

## Saving Plants that Save Lives and Livelihoods: FairWild Standard for sustainable wild harvesting and equitable trade

People around the world use an estimated 60,000 wild plant species for their medicinal, nutritional and aromatic properties. Sometimes referred to as the “hidden harvest” of wild plants, it provides a source of raw materials for local use and for the manufacture of a wide variety of pharmaceutical, herbal, food, cosmetic and fragrance products. It also provides a critical source of household income, particularly for the rural poor. A complete list of all plants used in traditional medicine does not exist, but at least 30,000 species of plants with a documented use are included in the Global Checklist (an extension of earlier efforts of WHO and NAPRALERT/WHO Collaborating Centre at University of Illinois at Chicago). Plants used in traditional medicine are not only important in local health care, but many (est. 4,000-6,000) are important in international trade based on broader commercial use and value. It is estimated that the global trade in plants for medicinal purposes only is valued at over 2.5 billion USD and is increasing, driven by industry demand.

Estimating the ‘hidden harvest’ of medicinal and aromatic plants	
Species used	60,000
Species threatened	14,000
International trade (tonnes/yr)	550,000
International trade (USD/yr)	2.5 billion
Commercial harvesters	tens of millions
Individual users	several billion

More than 550,000 tonnes of medicinal plants are traded internationally annually. Medicinal plant imports by China, the largest market for raw materials, were valued at USD360 million in 2012, followed by the USA. China is also a major exporter, along with India, Canada, the USA and Germany. Expanding human populations, increased interest in and income to pay for “natural” and herbal products, and the ability to market and transport products across continents mean that demand and trade will grow for the foreseeable future.



*Adonis vernalis*, medicinal plant threatened with collection from the wild © Radacsi

Most medicinal and aromatic species continue to be sourced partly or entirely from the wild, including well-known species like liquorice, wild-harvested from Spain to Kazakhstan, and less familiar species such as *Pelargonium sidoides*, sourced from Lesotho and South Africa for cough and cold remedies and sold in the USA and Europe. Wild species are often difficult to cultivate; it can take years to produce commercial quantities at competitive prices. Even where cultivation is successful, buyers may prefer wild products, as demonstrated by trade in wild ginseng to Asia.

## Tackling the issue: the FairWild Standard

Unfortunately, rising demand has led to widespread overharvest. Many medicinal plant populations are declining at alarming rates. Both species in trade and the human communities and businesses relying on them are at risk. One in five of the world's plant species is estimated to be threatened with extinction in the wild, and unsustainable harvest is a major factor. The results of monitoring selected species at high risk demonstrate few signs of recovery.

In response, TRAFFIC, working with IUCN World Conservation Union and WWF, led a needs assessment and multi-stakeholder consultation process to identify options to support sustainable management of wild plant harvests and strengthen benefit flows to rural harvesters. The consultation revealed a gap in the guidance and certification options available for wild-harvested products. Work followed to develop a best practice framework for sustainable sourcing and trade, and to merge this with a similar initiative focused on social and fair trade aspects. The resulting **FairWild Standard** is designed to meet the needs of businesses, governments, international agreements, NGOs and others concerned with wild plant harvest, use and trade. The FairWild Standard is maintained by the FairWild Foundation, a Swiss-based charity (TRAFFIC is a partner).

The Standard provides guidance on best-practice harvesting and trading of wild-harvested plant (and similar) resources in eleven key areas:

1. Maintaining wild plant resources
2. Preventing negative environmental impacts
3. Complying with laws, regulations, and agreements
4. Respecting customary rights and benefit-sharing
5. Promoting fair contractual relationships between operators and collectors
6. Limiting participation of children in wild-collection activities
7. Ensuring benefits for collectors and their communities
8. Ensuring fair working conditions for all workers of FairWild collection operations
9. Applying responsible management practices
10. Applying responsible business practices
11. Promoting buyer commitment.



While the responsibilities for implementation vary between stakeholders, the different actors involved in the wild harvest and trade must collaborate to implement the provisions of the Standard in practice. These include resource assessments; management plans; sustainable collecting practices; cost calculation along the supply chain; traceability of goods and finances; and documented fair trading practices.

