
Smallholders and Certificates: A Critical Assessment of Private-led Social and Sustainability Standards in Turkish Agriculture

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Résumé

Certification, labeling and third party monitoring systems are expanding with the rise of export-oriented agro food production and neoliberalization of food industry. Turkish agriculture has been going through an intense neoliberalization period since the beginning of 1980s, which accelerated by 2000s, with the economic policies of Justice and Development Party. During this period, conventional state-led market regulation mechanisms have eroded and begun to be replaced by the private-led mechanism of certification and third party accreditation schemes which have various agendas ranging from organic and environmentally sustainable production to fair trade and fair labor schemes. This new governance form brings together the multinational companies, civil society and national governments. Moreover, the consumer preferences for sustainable, environmentally friendly and fairly produced goods create a pressure on the MNCs but more importantly on their suppliers as well as governments that want to protect their market position in global markets. Turkey is not an exception. However, the impact of the market led quality standards on producers, especially smallholders and farm workers are not analyzed, in Turkish context.

Literature on the certification and sustainability is increasing. Coffee and cocoa are the major crops researched, and attention to palm oil is increasing as the product gains importance as a raw material in food industry. With the intense liberalization of Turkish agricultural markets, accreditation schemes and third party monitoring activities mushroom in agriculture. This paper focuses on two commodity markets, hazelnuts and cotton. Focusing on company CSR programs, certification schemes and due-diligence programs prevalent in these two markets, the paper describes how the erosion of state regulation and market restructuring opened the way for the private-led regulations and their impact of state policies. These certification organizations work with major chocolate and apparel companies. Their programs are analyzed with an emphasis on effects on smallholders and farm workers.

The questions this paper seeks to answer are as follows:

- Why do smallholders become part of the private led regulations? What are the mechanisms and motives? What are expected from the smallholders?
- How does the profit produced trickle down the value chain? Who gets the profit; who pays for the cost of compliance?
- How does the burden and responsibility of ethical production shared among the parties involved?

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I argue that the certification and regulation schemes contribute to the insecurity and vulnerability of the producers, especially on the smallholders. Even though the main responsible of the certification programs seem to be companies, the cost of compliance and due diligence are paid by largely by the producers while profits are shared by the global agribusiness and their main suppliers. Nation states continue granting concessions to the global capital while the sustainability and compliance programs create a discourse on ethical production hence market value for the global capital.

Mots-Clés: smallholders, certification, sustainability, market insecurity, Turkey, hazelnut, cotton