



Distr.
GENERAL

TIM/SEM.1/2003/R.24 (Summary)
10 January 2003

Original: ENGLISH

Seminar on
STRATEGIES FOR THE SOUND USE OF WOOD
Poiana Brasov, Romania
24-27 March 2003

FSC certification as a tool for socially and environmentally responsible trade
Session V

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Summary

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has now 9 years of experience with forest management certification and the labelling of products from well managed forests. As of January 2003, FSC has certified over 31 million hectares of forests, in 56 countries, over 6 continents. Over 20 million hectares of these certified forests are located in Europe, including state owned forests in several western and eastern European countries. In the marketplace there are now more than 10.000 products carrying the FSC logo, giving a proud guarantee that the material in that product comes from well managed forests.

FSC was created through a joint initiative by environmental, social and economic stakeholders with the goal of promoting environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests. This has been realized through establishing a worldwide standard of recognized and respected Principles of Forest Stewardship to enable the identification of well managed forests and the products coming from those forests. This has enabled FSC to provide consumers with an independent assurance of the sources of forest products. Since its foundation in 1993, FSC has been embraced by leading retailers around the world, such as Home Depot, B&Q, Obi and Carrefour, and also by international forest products companies, such as Assi Doman, Norske Skog and Tembec.

FSC considers forest certification as a market instrument. For retailers certification provides their consumer with a credible guarantee that the company is acting responsibly with respect to the environment and the social circumstances of those involved in forests and forestry. Recent research, undertaken for WWF in The Netherlands, shows that about 90% of Dutch consumers expressed that if they had a choice, they would prefer timber from well managed sources. This is however only a preference, and consumers may not put this into practice if they find price differences between certified and uncertified products. Internal research of Intergamma, a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) chain in The Netherlands and Belgium, has however shown that consumers feel that the retailer is responsible for the environmental quality of the product, not the consumers themselves. Further research by WWF NL in 2002 has backed up this finding. If responsible retailers are looking for a long lasting relationship with their customers they will therefore benefit from an independent and credible certification of timber. For Intergamma, and other retailers, this has been the primary reason to introduce a long-term policy to supply only FSC labelled timber to their customers. This attitude of consumers to the responsibility expected of the corporate sector has encouraged the 'Profit, People, Planet' approach to become an increasingly significant tendency in the business world.

FSC labelled products are considered by many forest owners, trade partners, governments and NGO's to be an integral part of a free market of environmentally responsible trade. FSC will continue to deliver a credible and independent certification system to support this developing sector.

Key words: certification, FSC, sustainable forest management, social and environmentally responsible trade, 'People, Planet, Profit'
