

# 6 tips on how to become more socially responsible in the processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts sector

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Demand for processed fruit, vegetables and nuts in Europe is rising. Today's consumers want not only affordable products but socially responsible products too. Buyers in Europe are therefore including social responsibility in their requirements. Exporters who want to improve their reputation and boost business can consider adopting socially responsible practices. Suppliers will find it easier to attract buyers if they support the well-being of workers and local communities, and communicate about it. The specific tips below will help you become more socially responsible and stand out to potential buyers.

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## 1. Reflect consumer values through social responsibility and sustainable practices

The European market is becoming increasingly competitive. Consumers are faced with ever more products. As a result, European consumers are looking for products made by companies that mirror their own values.

Consumers look at whether the values of a brand are close to their own values, according to the [2022 Global Trends](#) study from Ipsos. Most consumers say they believe business can be a force for good. Some 80% agree that brands can make money and support good causes at the same time. Almost two-thirds of consumers say they try to buy products from brands that act responsibly.

SMEs can become socially responsible suppliers by taking on sustainable practices that meet international standards. Social responsibility includes topics such as better labour conditions, low environmental impact, ethical sourcing, good governance structures and support to local communities.

Some food processing companies in developing countries employ a larger share of migrant workers than other industries. Migrant workers often work long hours in difficult conditions. Companies can establish fair labour practices for this workforce that reflect the local living wage, working hours and safety protocols.

Fruit and vegetable canning and freezing industries can release a lot of liquid waste. There is a large opportunity for involving the local community in environmental protection efforts to best focus investments. This can both improve public image and lead to better relations with the community.

Olive oil production also generates a significant amount of waste, including olive pomace and wastewater that harm the immediate community. However, these by-products can be turned into valuable resources for the community. Olive pomace can be used to produce biofuel, and wastewater can be treated and reused for irrigation.

The [ISO 26000 standard](#) was developed to help improve the social responsibilities that are relevant to their vision. It identifies seven core subjects and issues related to social responsibility:

Organisational governance
Human rights
Labour practices
The environment
Fair operating practices
Consumer issues
Community involvement and development

One way of being socially responsible is to take care of the local community. Palestine-based cooperative [Canaan Fair Trade](#) does this in its own community, by working with more than 1,000 artisan family farms in 43 villages. To promote social justice, Canaan uses fair trade principles such as full direct payment, fair prices for farmers and purchase guarantees. The company exports processed products like almond pesto, carob syrup and wild caper tomato tapenade.

Keep in mind that there is a difference between the terms 'fair trade' and fairtrade. 'Fair trade' describes efforts to lower global poverty. This is done with direct, equitable and sustainable trade between producers in the Global South and consumers in the Global North. The single word 'fairtrade' denotes food and goods produced under the standards set by the [Fairtrade International system](#).

Companies can implement fair trade principles even without certification. The World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) published [ten fair trade principles](#) in 2017 that can guide you in becoming a fair trade business.

Figure 1: What are fair trade, fairtrade and free trade?



Source: [Autentika Global](#)

Sourcing products with direct trade can help consumers support local growers. [Mavuno Harvest](#) is a small company in Tanzania that sells organic dried fruit from rural sub-Saharan Africa. The company chose to help farming communities in Sub-Saharan Africa by opting for direct trade. Its direct trade practices are certified by QCS. The company avoids middlemen by working directly with farmers. Keep in mind that there are still no widespread formal certifications exclusively to guarantee that raw materials have been bought through direct trade.

Social sustainability is also based on equal opportunities for all members of society. Colombia's [Fruandes](#) is a small fair trade company that exports a range of processed vegetable products. The company works with small-scale farmers. From the 74 farmer association members, 20% are women and 7% are younger than 30. Fruandes also includes fair wages and working conditions for its employees, 70% of them women who are helping to strengthen the entire community as a whole.

One way to focus on social sustainability is to make it part of a company's mission statement. Then make sure it is respected, which will help build good and long-term relations with local partners. Companies cannot expect to become successful in a failing community. The [UN Global Compact](#) offers useful information that helps companies embrace the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).

### **Tips:**

Monitor consumer expectations and highlight strengths of your own that may resonate with consumer values.

