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Bamboo and FSC - an exercise in paperwork

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is the world's most trustworthy forest certification system, ensuring that forest products that are branded with the FSC logo are grown, managed, harvested and processed sustainably. Their definition of sustainability of course takes into account the environment, but also the social aspects, including workers rights, wages and other related topics, because the concept of sustainability includes human communities. This begs the question: why don't we see more FSC certified bamboo? Shouldn't we be concerned about workers rights and sustainable harvesting?

The truth of the matter is that our bamboo is sustainably harvested by default!

Only 20% of bamboo shoots are harvested annually in order to ensure that only 5 year old shoots are harvested. Otherwise, the bamboo is too soft and the farmers lose yield. This ensures that there is no clear cutting, no erosion and no loss of wildlife. Further, it ensures that the bamboo is cut with a machete by hand instead of with machinery that damages the understory.



Bamboo harvesting leaves the forests intact. Bamboo farmers can earn up to 2.5 times the average income of their peers on a long term basis



By contrast, timber harvesting is highly profitable in the short term and not so much in the long term, which leads to industrial harvesting methods as seen in these pictures



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- Bamboo's rhizome (root network) allows it to self-regenerate, ensuring a long-term intact ecosystem. The root ball holds the soil in place after harvest and grows well on hillsides and in mountainous regions, helping prevent erosion ⁽¹⁾
- it requires no fertilizers, pesticides or irrigation to grow optimally ⁽¹⁾
- Bamboo actually helps restore eroded topsoil (caused by poor agriculture or poor timber harvesting) ⁽²⁾
- the vast majority of bamboo plantations are family owned and operated
- raw bamboo is sold using the "household responsibility system", aka the free market, with little government interference. In Anji County, this allows the farmers the freedom to earn almost 2.5 times the income of their peers ⁽³⁾
- Specifically, Anji county in Zhejiang province has been recognized and used as an example of how bamboo can work as a socio-economic engine to help lift people out of poverty ⁽³⁾
- our Bamboo is harvested in the mountainous regions of Zhejiang and Jiangxi, where bamboo has been growing naturally for centuries (and probably millennia!)
- Bamboo operations that have gotten FSC certified have not had to change the management of the operation, as the process already is practically optimized for sustainability.

In conclusion, the FSC provides a great system to provide a valid choice to the end consumer who wants to consider wood products that are ethically and legally produced. However, for bamboo products, FSC certification is actually a redundant exercise in paperwork.

¹ Bamboo Flooring & Plywood in a Sustainable Design Environment (2009) Retrieved Nov. 5, 2009 from The McGraw-Hill Companies website <http://continuingeducation.construction.com/crs.php?L=150&C=479>

² <http://www.bamboocentral.org/index1.htm>

³ http://wfi.worldforestry.org/media/publications/specialreports/Bamboo_Tenure_Wang.pdf