

Organic Monitor

PRESS RELEASE

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Latin American Foods Summit Highlights Sustainability Shortcomings

London – The premier Latin American edition of the Sustainable Foods Summit (www.sustainablefoodssummit.com/lamerica/) highlighted some of the major sustainability challenges faced by the regional food industry. About 140 senior executives convened in São Paulo to discuss sustainability and certification issues.

Much debate centred on the growing number of certification schemes for food products. Luis Fernando Pinto from Imaflora described the problems caused by multiple standards. Apart from the high inspection and certification costs, the accompanying bureaucracy was a major barrier for sustainable food production. Many participants stated harmonization or mutual recognition of standards was the way forward, however Augusto Freire of Cert ID likened the elusive solution to the Loch Ness monster, “everyone is talking about it, but no one sees it!”

Vanusia Nogueira, Executive Director of the Specialty Coffee Association, highlighted the challenges of sustainable coffee production and marketing. Although Brazil was the largest coffee producer in the world, exporters were encountering many marketing issues. According to Nogueira, Brazil had more environmental regulations than other coffee producer countries however some international buyers associated Brazilian coffee to destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

A number of speakers stated the challenges in developing internal markets for sustainable foods in Latin America. Ming Liu from IPD Organics Brasil said consumer knowledge of organic and sustainable products was a major hurdle: “although consumers are aware, few could correctly state what organic production means”. Raising domestic production levels was another hurdle according to Cassio Franco Moreira of the Brazilian Organic Coffee Association. About a third of the Brazilian organic products market was supplied by imports.

Some progress appears to be made in sustainable beef production. Márcio Nappo from the Brazilian Roundtable on Sustainable Livestock said beef production was no longer linked to deforestation. A sustainability scheme has been put in place that provides traceability of beef products from Amazon biomes. According to Nappo, “land efficiency was the key for Brazil to raise agricultural production”. The industry estimates that Brazil would have to raise agricultural output by 40% to meet rising domestic and international demand.

Two leading Brazilian retailers shared their sustainability experiences. Wal-Mart said zero waste, renewable energy and sustainable products were its key priorities. The retailer has made pledges to source sustainable soy, beef and wood in Brazil. Pão de Açúcar is focusing on marketing sustainable foods under its private label. Its Taeq brand is leading in terms of organic food sales. The supermarket has also introducing a reverse logistics program that removes packaging from waste streams.

Terracycle elaborated further on the possibilities of closed loops for packaging. The Brazilian wing of the American firm was setting up supply chains to collect packaging waste for use in new applications. Its national brigade program has collected 25 million pieces of garbage waste to make finished products.

The 2-day summit highlighted some of the sustainability shortcomings in the Latin American food industry. Sustainability is high on the agenda for Brazilian food companies and retailers, however their priorities differ from those in other regions. Biodiversity, especially the preservation of the Amazon, is high on the sustainability agenda. Packaging, waste reduction, and renewable energy are also key sustainability issues. However, sustainable agriculture, food waste, local markets and transparency in supply chains are areas that warrant greater attention. Subsequent editions of the Sustainable Foods Summit will focus on these key areas.

About the Sustainable Foods Summit

Organized by Organic Monitor, the Sustainable Foods Summit is an international series of summits that covers major developments in eco-labels and sustainability in the food industry. The premier Latin American edition was hosted at Pestana São Paulo on 27-28th March 2014; the proceedings are available for a professional fee. More information is available from www.sustainablefoodssummit.com/lamerica/

The summit in pictures

<http://www.sustainablefoodssummit.com/lamerica/galleryapril2014/summitpics.htm>

Upcoming editions...

Sustainable Foods Summit Europe	Amsterdam, 5-6 June 2014
Sustainable Foods Summit North America	San Francisco, January 2015
Sustainable Foods Summit Latin America	São Paulo, June 2015

Further Information

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