Adopt fair trade principles even if fair trade certification is out of reach. For guidance, look at the [10 principles](#) published by the WTO.

Survey and identify the biggest problems in your local community. Is it access to fresh water? Disease? Gender inequality? Try to form local partnerships to tackle problems.

Promote direct trade and fair pricing in day-to-day activities. A good rule of thumb could be to get to know and then negotiate directly with growers when possible. This helps build stronger ties.

Download and share [a set of free resources](#) developed by Partner Africa to facilitate the adoption of responsible business practices.

## **2. Promote health and safety at the workplaces**

Workers must be protected from potential dangers, such as diseases, injuries and harmful chemicals. Without suitable health and safety measures in the workplace, work can lead to accidents and illnesses.

Workers in mango farms, cashew processing factories and vegetable fields, for example, face many health and safety risks. Without good safety measures, they can get hurt or sick. In Bangladeshi mango farms, workers often use pesticides. If not used safely, these chemicals can cause health problems such as breathing troubles, skin issues, and even serious diseases like cancer.

In Kenyan vegetable fields, the work can be physically hard. Workers may have to lift heavy baskets of produce or work in uncomfortable positions, which can lead to back pain. They may also have to work in very hot weather, which can cause health issues like heatstroke.

In Beninese cashew factories there can be other dangers. Workers might get cut or injured by machines used to crack the hard shells of the cashews. They might also be exposed to the dust from the shells, which can cause

allergies or breathing problems.

## Encourage the use of PPE

The most important thing is to ensure the physical safety of workers. Companies should require employees to wear suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, hairnets, proper footwear and aprons. This protects employee health and prevents contamination of products.

PPE should be provided by the company and replaced regularly. The company should also provide workers with safety equipment such as goggles and masks where necessary. Be aware of specific problems and occupational diseases in your firm and supply chain, and use PPE and equipment that address the cause of a problem. For example, the corrosive cashew nut shell liquid (CNSL) causes a severe [dermatological problem](#) called cauterisation. India's cashew processor RTG Industries recommends cloth or rubber gloves for CNSL in its [material safety data sheet](#).

Check out the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OHSA) dedicated [farm hazards page](#) with proposed controls and solutions. They cover a wide range of hazards that farm workers are exposed to.

OHSA also has [industry-specific resources](#) for the food processing industry, as well as particular topics such as temporary staffing, beverage delivery, warehousing and storage. The Pesticide Action Network (PAN) presents alternative methods for managing pests, crop diseases or weeds in tropical and temperate regions.

Prolonged fruit or vegetable peeling activities can cause finger deformities and scarring. Make sure that proper protective gloves are utilised. Breaks are vital in this industry as they allow physical recovery from demanding tasks, prevent heat stress and foster mental rest, leading to increased productivity and safer work conditions.

Processing of stone fruits and nuts usually involves pitting and shelling activities. These activities are accompanied by higher levels of air particles and noise pollution. Workers should have air protection equipment to avoid respiratory problems and asthma. Ear protectors can help avoid hearing damage from noise pollution.

## Provide training and education

Simply giving PPE to employees is not enough. Workers need to know why hygienic measures are needed and how to apply them. Companies should provide continued education on worker safety and hygiene. Information also needs to be up to date. Rules in importing countries may change frequently. It is in the best interest of suppliers and sellers to keep their own workers informed. Companies can teach workers with regular short meetings and clear posters in the workplace. For updates, use digital tools where possible, or brochures and group talks as needed.

## Conduct a workplace risk assessment

A risk assessment is a careful check of what could harm people in the workplace. Employers and workers can easily conduct a basic workplace risk assessment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), basic measures can often control risks, and especially for SMEs its [five-step method](#) might be the simplest.

The idea behind a workplace risk assessment is that it's an ongoing process – you have to keep doing it. Conduct a formal, documented risk assessment at least once a year. A new risk assessment is a must if there are significant changes in the workplace, such as new machinery, processes or products.

For example, in a nut factory you first spot hazards like loud machines or sharp tools. Then, consider who might get hurt, for example workers near the machines. Next, evaluate these risks and decide on safety steps, like using ear protectors. Assign someone, perhaps a manager, to put these measures in place within a timeframe, say, by next week. Lastly, write everything down, monitor how it works, and make the necessary changes, perhaps with a monthly check.

