

THE BLUE NUMBER INITIATIVE: SUPPORTING FOOD SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

UN Global Registry in Food & Agriculture
(Integrated Sustainable Agriculture Programme - ISAP)

WHY

Pressure on food systems is set to intensify as the world's population grows to an estimated 9 billion by 2050. Our long-term food security requires the necessary increase in production to be sustainable, which in turn demands improved livelihoods for millions of small-scale farmers, greater respect for eco-systems and biodiversity, and more conscious consumption patterns, with much less food waste.

Meanwhile, consumer demand for sustainably produced food has caused sustainable agricultural production to gain in relevance over the last 20 years, with a proliferation of sustainability standards and voluntary certification schemes. To date, well over 40 large multinationals have publicly committed to strengthen sustainability, by using sustainability standards in their supplier relationships, and to source large parts of input agricultural raw materials sustainably in the coming years.

While these sustainability standards and practices have created market opportunities, they have also placed added pressure on farmers and agribusinesses around the world to provide evidence of sustainability practice and progress. This pressure is especially in developing markets, where complying with – and proving compliance with – such standards can be prohibitively expensive.

A new approach is needed to make it convenient, cost-effective and compelling for farmers and agribusinesses to switch to more sustainable practices. There is also a need for an established, centralized infrastructure for sharing and communicating expectations and validations between all actors in the food value chain: from farmer's field through to retailer's store shelf. Previously, reaching the millions of actors in global and local food systems would have been unaffordable, if not impossible. Now, Internet-based technology platforms, commonly used for e-commerce and social networking, make these challenges of scale easily solvable.

The purpose of the Blue Number Initiative:

To make global food and agriculture systems more sustainable
To enable more farmers and agribusinesses to 'think' and 'do' sustainably

WHAT

- An open global online registry to recognize the contribution of millions of **farmers and small agribusinesses** to the world's food systems;
- A neutral **global platform** which:
 1. recognizes previously 'invisible' farmers and agribusinesses of any size and puts them 'on the map';
 2. encourages them to declare their contribution to food systems and a willingness to enhance their sustainability practices and profile;
 3. connects them to global buyers who prioritize sustainable sourcing;
 4. allows them to compare national compliance and international voluntary standards: both for benchmarking their current sustainability performance, as well as charting a path to improve performance.

HOW

- A unique '**Blue Number**' (global location number or "GLN") and profile identifies a farm or SME in any part of a food and agriculture value chain;
- The **Blue Number** is a 'suitcase' containing key information on the individual farmer or business, a physical location, and what they produce or provide as a service;
- The **Blue Number** is obtained from a **dedicated global online system** where:
 1. farmers and agribusinesses can register and volunteer information about themselves;
 2. farmers and agribusinesses can create a **sustainability profile** on their products, services and capacity, including for trade or export;
 3. information can be **shared** with stakeholders, trading partners and regulators;
 4. farmers and businesses can declare they are ready for capacity-building support from national stakeholders, governments and various UN agencies.
- Blue Numbers are UN-sponsored and free to all - no one is charged for a Blue Number and the profile information will not be sold by the UN.
- Farmers and agribusinesses decide how much information they want to include, and choose with whom to share.

A user's public profile will include:

1. Name
2. Gender
3. Location
4. Email
5. Products or services

WHO BENEFITS FROM BLUE NUMBERS AND HOW?

FARMERS AND AGRIBUSINESSES

Increased visibility in the value chain

- Who are you and what do you do in the food system?
- Offer traceability of your products to your markets.

Easier compliance

- Update your profile once – [Share](#) with many. Online ‘suitcase’ of basic info and production practices: a CV or ‘LinkedIn’, and an immediate ‘sustainability report’ to share with your partners;
- What codes do you really need? [Compare](#) with your current practice. Chart how you want to improve, monitor progress and see what other markets present opportunities for entry.

BUYERS, RETAILERS

- Supply chain management tool: manage and communicate their sustainable supply chain commitments to their customers with confidence.

GOVERNMENTS

- Access to data on numbers of farmers in particular locations and the method of production;
- Make decisions tailored to solving possible problems related to sustainability in the agri-food chain (targeted interventions – geographies, producer size, commodities);
- Data over 3-5 years will allow for key assumptions on food systems and impacts to be tested.

CASE STUDIES

DENMARK A Danish dairy or pig producer may be certified based on a standard set of practices for the Danish market. Having a Blue Number allows the Danish producer to conduct a self-assessment to see what other markets present opportunities for entry. Danish farmers may recognize that, based on their products and level of sustainable production practices, they comply with standards in, for example, the U.S. or Chinese markets or with those codes of conduct that are demanded by private buyers like Unilever. As the self-assessment is conducted online through the blue number platform and results stored for users’ reference, this creates efficiencies and reduces paperwork.

MALAYSIA Entering the Blue Number online platform offers the small-sized Malaysian producers a gateway to become visible to the global market for their products. Already by listing the basic information and location of, for instance, Malaysian producers of shrimps and prawns and the attached

Blue Number recognized them in front of the existing or new business partners at home or abroad. The Malaysian producer can further create a sustainability profile, assessing the current sustainability performance. This is an important first step to provide traceability of the producer’s prawns and shrimps at the farm level, which is required by the Good Aquaculture Practice (Aquaculture Farm, General Guidelines) standard in Malaysia.

Farms and agribusinesses in **ALL COUNTRIES** which join the Blue Number online platform can drive their sales by sharing their information and sustainability profiles with their business partners or authorities in real time. Without the need to establish complicated traceability systems, having the Blue Number offers to the producers the opportunity to engage continually engage with existing or new buyers, communicating the sustainability profile or commitments with an online profile.