

Case Study: UTZ Certified Rooibos farms in South Africa

UTZ response

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Background

UTZ Certified began the development of a Rooibos code in 2009, in response to demand from existing tea buyers. After initial stakeholder consultation and code development, the first farm and processor were certified in January 2011, followed shortly afterwards by four more farms and one further processor. By 2013, all farms and producers had maintained their certification and were entering year three of the program.

The study was carried out by Sandra Kruger and Associates and comprises primarily of a number of case studies, drawing on the perception of changes as seen by the members of the UTZ Rooibos program.

The study design means that the perceived changes cannot be attributed only to UTZ Certification, however as all UTZ Certified Rooibos farmers and processors participated in the study, it provides an interesting and important snapshot of the first three years of certification and highlights some of the areas of development we will be working on in the second phase of the Rooibos program.

Main findings

The case study highlighted a number of positive effects of the UTZ Certified Rooibos program.

Better farming methods

The study found that record keeping had increased and that this in turn was having a positive impact on helping farmers make informed decisions.

A number of farmers in the study cited UTZ Certification as the trigger to set up or improve record keeping systems, and once the record keeping began farmers saw the benefit of keeping additional records, which the report found demonstrated that better farm management was becoming integral to their practices.

"In our preparation for UTZ certification we needed to update our administration and recordkeeping systems. This included reviewing our worker's contracts, farm policies and procedures. We have now also started keeping additional records such as training registers, cleaning registers and IPM activities"

Andries Slinger, De Lille Boerdery.

Improved record keeping not only benefited farmers but also assisted processors in their own traceability.



Better care for nature

Greater awareness of their responsibility towards nature and the environment was cited by many of the UTZ Certified producers as the most significant change in outlook since certification.

Improved record keeping was seen to have an impact on the responsible use of pesticides. The requirements for record keeping on pesticide use in the UTZ code have meant that those farms that were not already part of the GLOBALGAP¹ for citrus, have implemented stricter policies and have a better overview of their Integrated Pest Management, which in turn has an impact on their environmental practices.

"As a result of the UTZ standards regarding the environment, I have undergone a mind shift and am now more aware of the natural environment and better agricultural practices in terms of this."

Francois de Plessis, Aggenbagskraal.

The study noted that UTZ Certified producers are frontrunners in improved environmental practices, with all those in the program participating in initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and commitment to protecting the environment. All seven members of the UTZ Rooibos program participated in the South African Rooibos Council's Right Rooibos initiative, an initiative set up in 2010 aimed at encouraging sustainable practices in the production of Rooibos.

Better income

The report found that wages on UTZ Certified farms are either meeting or closing the gap with the estimated 2013 LW benchmark for Western Cape² set at 144 rand a day (or 3,122 Rand a month). In addition living conditions on UTZ farms are perceived as above average compared to national levels.

The processors who are part of the UTZ Rooibos program both stated that being UTZ Certified has allowed them greater access to international markets, which allows for greater stability in securing demand.

¹ G.A.P. stands for Good Agricultural Practice and GLOBALG.A.P. is the worldwide standard that assures it for 3 scopes, 1 of which is crops. To find out more visit their website: <http://www.globalgap.org/>. GLOBALG.A.P is a requirement for South African citrus farms specifically who wish to export their product.

² Living Wage for rural South Africa with Focus on Wine Grape Growing in Western Cape Province: https://utzcertified.org/images/stories/site/pdf/downloads/impact/living_wage_report_southafrica.pdf



Better working conditions

"Before we only did induction training for Citrus workers, but after UTZ certification we do induction training for Rooibos workers as well, concentrating on harvesting procedures. UTZ is also focussed on PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and therefore we have provided our seasonal workers with a second set of PPE clothing."

Madelé Mouton, Mouton Citrus.

The impact of UTZ on the implementation of improved health and safety was consistently mentioned by all the farmers. Whilst South Africa has advanced health and safety legislation it is clear that this is not always implemented for all workers in Rooibos production. UTZ Certification however assisted in increasing awareness and maintaining or improving compliance.

Even more encouraging were the reports of increased training and access to broader health and safety issues, including regular health checks, and information on HIV and AIDS.

UTZ' response & next steps.

We are pleased to see that the participants in the UTZ Certified Rooibos program have seen positive improvements with regards to ensuring better working conditions – improved health and safety; better farming – with improved farm management; better care for nature and better lives.

As we enter year five of the program we are also happy to have an UTZ Certified field representative in South Africa with a focus on Rooibos production. This allows us to continue to provide direct support to existing farms and build the program by reaching out to new producers.

Whilst it is encouraging to hear that international markets are growing in the sector, we shall also be focusing on building the national market, in order to build further the demand for UTZ Certified Rooibos. Our field representative will be playing a key role in this market development and we hope that by strengthening the market demand within South Africa for UTZ Certified Rooibos we will be able to create a more stable base for all those in the program.

It is encouraging to see those who participated in the first years of the Rooibos program becoming frontrunners in the sector, especially in the approach to environmental practices and awareness. It confirms our belief that UTZ Certification is a valuable support the development of Rooibos production, and provides an encouraging base to continue to build the program.