## FairWild Standard in Policy and Practice

Designed to be relevant to the private sector, civil society organizations and governments alike, the Standard and associated guidance tools are now being used by industry to

inform their product-sourcing guidelines, by governments in designing harvest and trade controls, and by communities in their management systems. The Standard forms the basis of a third-party audited certification system, complementing organic and fair trade certification processes, which typically lack mechanisms for certifying that wild harvest levels are sustainable. A core group of over twenty companies are engaged in the certification scheme, and participation is growing. The principles and approach are hence being used by a growing number of herbal product, food and other companies dependent on wild-sourced botanicals in Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA. The FairWild Standard has also been drawn upon by governments keen to bring or maintain wild plant harvests and trade within sustainable levels, for example informing policy dialogue processes and legislative revisions in countries as varied as Bosnia-Herzegovina, India, Japan, Kosovo and Azerbaijan. At local levels, the FairWild Standard has been used as a reference framework for communities and other producer groups, e.g. in China, Viet Nam, Ecuador and Central Europe. FairWild projects are already demonstrating positive conservation and livelihood outcomes.

The potential of the FairWild Standard has also been recognized in the international policy arena, providing the opportunity to scale up efforts and make a wider impact. The provisions of the Standard have clear links to the CBD's core aim of conservation of biological resources, including their sustainable use and fair sharing of benefits resulting



from such use. In particular, the FairWild Standard is recognized as a best practice tool for the delivery of the sustainable use target of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) of CBD. The FairWild Standard also includes ABS elements as important constituents of sustainable use practices. In other policy processes, the FairWild Standard has been drawn upon in developing good practice guidelines for CITES Non-Detriment Finding processes, and WHO/IUCN/WWF/TRAFFIC Guidelines on Conservation of Medicinal Plants (under finalization).

### **Sustainable use of medicinal plants: TRAFFIC's experience**

TRAFFIC supports the implementation and further use of the FairWild Standard. Working through an international network of offices and with a variety of partners, a number of sustainable use and trade projects are underway.

In the context of the **traditional medicine sector**, the FairWild Standard is applied as best practice in a pilot project with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) companies in China by TRAFFIC in partnership with the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (WFCMS) and Wecome Pharmaceutical Ltd. The FairWild Standard is also being piloted in India's Western Ghats to certify species important in Ayurveda

medicine, through a collaboration with the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), Durrell Institute for Conservation Ecology, and Pukka Herbs Ltd, and in northern Viet Nam on value chains for traditional Vietnamese medicine species, in a partnership between TRAFFIC and Bac Kan, Provincial Forest Protection Department.

TRAFFIC is also taking a role in developing tools and platforms to share experiences and provide resources for learning about sustainable collection of medicinal plants. The “Traditional and wild” online toolbox, launched by TRAFFIC in 2014 in the frame of the EU-funded project in Central Europe, is an online suite of globally-applicable tools



designed to be accessible to the general public, and to provide a learning resource for a wide range of stakeholders working with or interested in wild plant resources conservation and sustainable use. The toolbox includes sections with information about 30 commonly used wild-collected plants, such as Leopard’s Bane *Arnica montana* and Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*. Such information is traditionally passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation, but today is being lost through a combination of fewer wild plant harvesters operating and an increasingly urbanized population. An overview of worldwide projects incorporating use of the FairWild Standard, e.g. those on FairWild-certified Frankincense (*Commiphora* and *Boswellia* species) from Kenya and Liquorice root *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* from Kazakhstan, are included. TRAFFIC also works with industry associations, such as the China Medical Pharmaceutical Material Association and International Trade Union of Genuine Regional Materia Medica, to promote discussion and inspire commitment to action through existing platforms.

While implementing sustainable harvest and trade projects can be challenging, experience with the FairWild Standard has demonstrated the value of multi-stakeholder approaches. Maintenance of systems of wild collection according to a best practice framework can continue to deliver wild plant ingredients important to both community livelihoods and traditional healthcare practices. This provides a viable alternative to shifting towards cultivation or chemical synthesis, and helps maintain ecosystems and traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity, as well as human needs. Industries reliant on these resources have shown interest and commitment to support good practices and take responsibility for their supply chains, establishing long-term equitable relationships with their trading partners and communities managing the resources. While these practical examples are still relatively few in number, they are helping to build the body of experience with sustainable wild collection, and through the increasing interest and attention paid in national and international dialogues and policy processes, the opportunity to scale up and achieve wider impact is starting to be realized.

For more information: [www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org) and [www.fairwild.org](http://www.fairwild.org)