Global Warming, Environmental Footprints and Traceability Processes

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Global Warming

According to recent studies released about environmental footprints and climate change, one in six people may eventually suffer from water shortage, up to 100 million may become refugees due to rising water levels, and between 10-100 million may flee their homes due to severe draughts.

We are led to believe that by 2050 mankind will need two "Planet Earths" to overcome its environmental footprint in order to feed itself. With these changes it is predicted that only 600 of the approximately 6000 indigenous languages spoken today will be alive in 50 years. Their loss will also lead to the loss of knowledge that inherently lives in the cultures quieted forever. Today there are still 127 distinct languages spoken in Brazil. Were they to disappear, so would the knowledge of potential medicinal uses of the many varieties of the great Cerrado Biome currently being plowed under to make way for monocultures such as soy bean, corn, cotton and coffee.

Most relevant to agribusiness is the fact that the environmental losses predicted could cause an up to 20% reduction in GNP of affected countries. During a recent visit to Brazil, Richards Mills general director for the International Union of Air and Environmental Pollution Prevention Association, stated that tropical regions in which among others crops coffee is grown, and the largest cities in the southern hemisphere to which rural populations will migrate as agricultural output falls, could be among the most affected areas.

Farmers have always understood the complexity of their own environment and are keenly aware of the consequences changes to it could cause. More than ever, front runners are relying on management systems that are in sync with the warning issued by the International Panel on Climate Change and Sir Nicolas Stern’s Report on the Economic Impact of Climate Change.

By designing and implementing practical Traceable Process Systems aimed at obtaining higher efficiencies from available resources, modern agribusiness pioneers optimize their processes to be able to substitute earnings currently enjoyed and to expand their markets. This becomes even more vital should the dire warnings come true, thereby resulting in less resources to work with. Traceable Systems work on eliminating the most common causes of corporate environmental, social or financial losses due to:

1. inadequate programs,
2. inadequate standards, or
3. inadequate implementation of chosen standards.

To assure their place among reliable and responsible supply chains traceable-process companies set up their operations in such a manner that they are readily traceable and auditable.
When talking about traceability it is important to understand that one is talking about much more than its place of geographical origin. It relates to a process that allows management and all stakeholders to understand and measure the product’s quality, cost, significant impact on the natural and social environment, and efficiency at each step of the process from its beginning in the nursery to the end user’s point of sale.

Regardless of the demand for origin traceability by certain countries or customers, a traceable system is a sound financial tool for any company looking for competitive advantage. The system follows Deming’s tried-and-trusted continuous improvement Plan, Do, Check and Act (PDCA) circle. The intent is to identify all the process stages by means of traceable registers, either for internal management purposes or interested party disclosure.

Each step of the process is evaluated and subsequently controlled and monitored to mitigate the significant risk it carries to the system as a whole.

As Bjorn Lomborg points out in his book The Skeptical Environmentalist, it is clear that this kind of comprehensive fact-based analysis, monitoring and control of impacts any business has on its environment, surrounding communities, and economic value, is the right step towards understanding the processes that could bring dire consequences to the lives of many of the people we work with on a daily basis. By understanding the challenges, it is possible to determine the right course to be taken, in order to avoid any continued and lasting negative impact.

SKG/Sustainable Solutions works with worldwide agribusiness leaders, especially coffee producers and exporters, using the Traceability Process to assure Integrated Coffee Production systems that make fact-based decision making part of the daily routine. These decisions can only be taken given a thorough understanding of every aspect of the business and how these affect the whole, and consequently all stakeholders.

It is our understanding that in the absence of this basic tool, we will continue on the path that has alarmed so many in recent times. Reliable facts must be used to choose actions for the all encompassing review of the current agribusiness practices. The result will be supply chains built on principles and practices that minimize its environmental footprint and its contribution to global warming processes. This in turn may avert the scenario so often depicted by the media and thereby assure the continuity of our many different cultures, speaking their native tongue, and thus by definition, our corporate profits in current and future market conditions.

It will secure a future our children will want to inherit.

* About the author: Soren Knudsen P.E., MBA is director of SKG/Sustainable Solutions. SKG/Vaering Corp. is credited as "Starbucks CAFE Practices, y 4C’s" certifier. His team seek to develop and promote business models and practices to contribute to a world that future generations want to inherit, from his headquarters in Nicaragua and Brazil. You can reach them at www.sorenknudsen.com.br.

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