Figure 2: Five-step method for a workplace risk assessment



Source: [Autentika Global](#), ILO

## Provide safe workplaces and accommodations for workers

Companies should ensure that the workplace and accommodations for workers are clean and well-maintained. Facilities for workers should have adequate ventilation and lighting.

Employees must also have access to basic amenities such as clean water, toilets, and bathing facilities if necessary. When possible, companies can improve worker well-being with additional facilities like a sports area, spaces for meals and other facilities, and health services.

Keep in mind legislation on workers' load-handling. European [Directive 90/269/EEC](#) specifies that employers must reduce risks in the manual handling of heavy loads. Employers can do this by using tools like forklifts or trolleys for heavy loads, plus provide training on safe lifting practices. Consult a [guide on manual handling](#) from the UK's Health and Safety Executive and [national laws](#). Checking European national laws can help align your standards with those of potential importers and give you ideas for effective safety measures.

A good source of answers on a range of international labour issues is the [ILO Helpdesk for Business on International Labour Standards](#). It provides information on many labour topics and there is even a Q&A section on [business and occupational safety and health](#). For example, the [ILO code of practice on safety and health in agriculture](#) provides guidance on aspects like load-handling. Workers who handle (lift, carry and position) heavy objects (weighing in excess of 23 kg) at rates exceeding three times per minute for more than two hours are at risk of experiencing lower back injury, generalised fatigue and possibly heat stress.

## Ensure free health check-ups for workers

Health check-ups can help identify potential health issues early on. This can prevent more serious health problems down the line. Early detection of health problems improves outcomes and lowers healthcare costs. Another benefit for companies is that workers know the company cares for their well-being. This improves satisfaction and work morale.

Employers can expand their social responsibility by integrating health services for multiple health issues. Integrated health testing for multiple diseases is more likely to be accepted, according to an [ILO report](#).

Malaria and tuberculosis kill millions every year. They also have clear symptoms which, when caught early on, can help diagnose these treatable diseases. Free health check-ups can help identify the presence of such diseases.

Companies can conduct a workplace health assessment to understand the specific health risks present in their work environment. These can include potential exposure to harmful substances, noise levels, or ergonomic hazards. An assessment will also yield data about the health of employees, according to a [workplace health model](#) from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The data from a health assessment can guide companies on the right health programmes for their workers. For example, if noise levels are high, ear protection programmes could be a priority. If many workers have malaria symptoms, a partnership with a local healthcare provider for regular check-ups might be beneficial.

Figure 3: Data sources for a workplace health assessment



### Tips:

Implement regular cleaning and sanitising measures at your firm. Consult local regulations to ensure full compliance with hygiene requirements.

Create guidelines that promote a culture of wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE). Then provide all the necessary PPE. Conduct a [manual handling risk assessment](#).

Provide basic amenities such as clean water, toilets and meal spaces. Consult workers on additional amenities that could improve the working environment.

Offer free health checks for workers and run a workplace health assessment. Use available models, such as the [workplace health model](#) from the CDC.

Consult the [concise list of main causes of injury](#) in the fruit and vegetables industry from the UK's HSE.

## 3. Promote inclusivity for a successful business

Suppliers of processed fruit and vegetables play a critical role in the global food supply chain. This also brings along responsibility. Exporters can build stronger relationships with buyers and suppliers by being fair in all dealings. Companies should discontinue any practices that worsen poverty, gender inequality and discrimination. This is also good business sense because companies depend on the local community and environment.

Inclusiveness means having a diverse workforce where everyone is given equal opportunities, regardless of gender, race, age or religion. Fair practices are actions that promote equality and justice, such as equitable hiring, fair compensation and eliminating discrimination. Workers' rights cover the right to safe working conditions, fair wages, and freedom from discrimination.

Customers are increasingly buying products that are made by those who respect human rights. Being socially responsible requires effort from everyone in the company. Focus on areas in which your company faces the biggest challenges.

Figure 4: The business benefits of full inclusion of employees



Source: [Autentika Global](#), McKinsey & Company

Be aware that firms can face legal, financial and reputational problems if they fail to respect workers' rights. Also, production stoppages become more likely when there is worker unrest. Firms can lose important contracts to suppliers who show buyers that they have greater protections for workers. The cheapest option may turn out to be the most expensive. For example, firms can be forced to pay legal damages or injury compensation to workers, or their reputation can suffer because of critical news reports.

