

PRESS RELEASE

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RA-Cert and NEPCon Announce Intent to Join, Forming the World's Largest Mission-Driven Certification Body

The combined organisation will provide credible sustainability certification services at a global scale, engage with wide and diverse stakeholders, and productively contribute to the development of numerous certification schemes.

Copenhagen, New York (09 February 2018) – After two decades of close partnership, NEPCon and RA-Cert (the certification division of the Rainforest Alliance), the world's two leading non-profit certification bodies, have announced their intention to join later this year. The transaction is subject to agreement on final terms, which the parties expect to finalise later this year.

The combined organisation, which will operate under the name of NEPCon, will continue to offer services that both NEPCon and RA-Cert have been delivering in forestry, agriculture, responsible sourcing, biomass, carbon footprinting, and tourism.

"NEPCon and RA-Cert share similar values, including a commitment to credibility at the heart of our services. We already have closely aligned management structures, systems and working procedures, as well as long-standing trust across the two organisations. RA-Cert complements our existing capacities and geographical areas, and we are excited to have the RA-Cert team join NEPCon," said Peter Feilberg, Executive Director of NEPCon.

The RA-Cert/NEPCon union will have over 200 staff and a wide network of consultants working worldwide, delivering services on six continents. "The current RA-Cert and NEPCon geographies and services are complementary to each other, and together will drive greater reach and impact," said Feilberg.

Independence in Certification

The transition of RA-Cert was predicated on two significant changes undertaken by the Rainforest Alliance. In late 2017 [the Rainforest Alliance took over management of the Sustainable Agriculture Network \(SAN\) Sustainable Agriculture Standard](#) for Rainforest Alliance Certification, and the certification programme, and, separately, in January 2018 the Rainforest Alliance [merged with UTZ](#), a leading agricultural certification scheme based in Amsterdam. These changes have positioned the new Rainforest Alliance as an agriculture certification scheme owner, and for this reason, the Rainforest Alliance sought to make its in-house certification body, RA-Cert, independent.

Various options were explored to enhance RA-Cert's independence, and it was determined the most successful outcome would come through joining with NEPCon. This will enable RA-Cert to preserve continuity of services from its same expert staff, auditors, and partners established around the globe.

"Since pioneering the concept of sustainable forestry certification in 1989, the RA-Cert programme has played a critical role in innovating third-party certification, and the Rainforest Alliance has chosen the best path forward for both RA-Cert and our valued clients," said Laura Terrall, Director of RA-Cert. "In joining with NEPCon, we look forward to meeting new service needs, such as adding new programmes that allow audit bundling, and keeping an eye towards innovative solutions across our certification and assurance activities. RA-Cert is pleased to make this transition with NEPCon, which serves our shared mission to support sustainability on a local and global scale."

Preferred by Nature™

Our vision: A world where human choices ensure a sustainable future

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Our Shared Mission and Commitment

NEPCon and Rainforest Alliance have been close collaborators since 1998, initially working together on FSC™ (Forest Stewardship Council™) certification and expanding to other services, including agriculture certification. Based on this decades-long partnership, the NEPCon and RA-Cert approach to certification management has followed very similar guiding principles. This means clients can expect a seamless transition, with the familiarity of the service model they have come to know, and the high credibility they have come to trust.

"RA-Cert and NEPCon share a long and fruitful history of over 20 years, from NEPCon's beginning," said Richard Donovan, the Rainforest Alliance Senior Vice President and President of Forestry. "As an organisation with a mission-oriented certification programme, NEPCon is an ideal choice and we are confident the union with NEPCon will deliver benefits for companies and stakeholders, as well as certification and assurance systems, through continued innovation around engagement of smallholders, services which constantly focus on sustainable communities and land use, and tackling deforestation."

Credible services delivered worldwide

The union will create expanded reach and scale that will enable NEPCon to better drive impact and reach its mission. The organisation will be well-equipped to provide services to large international corporations with global supply chains in agricultural and forest products, as well as engage more with smallholders and community enterprises that are important drivers of impact on the ground.

"RA-Cert has played a key role in driving the Rainforest Alliance's vision of a world where nature is protected and biodiversity flourishes; where farmers, workers, and communities prosper; and where responsible land use and business practices are the norm," said Rainforest Alliance Chief Executive Officer, Han de Groot. "The acquisition of the RA-Cert programme by NEPCon is the right solution to maintain the credibility and independence of the RA-Cert certification and auditing services. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with NEPCon in a variety of areas in the future."

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About NEPCon

NEPCon (Nature Economy and People Connected) is an international non-profit organisation that works to build capacity and commitment for mainstreaming sustainability. For over 20 years, we have worked to foster sustainable land use and responsible trade in forest commodities. We do this through innovation projects, capacity building, and sustainability services.

We are accredited certifiers for sustainability schemes such as FSC™, PEFC, RSPO and SBP. We offer Chain of Custody certification according to the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture standard. We also certify to our own LegalSource™ and Carbon Footprint Management standards. A self-managing division of NEPCon promotes and delivers our certification services. Surplus from certification activities supports the development on NEPCon's non-profit activities.

Our work with certification systems extends far beyond service delivery. We are constantly engaged in improving certification schemes to support their credibility and impact on the ground whilst enhancing access to certification for small enterprises.

In line with our Open Source Policy, tools and systems that we develop under our programmes are freely available. We place great focus on transparency and knowledge sharing, and we collaborate with the entire range of stakeholders, including governments, NGOs and industry organisations. Learn more at www.nepcon.org

About RA-Cert and the Rainforest Alliance

RA-Cert is the certification division of the Rainforest Alliance, encompassing all certification, assurance and auditing programmes that the Rainforest Alliance currently manages across agriculture, forestry, and tourism. RA-Cert delivers its services with a global staff and a network of partners located across North America, Central and South America, Africa and Asia Pacific. The Rainforest Alliance's certification and assurance team helped establish some of the leading sustainability standards in forestry, tourism and agriculture. The RA-Cert expertise, transparency and integrity is recognised and valued around the world, and we continue to innovate and drive improvements in these standards. <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/certification-verification>

The Rainforest Alliance works towards a future where people and nature thrive in harmony. It is an international non-profit organisation working to build strong forests, healthy agricultural landscapes, and thriving communities through creative, pragmatic collaboration with farmers, foresters, communities, scientists, governments, environmentalists, and businesses. The Rainforest Alliance merged with UTZ in January 2018, joining forces to rejuvenate agricultural landscapes, conserve forests, foster sustainable livelihoods, and build climate resilience across vulnerable regions; transform business practices and drive supply chain innovation; and engage consumers in positive change. Learn more at www.rainforest-alliance.org and <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/>