

Creating Learning Experiences for Smallholder Producers in Sustainability Initiatives

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SUMMARY

Several initiatives are being developed to improve sustainability of coffee production throughout the chain from farmer to roaster. Initiatives such as the Common Code for the Coffee Community (4C) and Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) are partnerships between major roasters, NGO's, Unions and coffee federations. Presently, both codes are in the design phase and initial testing and adaptation of the codes takes place in pilot projects.

The project 'improvement of coffee quality and sustainability of production in Vietnam', financed by SaraLee-DE and Kraft Foods, serves as one of these pilots. Working with Tan Lam Company (Talaco), a local processor and exporter, the project is active in an area of small-scale but intensive Arabica production. Farmers in the area are positive of the codes but don't see any immediate benefits and therefore might be hesitant in its application, especially because both codes are rather demanding. From early 2003, the pilot explored several ways of integrating sustainability codes in training of farmers. In this way it is expected to increase the immediate usefulness of codes for farmers leading to better uptake on field-level. By benchmarking values, e.g. on fertilizer use, farmers can learn of improvements that not only benefit the environment but also have an immediate economic kickback in terms of cost reduction and/or product quality.