

USA tea



TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Raising standards in Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador

Unilever's subsidiary Lipton in the USA sources some 55% of its leaf tea from major suppliers in Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador. This amounts to some 14,000 tonnes annually.

Unilever has decades of tea growing expertise on its own estates. Pilot projects to define detailed guidelines for sustainable tea growing began in Kenya in 1999, quickly followed by similar schemes in Tanzania and India. Initially these were confined to the Unilever estates, but now in Kenya the programme involves the entire tea supply chain, including third party suppliers and hundreds of smallholders, in a partnership programme with the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA).

From Africa to Argentina

It is this experience that has been particularly valuable in establishing Lipton USA's first year assessment programme for its South American suppliers. Although conditions are different in many ways - for example the South American estates are mostly on flat land, irrigation is not necessary, the season only extends from October through March and the leaves are harvested by machine - Lipton USA has been able to draw on tried and tested programmes for supplier assessments, adapted as necessary to local conditions.

All South American tea suppliers to Lipton have completed sustainability questionnaires, used to identify gaps and to prioritize next steps. Initial evaluations indicate that the suppliers to Lipton, representing the majority of the South American supply, are well on their way to operating sustainably. One year's monitoring is not enough, but the results are encouraging. Furthermore the suppliers are enthusiastic in their efforts towards greater understanding of sustainable practices, incorporation

of manufacturing efficiencies, and regard this programme and Unilever's support as a welcome opportunity.

Next

From working with six major suppliers, the next step will be to involve the entire supply chain, along the lines of the KTDA programme. Other issues that need particular attention include fertilizer use, biodiversity programmes, and energy reduction initiatives.



Argentina – Mechanical harvesting

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The tea in this story can be found in:

