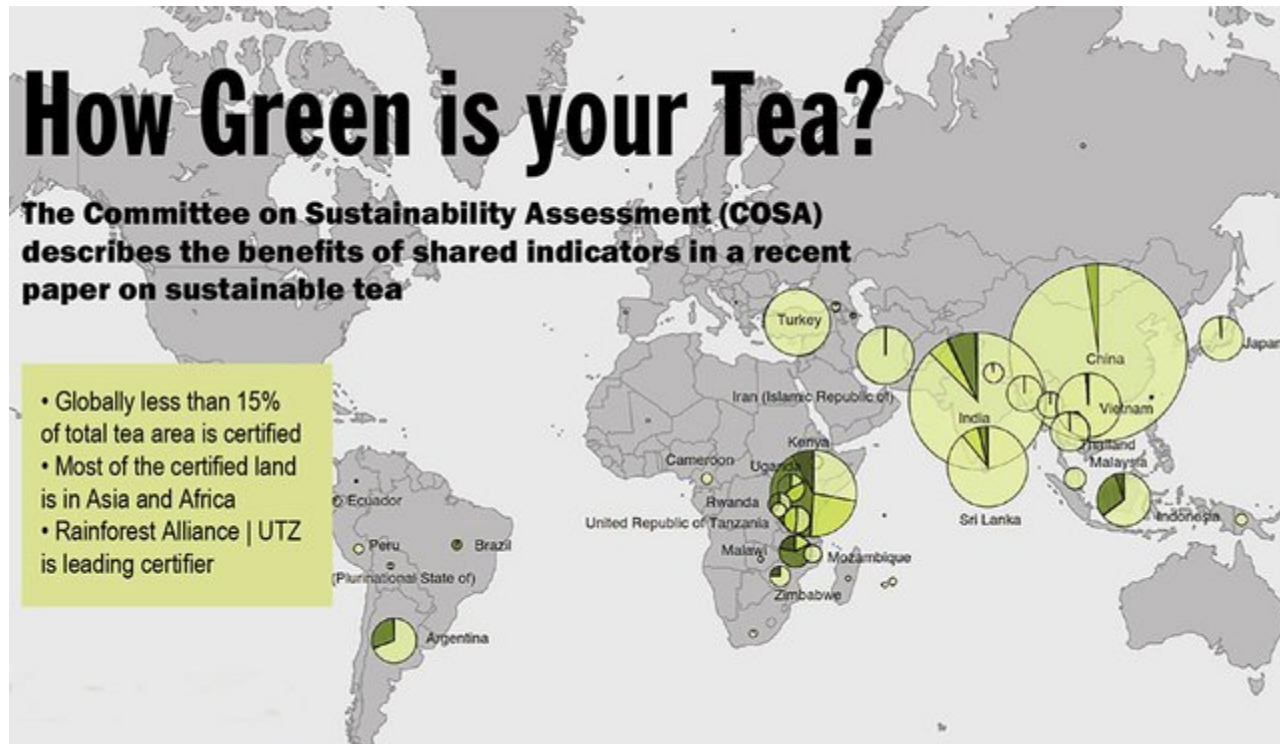


How Green is Your Tea?

by [Dan Bolton](#)

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The Committee on Sustainability Assessment (COSA) describes the benefits of shared indicators in a recent paper on sustainable tea.

By Dan Bolton

The tea sector has undertaken several initiatives to promote sustainability in recent years and, while many are conceptually excellent, others are impractical to scale, writes Daniele Giovannucci, president of the non-profit Committee on Sustainability Assessment (COSA).

“One of the key challenges facing the tea sector today lies in establishing practical and broadly recognized ways to measure and manage sustainability efforts,” says Giovannucci, “Credibility is key, and so is comparability so we can benchmark efforts and scale up.”

In January COSA, a consortium of 60 global organizations committed to sustainable practices, published a paper identifying sustainability challenges facing the tea industry. These were grouped into three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social.

COSA and the Ethical Tea Partnership reviewed more than 100 studies by academics, government experts, and certification bodies to agree on a common list and description of indicators. Researchers next applied the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound and trackable) process in selecting indicators that are science-based and appropriate for all tea globally. These were also then reviewed by a notable panel of international experts, he explains.

Consider the “economic” dimension from the vantage of a grower. COSA identified five economic themes: producer livelihoods, risk (defined as economic resilience); producer organizations (providing services and governance); competitiveness, and perception (the producer’s opinion of their overall economic situation).

Drilling down, a series of core components of competitiveness were identified within categories of business development, differentiation, and efficiency. Benchmarks include product quality, standards and certifications, and the price premium paid, or value delivered for meeting these standards.

“At a global level indicators can even capture the Sustainable Development Goals for organizations that want to including their specific principles, such as: “to double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists, and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land.”

“These indicators are, first and foremost, designed to be pragmatic and as simple as possible,” says Giovannucci, “They focus on the farm-level realities where information is typically most difficult to obtain. We elected to sacrifice high levels of accuracy to instead make them more universal and accessible for a wide range of users. They can provide high-level diagnostic information on the state of tea sustainability and the main challenges, and readily convey specific and vital information that can inform policy and decision-making,” he says.



Daniele Giovannucci

A web-based dashboard permits easy access to key performance indicators (KPIs) and makes it possible to identify critical hot spots at any given point in time. Indicators are color-coded and weighted to help users identify the relative impact of sustainability and certification initiatives on farmers’ well-being, livelihoods, and environment.

“A common language of measuring tea sustainability improves our ability to understand and effect change,” says Giovannucci. “Without pragmatic measurement, we will never have the necessary clarity to determine what efforts or investments are working and what may miss the mark or even be detrimental,” he says.

Learn more: thecosa.org/tea-indicators

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