
GLOBAL STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVES AND THE IMPACT ON THE MARKET

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Over the past several years the global agri-food sector has faced several challenges ranging from food safety scares, questions surrounding natural resource protection/sustainability, heightened consumer nutritional health/wellness awareness and animal welfare scrutiny. All of these challenges have lead to an escalated awareness of “social responsibility” from the upper echelon of the food value chain globally.

In most developed countries there are standards that addresses many of the emerging consumer and societal concerns including: consumer protection encompassing food safety standards, natural resource preservation/conservation and rural community/economic development. Over the past several years it appears government initiatives are no longer enough. Private companies (predominantly European based) and industry associations throughout the food chain have begun to implement tighter controls then are set by many



FarmTech 2008

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legislative bodies. In several instances primary producers globally are being required to comply with local/national legislations, but must also satisfy a wide range of additional “standards” required by segments of the market they seek to sell their products to.

There are several drivers for this proliferation of additional production based standards including: differentiation of brand/image, move to government being an oversight body, legal firewalls, global company standard food sourcing, etc. Many of the requirements that these new standards encompass involve food safety, environmental and societal components and most require independent audits. Other schemes are predominantly centered on sustainable agricultural practices that range from basic agronomic components including: soil fertility, pest management and nutrient management to broad based social and human capital issues such as: safety/training, local economic development and water/energy consumption requirements. (Discussion of several case studies from around the world including EurepGAP, Nature’s Choice, Del Monte and SAI).

The impact on voluntary standards has in most instances not reached markets and producers in North America, but is beginning to gain a foothold within segments of the horticulture sector that are focused on meeting the demands of export customers. In the future there will be both positive and negative outcomes from the emergence of heightened standards that are not fully understood currently, but will potentially affect Canadian primary producers and the overall agri-food industry.