put forth by FSC is so strong that major wood and paper buyers often require their suppliers to implement a high conservation value forest inventory in the areas where they operate, even where they are not seeking FSC certification. The rigor of this system is so widely recognized that other certification systems incorporate similar models. Unfortunately, no other system has reached the levels of protection afforded by FSC.

Conservation of natural forests

In the last 50 years we have done more damage to natural forests than in the previous 80 centuries of human activity. FSC certification is not provided to forest management operations that have converted natural forest stands to ecologically simplified "plantations" since 1994 (FSC's first implementation year.) No other certification system precludes this practice from being certified. FSC holds that conservation and management of natural forests is a priority. Existing (before 1994) plantations can only be certified where they meet high performance standards for protecting and encouraging the restoration of native biodiversity.

Performance versus intent

There are certainly specific differences among certification systems in terms of their on-the-ground requirements. Many systems require policies or plans for dealing with issues like chemical use or worker's rights. FSC requires actual performance against standards, not just on-paper intention. Differences exist in types and size of buffer areas that cannot be harvested near streams, the size of areas allowable for clear-cut logging, the requirements for mapping and documenting procedures and so on. The bottom line is, when added up with all of the differences noted above, there are no "apples to apples" comparison between FSC and any other system. FSC is the largest, oldest, strongest, and most visible system ever devised for linking responsible forestry to markets.

For more information, visit www.fscus.org.

Our mission:

Create a marketplace that promotes well-managed forests by ensuring forestry practices that are environmentally responsible, socially equitable, and economically viable.

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