Some of the most important fair practices that companies can adopt are listed below.

## Put in place equitable hiring practices

A strong and resilient workforce reflects the community it comes from. Processed fruit and vegetable companies should employ all people, without preference for any gender, race, age or religion. However, providing equal employment opportunities is not the end of fair treatment in the workplace. Being inclusive also means giving fair compensation. All workers should have the same access to promotions, training and development opportunities. Some groups may benefit from additional support, like young and older workers.

The UN Global Compact developed a free [decent work toolkit](#) that helps buyers support decent work. It can provide suppliers with good insight into what buyers are looking for from suppliers. It consists of three specific tools that focus on decent work and how to promote it inside a company and supply chain. The toolkit includes case studies, examples and links to e-courses.

## Encourage a diverse workplace culture

High levels of diversity and inclusion in a company are linked to greater productivity, innovation and well-being. An [overview of diversity and inclusion research](#) from 2020 shows that individuals, organisations and society can all benefit. The ILO published these findings in a [2022 report](#) on productive and strong workplaces.

Inclusion does not simply mean asking 'Do you feel included at work?'. Inclusion means being valued as an individual and having a strong sense of belonging at work.

Figure 5: Four principles for achieving transformational change on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)



Source: [Autentika Global](#), International Labour Organization (ILO)

Companies that want to promote inclusion and diversity must identify barriers in their organisation. These blockages can be overcome by focusing on employees' feelings of inclusion. According to a [2020 study](#) by global management company McKinsey & Company, four factors are linked to a strong sense of inclusion:

- Diverse, inclusive company leadership is correlated with individuals feeling included. Respondents from companies with diverse leaders are 1.5 times more likely to feel included, compared to workers from organisations without diverse leaders.
- A meritocratic company culture is linked to workers' sense of inclusion. Workers in companies where the work culture is based on merit are 1.3 times more likely to feel very included. Fairness in work performance evaluations is also positively linked to feelings of inclusion.
- Sponsorship helps the career prospects of underrepresented employees. Companies where colleagues create opportunities for other workers help workers feel a strong sense of inclusion.
- Meaningful access to senior leaders helps worker advancement and increases feelings of inclusion. But not all employees are equally likely to report benefiting from access to leaders. Research shows that women are less likely to have meaningful access to senior leaders than men.

## Offer training and development opportunities

Companies that offer workers learning and development are able to fill existing or new skill gaps. In-house talent can often help address issues a company may face.

Training should cover equipment use, quality assurance and sustainable farming methods. Staff can also learn about food processing techniques, supply chain management and leadership skills. Health and safety training is essential to create a safe work environment.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates that over half of the global workforce will need new skills in the medium term. According to a [WEF 2020 report](#), 94% of business leaders expect employees to pick up new skills

on the job. This is up from 65% in 2018.

By developing its own employees, a firm can create a strong talent pool. This allows businesses to promote from the inside, according to a [2021 analysis](#) by the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. These practices also cut down on costs for recruiting, interviewing, hiring and training.

Companies should offer training and development opportunities to all employees to enhance their skills and knowledge. This can help them grow, making them more valuable assets to the organisation.

Employees increasingly see learning and development (L&D) culture as a positive part of a company's image. According to a [2022 study](#) by TalentLMS, employees see a vibrant learning & development (L&D) culture as a key component of what makes a company a great place to work, now and for the future.

## Overcome gender discrimination and promote equality

Women and girls make up almost half of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, according to a [2019 study](#) by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Women in the farming and food processing sector often face a lack of access to training, machinery and new technology.

Gender equality is the fifth goal of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) adopted by the UN in 2016. Although there are more women than ever in the labour market, major inequalities remain. In some regions and countries women are denied the same work rights as men, according to the [UNDP](#).

The latest employment indicators for women in the agriculture sector for some [CBI target countries](#) indicate that women are not equally represented. In some of the countries with available data, women represent less than 5% of the workforce.

