

Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance Certification for Goods From India

Yash Khatri

Founder, SourcingFrom

Published 17 Oct 2026 8 min read

Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance are both farm-level sustainability marks, but they work differently. Fairtrade sets a Minimum Price and pays a Premium to producer organisations, and FLOCERT certifies everyone in the chain who trades the goods. Rainforest Alliance certifies farms and supply chain actors against its 2020 standard through accredited certification bodies. This guide shows importers how to check both and gives Indian producers and exporters the steps to certify.

The Short Version

- Neither mark is a border requirement. Both are customer and label requirements, and using the mark needs a licence or approval.
- Fairtrade certifies the trader too. An Indian exporter selling Fairtrade cotton or tea needs its own FLOCERT certification.
- India sold 71% of all cotton sold on Fairtrade terms in 2022, so Indian cotton is the core of the Fairtrade cotton supply.
- Rainforest Alliance certificates run three years with yearly audits, and certification bodies run surprise audits on 10% of holders.
- Check FLOCERT Customer Search or the Rainforest Alliance certificate holder list yourself, not a PDF from the seller.

India sold 71% of all the cotton sold on Fairtrade terms in 2022 (Fairtrade NAPP). If you buy Fairtrade cotton anywhere, the odds are good it started on a small Indian farm.



That makes India a big place for both marks covered here, Fairtrade on cotton and some tea, and Rainforest Alliance mostly on tea, coffee and spices. Below I explain what each mark proves, how an importer checks it, and the steps an Indian farmer group, estate or exporter takes to get certified. The page sits in our [certifications hub](#) next to [organic certification](#), which buyers often ask for on the same goods.

1. Two Marks With Different Promises

Here's the plain difference -

	Fairtrade	Rainforest Alliance
Who sets the standard	Fairtrade International	Rainforest Alliance
Who certifies	FLOCERT	Independent certification bodies with ISO 17065 accreditation
Core promise	A Minimum Price floor and a Fairtrade Premium for producers	Farms meeting social, economic and environmental requirements, with continuous improvement
Who in the chain is certified	Producers and every trader that buys and sells the goods	Farms and supply chain actors that handle certified goods
Cycle	Three years for producers, five years for traders	Three-year certificate with yearly audits

Sources are in the sections below. In my opinion the price mechanism is the real difference. Fairtrade puts money on the table for the producer organisation, and Rainforest Alliance asks farms to improve against a standard.

Neither is a border rule in the UK, EU, US, Australia, New Zealand or the UAE. Your customer or your own label decides. Rainforest Alliance does say its certification helps companies meet EU and other due diligence rules at farm level, and it publishes a separate list of certificate holders aligned with the [EU deforestation regulation](#) for coffee and other covered crops. That helps, but a certificate isn't the due diligence statement itself.

2. Where Indian Goods Carry Each Mark

- **Cotton** is Fairtrade's biggest Indian story. India produced over 76% of Fairtrade seed cotton between 2019 and 2022 ([Fairtrade NAPP](#)). In 2020 an Indian garment maker, Purecotz, was reported as the first sewing factory certified under Fairtrade's textile standard ([FashionUnited](#)).

- **Tea** from Assam, Darjeeling and the Nilgiris is where most Indian Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade tea certificates sit, so check the list for your estate. See [tea from India](#).
- **Coffee** from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu is certified on some estates, so check each one. See [coffee from India](#).
- **Spices** carry both marks at smaller scale.

We couldn't find a current official count of Indian certificate holders for either mark. Use the searches in section 3 with India as the country filter if you need one.

3. What an Importer Should Check

For Fairtrade –

1. Ask your supplier for its FLO ID and the products on its certificate.
2. Look it up in [FLOCERT Customer Search](#). You can filter by certification status, product, country and function. The certificate states its scope and period of validity ([FLOCERT](#)).
3. Check every trader between you and the producer. Fairtrade certifies the trading chain, so an uncertified middle trader breaks it.
4. Ask for the contract or invoice terms showing the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium were paid. Traders are audited on exactly that.

For Rainforest Alliance –

1. Ask for the certificate code and the certification body.
2. Look it up in the [Rainforest Alliance certificate holder list](#), which covers farms, farmer groups and supply chain certificates under the 2020 standard (last updated 21 January 2026 when we read it).

3. Check the supply chain side. The exporter handling the goods needs its own supply chain certificate, and the transaction should be recorded on the Rainforest Alliance platform.

Red flags are a "Fairtrade" or "Rainforest Alliance" logo on a sales sheet from a firm that isn't in either search, a certificate in a farmer group's name offered by a trader who can't show its own, and a quote for "certified" tea that's no different from conventional. None of these proves anything bad. Each is a question to ask.

