

How a Project in Southern India Creates New Perspectives

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It is easy to identify how much a product costs by simply looking at its price tag. However, the consequential costs entailed in how we approach production and consumption are not reflected in a sticker price. As consumers, it is practically impossible, for instance, to discern the costs for the environment and our health that are associated with a product.

Yet these are enormous: For instance, the current food (production) system alone is responsible for 24 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and 70 percent of fresh water consumption. It is the leading cause of tropical deforestation and biodiversity loss, and it increases the risk of future pandemics.

If the ecological footprint of the worldwide agriculture industry and food chain is to experience sustainable improvement, something fundamental must change. We need more clarity about the consequences of our actions for the environment, nature and society. The objective of the True Cost Initiative, in which twelve companies from the food and agriculture industries have joined forces, is to comprehensively analyze and quantify these effects. The jointly developed methodology of True Cost Accounting (TCA) quantifies both downstream costs of specific production methods in the areas of environment and health and the positive effects, such as CO₂ savings.



Women collecting Eucalyptus leaves, Nilgiri Mountain Rang, India. © PRIMAVERA LIFE GmbH

Collection and Distillation of Organic Eucalyptus in Southern India

PRIMAVERA, an aromatherapy pioneer and leading producer of organic and natural beauty, is one of the members of the True Cost Initiative. Since 2017, the company based at the foot of the German Alps that recently received the 2022 German Sustainability Award has been working with an organic farm partner located on a nature reserve in the Nilgiri Mountains of India.

The Nilgiri Mountain Range is located in southern India in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The cultivation site itself, where the community

also lives, is situated at an altitude of 2,700 meters as part of a special NGO reserve. The trees there are over 50 years old and are critically significant for the families in the community. Protecting and assuring their continued existence serves as the economic basis for the people. That is why the trees are neither cut down nor pruned and are part of a protected area.

The father of the current project, Raunak R. Jain, started by collecting and distilling eucalyptus and then founding his company in 1958, at the time still using conventional production methods. Today, more than 100 families in the reserve work on organic eucalyptus harvest and distillation. It is important to point out that the harvest does not involve the usual practice of cutting off branches or chopping down entire trees. Rather, only the leaves that have fallen from the trees are gathered by hand. The reward: Eucalyptus Oil endowed with a unique, especially precious composition.



Nature reserve in the Nilgiri Mountains of India. © PRIMAVERA LIFE GmbH

Comprehending Nature as a Treasure: The Core of PRIMAVERA's Sustainability Concept

Treasuring nature is of utmost importance to PRIMAVERA, since the company uses only the purest raw materials in its products. Eucalyptus, Hemp, Rose and many other ingredients are now produced by 17 organic farm partners worldwide, some of whom have accompanied or directly supplied PRIMAVERA since the company was founded. The trustful, long-term and fair collaboration with these like-minded partners constitutes the basis for the highest quality and purity of the products and is, at the same time, the centerpiece of the company's sustainable corporate philosophy. The organic farm partnerships enable active species conservation and promote environmentally sound agriculture in small-scale farming structures.

With its commitment to the True Cost Initiative, PRIMAVERA seeks to take another step in this mission. Only systematic logging of the true costs and the ecological and social impact along the entire value chain allows for undertaking measures to balance these- and preserve the sustainable balance between humanity and nature.

How exactly does this work? In the course of the cooperation under the auspices of the TCA, the PRIMAVERA suppliers and farm partners fill out a questionnaire on ecological and social issues. This forms the basis for establishing a balance sheet of the true costs of an agricultural product. In order to test a first draft of this questionnaire in practice, it was sent to several farm partners, one of them was Raunak in India. With the help of his feedback and that of other farm partners, PRIMAVERA was able to assess whether the questionnaire was too complex or unintelligible and was thus able to recommend and implement adjustments. This is how Raunak and his organic eucalyptus project became part of the TCA initiative. As he himself describes in the video, the questions helped him to immediately identify several action areas in his own operation, such as on the subject of equality. Thus, the holistic consideration of the costs brought immediate advantages to him and his team.

Strengthening the People. Securing the Supply of Raw Materials and Protecting the Climate: A Win-Win Situation for All

The objective of a PRIMAVERA raw materials funding project in India is to strengthen the local economy and improve the income opportunities of local people by expanding the sustainable production of essential oils. With the production of the essential Eucalyptus Oil, more than 100 Indian families are given a sound economic outlook. Furthermore, the project aims to support nearly 300 participating women, the transition to a solar-powered distillation plant or the extra steps required to conduct the organic and FairWild certification for the Eucalyptus Oil in order to further optimize the local environmental and social standards.

Last but not least, as in all its partnership projects, PRIMAVERA strives for intensive knowledge transfer. In the next few years, the establishment of a Knowledge Management Center with a sample distillation plant, presentation techniques and training material are planned. Workshops, lectures and training sessions whose content focuses on agriculture, technology, analytics, marketing and occupational safety, hygiene and sustainability are to be offered or take place here.

Despite the enormous difficulties imposed by the worldwide pandemic, the objectives that PRIMAVERA had set itself for the collaboration have been achieved in the progress of this project. A new distillation plant is to be built in the course of this very year, the construction of which will enable several members of the community to find seasonal work. Corona did not make the shared path any easier. But both sides are sure of one thing: They will not let the goal out of their sight.



Two Eucalyptus leaf pickers, Nilgiri Mountain Rang, India. © PRIMAVERA LIFE GmbH

[Click here to watch interview with Raunak R. Jain](#)



True Cost Initiative
Website: www.tca2f.org



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