Table 1: Share of female employees in total employees in agriculture, forestry and fishing in 2020

Country	Share of female employees (%)
Egypt	5.2
Indonesia	28.5
Jordan	4.0
Myanmar	39.2
Palestine	4.5
Zambia	24.0

Source: FAOSTAT, 2023

The [Empowering Women at Work Capacity Development Platform](#) provides tools and resources to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in companies. The platform offers online learning modules for companies on important issues for women at the workplace. Topics include closing gender pay gaps, achieving a work-life balance, and addressing violence and harassment against women in the workplace.



Food processing companies can become more gender-aware and provide equal rights to women by using strategies and tools such as:

- Making a longer shortlist when hiring new candidates if you wish to give women a better chance. [A 2021 study](#) by the Harvard Business Review warns that gender inequities may be silently present in informal hiring. They found that the share of female candidates was 33% higher in extended shortlists.
- Eliminating gender pay gaps through wage transparency. Firms should make it a policy to pay everyone the same for the same roles. This is a finding from the [2021 Future of Work](#) analysis by the WEF.
- Conducting a gender audit to find gender gaps and any favouritisms in company policies and practices.
- Having women mentor men to reduce the divide between the genders in the company. [A 2021 article](#) suggests that women mentoring men could benefit both sides.
- Encourage work-life balance by providing flexible working hours, parental leave and childcare. This is very helpful for women who balance work and family responsibilities.

The International Financial Corporation (IFC) published an [interactive gender toolkit](#) to help companies unlock opportunities for women. The toolkit can be used by all firms that want a more diverse, gender-balanced workplace. With the report builder, users can choose the content and build a customised report.

### **Tips:**

Conduct a survey and check whether the workforce reflects the community in terms of race, religion, age, gender and nationality. If not, check for possible bias in employment practices.

Champion a culture that acknowledges and rewards talent; initiate equitable hiring and compensation strategies now.

Proactively monitor and improve the minimum-to-average wage ratio in your company.

Prepare and conduct workforce surveys to pinpoint preferred training programmes. Develop and roll a first batch of comprehensive training to boost employees' skills and growth.

Announce a policy of equal access to training, machinery and new technology for all workers.

## **4. Take ownership of your supply chain**

Companies that work to develop responsible supply chains can improve their reputation and the brand value of their products. Such behaviour increases customer loyalty and helps attract new customers who care about sustainably made products. In addition, every country has laws and regulations in place that prohibit labour abuses. Companies that ignore these regulations can face legal problems and financial costs.

Sensible supply chain practices can also help companies save money over the long term. Also, joint work with suppliers to improve practices can create a more efficient supply chain.

Companies that do not manage supply chain risks properly can face risks such as reputational damage and legal and financial perils. Poorly managed supply relationships can also lead to shortages of key materials because of supplier problems. Discovery of unsustainable supply chains can cause loss of market access.

Farmers are at the heart of the food supply chain. Processors should keep grower interests prominent in their code of conduct. Farmers are not employees and often lack the same protection net as workers. Adopt policies that ensure fair conditions for growers, like payments based on grower production costs, quality-based premiums, farmer assistance programmes, and weighing of produce only with regularly calibrated scales.

Conduct a risk assessment of your supply chain to find potential risks, then develop strategies to manage labour, environmental and social risks that emerge. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is a reliable source of information on how firms can conduct a risk assessment on suppliers. GRI standards help firms understand and report their impacts on the economy, the environment and people in a comparable and credible way. In addition to the [GRI Universal Standards](#), new GRI standards for [sustainable production of food](#) have been developed and are free.

Food processors should develop a supplier code of conduct. This document should outline the expectations and standards that suppliers must respect and commit to. The code can address issues such as human rights, labour practices, environmental sustainability and business ethics.

Even with a code of conduct in place, firms must make sure that the code is being implemented. To do so, monitor supplier compliance. This is usually done through supplier audits, site visits, and other forms of due diligence. The best way to build a trusted relationship is to work with suppliers directly to promote responsible practices.

Social compliance audits can help a company know that its factory or suppliers are compliant with labour and environmental laws. Two common audits are [amfori BSCI](#) and [SMETA](#). Both audits can help you understand standards of labour, health and safety, environmental performance, and ethics in your firm or at a supplier site.

