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Case Study

Changing practices on sugar cane plantations in Brazil

We continue to work with mills in Brazil to meet our Gold Standard for sustainable sugar cane production. This was one of the first voluntary sustainability schemes to gain approval under the EU Renewable Energy Directive and has been described by a UK Government agency as meeting a Gold Standard for sustainable biofuel.

The standard holds farmers in Brazil to strict sustainability criteria, enforcing conformance with environmental, health and safety and labour regulations and incentivising conservation, reforestation and community engagement.

Greenergy Brasil works with mills directly, training mill managers to implement all principles of the standard. Under a programme of continuous improvement, we guide and persuade mills to resolve any non-conformances within a set time period. And by buying only from mills which meet our sustainability criteria, we drive demand for product meeting our standard.

Here's one example of our work:

In October 2010, Greenergy commissioned a Brazilian environmental auditing company to perform an audit at a new potential supplier, a sugarcane plantation in the state of Sao Paolo.

At this audit several major and minor non-compliances were observed:

- No survey of local fauna and flora had been conducted;
- No biodiversity management plan had been developed or implemented;
- There were no formalised procedures to control wash and rinse water from pesticide spraying vehicles.
- There was no water proofing and appropriate retention of rainwater in the vehicle garage;
- There were no records of environmental compliance by subcontractors;
- Absence of records of monitoring weeds (integrated pest management concept);
- Soil preparation implements were not cleaned before being transported to another plot;

- The hand washing tank was situated on the side of the syrup truck, with potential for contamination;
- Subcontracted workers involved in mechanised harvesting and sugarcane transportation were working in excess of national legislation;
- The support truck had oil leakage in the hydraulic system and a degraded tyre.

To be considered as a potential supplier to Greenergy, the mill's management team needed to resolve these non-compliances within 90 days. They worked with the Greenergy sustainability team in Brazil to identify and implement appropriate management practices.

In December 2010, the auditor reviewed procedures at the mill once again and was satisfied by with the evidence of resolution provided, specifically with the management plans regarding subcontractors.

The auditor recommended that at the next annual audits paid specific attention to these management plans and also to the requirement to monitor surface and ground water to prove effective containment of pesticide run off from the sprayer washing area.

In this case, enforcement of the Greenergy Gold Standard criteria led to real improvements in social and environmental sustainability, with:

- Implementation of biodiversity conservation plans, changes;
- Improvements to agricultural practices and employment practices to protect soil and water quality; and
- Improvements in working conditions.

