

FairWild goes virtual while pressures mount on wild plant supply chains during COVID-19 pandemic

This year has brought new challenges for the FairWild initiative¹ and work to promote sustainable trade in wild ingredients. The year began with the annual exhibition at the BioFach organic trade fair in Germany, where the event “*Wild plants, wild world!*” highlighted the role that businesses can take to protect biodiversity in a changing world. The topic was chosen in the expectation that 2020 would be a biodiversity “super-year”, with major policy events such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) CoP15 scheduled to take place. Global affairs have since taken a rather different turn, as the true scale and implications of the COVID-19 crisis have become clear. However, the need for sustainable and equitable production systems has never been greater.

The FairWild Foundation took steps to ensure the FairWild certification scheme could continue to operate amidst the pandemic. A set of COVID-19 auditing guidelines allow for the possibility of “remote audits”—an approach that has become necessary due to travel restrictions worldwide. More flexibility has also been provided around the use of the FairWild Premium fund² to support wild collection operations and communities in adapting to new challenges. As the end of 2020 draws near, FairWild is taking stock to identify what else is needed to respond to the needs of the community and partners in 2021 and beyond.

Meanwhile, FairWild has continued to promote sustainable wild harvest and trade. A well-attended webinar in May 2020 “*Boost your business with FairWild*” was held to encourage new brand manufacturers to become involved with FairWild. Industry interest in sustainability remains strong despite the more immediate issues many companies are facing. This is perhaps in line with a general public desire to keep environmental issues a high priority. A survey by Accenture in April 2020 found that 45% of consumers said they are making more sustainable choices when shopping since COVID-19 and will likely continue to do so.³ With increased capacity provided by the newly established Business Engagement Officer role, FairWild is reaching out to more companies and has been pleased to see more manufacturers come on board as licensees in 2020, despite the practical problems of the pandemic. FairWild has also been featured in the industry press, winning the 2020 sustainability award from the *Nutrition Business Journal*.

However, anecdotal information indicates that demand for wild plant products has increased worldwide—both

as herbal products to prevent and treat COVID-19 and because of more people turning to wild harvesting as an alternative source of income during times of high unemployment and economic crisis. TRAFFIC released the report “*The Invisible Trade: Wild plants and you in the time of COVID-19*” in June highlighting the issue. Its launch coincided with FairWild week—an online event that celebrates wild plants and all that nature can bring to our lives. It brought together the energy of FairWild’s partners and licensees⁴ to highlight the positive benefits of sustainable wild plant harvesting as well as the considerable challenges that these species and landscapes are facing.

With many parts of the world still facing restrictions, more must be done to support the communities hardest hit by the COVID crisis—to help ensure they can continue to manage their wild resources sustainably. A recent webinar encouraged wild collection operations to stay involved with FairWild and seek the support and commitment of their trading partners on their journey to sustainability. Representatives from two FairWild-certified companies, B’Ayoba and Nelixia, shared their stories and encouraged others to join in.

In 2021 FairWild will keep moving forward, with more virtual events planned for the first part of the year. Other forthcoming opportunities include the expansion, with assistance from members of the IUCN SSC Fungi Conservation Committee and FairWild advisory panel and several industry partners, of the FairWild certification scheme to fungi products. The Foundation is also working to clarify the eligible certification “grey area” between wild harvest and cultivation, and thus expand the range of certifiable scenarios and resulting biodiversity benefits. As ecosystem restoration is likely to continue gaining emphasis as a future conservation strategy, as well as the mainstreaming of biodiversity in production landscapes, this is an approach in line with the overall direction of the conservation movement.

Please contact the FairWild Secretariat if you would like to work on new opportunities together—including industry involvement in the FairWild certification scheme; engagement in training and capacity building activities and technical work on the Standard; and fundraising and partnership development. A fair deal for people and wild collected plants involves us all!

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¹ FairWild Foundation maintains the FairWild Standard and certification scheme for the sustainable and fair trade of wild harvested plants, fungi and lichen ingredients. The FairWild Secretariat is provided by TRAFFIC under the basis of a partnership agreement, and TRAFFIC also supports uptake of the FairWild Standard worldwide through a broader programme of work on sustainable trade.

² The FairWild Premium is a ringfenced amount of funding paid by FairWild buyers on top of the usual sales price for FairWild-certified ingredients, to support social development projects for the wild harvesters and their communities.

³ *COVID-19 Increasing Consumers’ Focus on “Ethical Consumption,” Accenture Survey Finds.* <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/covid-19-increasing-consumers-focus-on-ethical-consumption-accenture-survey-finds.htm>

⁴ Brand manufacturers using FairWild-certified ingredients.