Reporting on supply chain performance can be difficult and expensive for SMEs. Researchers from Indonesia have found that SMEs in their country have limited resources to dedicate to this purpose. Also, there is a lack of specific guidelines for sustainability reporting by SMEs. According to a [2021 case study involving 25 SMEs](#), Indonesian researchers proposed that SMEs adopt a smaller number of indicators for reporting by choosing the most relevant indicators for their business. Start modestly by focusing on key indicators, then expand as proficiency in reporting grows.

Be inspired by SMEs that already report their impact. [Kuli Kuli](#) is a small food processor in the USA that produces and sells moringa-based food powders for smoothies. The company has published its [2021 sustainability impact report](#), which includes information on their supply chain sustainability practices. They are building a fair food chain and using the food economy to improve conditions in under-privileged regions.

### Tips:

Conduct a social compliance audit of your own company and suppliers. Use common audits like [amfori BSCI](#) and [SMETA](#).

Instruct company procurement staff to use the [Decent Work Toolkit for Sustainable Procurement](#). Ask suppliers to do the same. This will enable action to improve labour conditions for supply-chain workers.

Develop a supplier code of conduct. This document should outline the expectations and standards that suppliers must respect and commit to.

Search for potential risks now by conducting a risk assessment of your entire supply chain.

Embrace sustainability at the very top of the firm and then expand to all partners and workers.

## 5. Be aware of changing human rights due diligence legislation

The EU is preparing due diligence legislation that will protect human rights in Europe and beyond. In February

2022 the European Commission adopted a [draft directive on corporate sustainability due diligence](#) to address human rights risks. The draft directive is working its way through the European Parliament, as of March 2023.

SMEs from non-EU exporting countries are not directly targeted by this proposal, yet may be indirectly affected if they supply EU companies that do fall under the new rules. If approved, the directive will apply to medium-sized companies in high-risk sectors from the fourth year after entry into force. The [list of high-risk sectors](#) includes agriculture, manufacture of food products, and wholesale trade of agricultural raw materials, food and beverages. Due diligence would apply to companies' own operations, their subsidiaries and entire value chains.

Human rights due diligence (HRDD) in supply chains is a new and developing area, and firms may be confused about the changing rules. SMEs can find implementing HRDD difficult, but there are resources available. The [Norton Rose Fulbright report on HRDD](#) states: "Start somewhere... It is important to keep on improving".

Figure 6: How to keep up with human rights due diligence (HRDD) requirements



Source: [Autentika Global](#)

## Individual countries also have their own HRDD rules

SMEs supplying large companies in Europe should be aware that individual countries have been developing their own HRDD legislation. Countries are requiring their companies to implement due diligence measures in their extended supply chains. Notable examples are [France's Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law](#) of 2017 and the [Dutch Child Labour Due Diligence Law](#) of 2019. In January 2023, Germany's own [Supply Chain Due Diligence Act](#) came into effect. Germany's regulations require companies to take appropriate measures to respect human rights and the environment within their supply chains.

## Follow and adopt existing HRDD guidelines

To better understand the human rights issues in supply chains, consult reputable resources on HRDD, such as [Gender-Responsive Due Diligence](#). Another source is the [Making Sense of Managing Human Rights Issues in Supply Chains report](#), which can assist companies in understanding what is expected and how to set good practices.

The [OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct](#) also gives practical support to firms explaining due diligence recommendations, but is a more general document.

Despite the availability of these resources based on internationally recognised frameworks, most of these sources are general guidelines that do not specifically address fruit, vegetable and nut processing. Food processing is often linked to informal seasonal work, extensive reliance on small growers, and traceability problems.

Companies facing forced labour, child labour and human trafficking problems can look at specific tools such as the [Responsible Sourcing Tool for Food and Beverage Compliance](#). This toolkit was developed by Verité with the US government. Also consult the [OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains](#), whose step-by-step approach helps companies integrate this process into their operations and supply chains.

To address the risk of child labour in agricultural operations, the Fair Labor Association issued [new guidance to companies](#) in March 2023. The guidance consists of eight steps to be followed:

Commit to aligning policies with international standards on child labour.

Recognise that local laws may not adequately protect children. Many companies use 18 as an upper age limit for children, as good practice. Be aware of your local legislation and its details. Err on the safe side.

Build awareness among staff, subcontractors and supply-chain partners.

Actively monitor facilities.

Maintain required permits and parental consent documentation.

Develop special considerations for the employment of young workers.

Implement a system to identify and document proof of age for young workers.

Take steps for remediation and case management.

[Sol Organica](#) is a Nicaraguan food processor that sources, manufactures and exports solar dried fruit and tropical fruit purees and juices to Europe and North America. A severe lack of jobs and education in rural areas has created a cycle of poverty in many farming communities. Sol Organica addresses some of these human rights issues by offering farmers financial training and helping to open bank accounts for farmers and cooperatives. The firm pays above-market value for crops and offers jobs to single mothers in rural communities.

Be proactive and prevent problems by adopting anti-harassment, anti-discrimination, whistle-blower and 'right to unite' policies. These policies should be developed as documents and be easily available. They should contain precise ways to protect victims, guarantee fair treatment of complaints, and ensure reporting of outcomes.

Companies in the processed fruit, vegetable and nut sector often use voluntary sustainability standards. These risk-based due diligence systems can help firms follow requirements of international markets. Their usefulness depends on how closely they match international expectations and regulations. The FAO published an excellent [technical gap analysis tool](#) on voluntary sustainability standards in the avocado and pineapple sectors in March 2023.

## **Keep on top of HRDD developments in target markets**

Non-compliance with HRDD legislation could result in legal action, restrictions, fines and/or penalties imposed by regulatory bodies in EU countries. Another serious risk is reputational damage.

In 2012, a [sweeping, independent investigation](#) by the Fair Labor Association mapped Nestlé's cocoa supply chain from its headquarters to the farms in Ivory Coast and identified numerous child labour violations. Nestlé was accused of using child labour in its cocoa supply chain in West Africa. The company faced a backlash from European consumers and retailers even though HRDD legislation was not in place back then.

### **Tips:**

Start somewhere if your company has not started working on HRDD yet.

Keep on top of both EU and national HRDD legislation for markets that you export products to.

Consult reputable resources on HRDD in the food sector such the [OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains](#) and the [Responsible Sourcing Tool for Food and Beverage Compliance](#).

Be proactive and adopt voluntary sustainability standards. Consult the new FAO [technical gap analysis tool](#) to see how other companies are using their own voluntary standards.

## **6. Employ and train youth for better outcomes**

Creating opportunities for youth employment in the processed fruit or vegetable sector can have a positive impact on local communities and the industry. It also means you will have access to a newly skilled and motivated workforce. This in turn can lead to innovative solutions and increased productivity.

Many African countries have young populations. While informal job opportunities are commonly found in agriculture and the food industry in rural communities, these often involve small-scale, subsistence farming. However, this type of farming may not be the most appealing career path for the youth (see definition in Box 1). The processed food industry, with its potential for formal employment, could present a more attractive option for them.

The United Nations (UN) defines 'youth' as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition.

Youth is defined as persons aged 15 to 29 in the ILO's Youth Labour Market Statistics (YouthSTATS) database.

Most African countries adopt the African Union (AU) definition of youth as people between ages 15 and 35.

A 2020 CTA study on [ICT uses by rural youth in Kenya](#) showed that there is a need for training among the younger generation. Companies that mainly employed young people from low-income and low formal education backgrounds showed low technology adoption.

These problems are made worse by the high cost of information and communication technology (ICT) devices and internet subscriptions. This is further aggravated by poor and unreliable connectivity and limited electricity infrastructure. It is especially true in rural areas where there are large hindrances for adoption of digitalisation. Create training programmes, invest in infrastructure and ICT, and support the young generation in their use.

### **Tips:**

Offer internships and apprenticeships and partner with local educational institutions, agricultural schools and universities.

Create inclusive employment policies that prioritise and encourage the recruitment of young people, ensuring a diverse and dynamic workforce.

Offer competitive wages and benefits to attract young talent. Good working conditions and chances for professional growth and advancement are ways to attract young people.

Develop a strong employer brand: SMEs can build a positive reputation as an employer that values youth development and offers ample opportunities for growth and learning.

Encourage young farmers and entrepreneurs by offering guidance, mentoring, and access to resources. This could include small-scale farming, processing firms or distribution services.

[Autentika Global](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

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