Using the mark on your own pack is a separate step. Fairtrade licenses the mark to brand owners, and Rainforest Alliance approves seal use. Check the current label rules with each before you print.

4. When to Ask in the Order

At enquiry, ask for the FLO ID or certificate code. Check it the same day. At sampling, ask whether the sample lot is certified, since certified and conventional lots often sit in the same warehouse. At the purchase order, name the certification and say the goods must be sold as certified on the invoice. At shipment, the invoice and the platform record (Fairtrace for Fairtrade, the Rainforest Alliance platform for RA) should match quantities. If you'd like someone to chase that paper across a farmer group, a processor and an exporter, SourcingSync can do that on the ground.



5. How an Indian Producer or Exporter Gets Fairtrade

FLOCERT runs the certification. Its published path has three steps (FLOCERT), which I've split a little further.

Step 1 - Check you're in scope. Fairtrade certifies small-scale producer organisations (farmer cooperatives and associations), hired labour set-ups (estates) for some products, and traders. A single small farmer can't certify alone. They join or form a producer organisation.

Step 2 - Apply to FLOCERT. If you're in scope, FLOCERT gives you an Application ID and an application package to fill in, sign and return. Check the current application and certification fees with FLOCERT. Exporters, importers and manufacturers get a temporary Permission to Trade after a successful application.

Step 3 – Appoint a Fairtrade Officer. FLOCERT asks each customer to name one as its key contact.

Step 4 – Initial audit. An auditor visits, reviews facilities and paperwork, and interviews people. Producers are assessed mainly on transparency, democratic decision-making, working and environmental conditions and traceability. Traders are assessed on contracts, payment terms, sourcing plans, prefinancing and the Minimum Price and Premium.

Step 5 – Fix non-conformities. Your FLOCERT analyst reviews the results. Producers without major non-conformities get a temporary Permission to Trade, and the certificate follows once all non-conformities are closed.

Step 6 – Live the cycle. Initial certification starts a three-year cycle for producers and five years for traders. FLOCERT audits periodically, may audit unannounced, and you pass a renewal audit at the end of the cycle.

What usually slows Indian producer organisations down is records. Premium spending has to be decided democratically and documented, and member lists, sales records and traceability from member to lot all have to hold up.

6. How an Indian Producer or Exporter Gets Rainforest Alliance

Rainforest Alliance certification is done by accredited certification bodies, not by the Rainforest Alliance itself.

Step 1 – Read the 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard on the Rainforest Alliance Knowledge Hub. Farms read the farm requirements. Exporters, processors and traders read the supply chain requirements.

Step 2 – Register on the Rainforest Alliance certification platform as a farm, farmer group or supply chain actor.

Step 3 – Choose a certification body approved for Rainforest Alliance in India. Check the current fee on its quote.

Step 4 – Self-assessment and preparation. Farms complete risk assessments and an improvement plan. Groups set up an internal management system with internal inspections of members.

Step 5 – Certification audit. A positive decision gives a certificate valid for three years (Rainforest Alliance).

Step 6 – Yearly audits. You're audited every year against your improvement plan. Each certification body also runs surprise audits on 10% of its certificate holders.

Supply chain actors may not need a full audit every time. A certification body's copy of the current rules (v1.1, 2025) ties supply chain certificate validity to the verification level, two years at level C and three at level B (Control Union, secondary). Check your level with your certification body.

The downside is real. Suspension can last up to three months, during which you can't sell as certified, and a decertified holder has to wait at least six months before reapplying. Indian tea estates with workers' housing, pesticide handling and protective equipment to manage should treat the yearly audit as a fixed date in the calendar.

What to send the buyer for either mark – the certificate or FLO ID, the scope and products, the expiry date and a record of the certified sale.

7. A Worked Example With Assam Tea for a UK Brand

This example is an illustration built from the rules above, not a real firm.

A UK tea brand wants Rainforest Alliance Assam CTC for a supermarket own label, and the supermarket wants the seal on pack.

The Kolkata exporter quotes from three estates. The buyer asks for each estate's certificate code and the exporter's own supply chain certificate, then checks all four in the Rainforest Alliance list. Two estates are current. The third shows a certificate that ended in the summer, and the exporter says the renewal audit is booked. The buyer takes the two current estates for the first order and writes the third in for later, subject to the renewed certificate.



The exporter records the sale on the platform, and the invoice says Rainforest Alliance Certified with matching quantities. The brand applies to the Rainforest Alliance to use the seal. Nothing here was hard. It just needed checking in the right order. Shipping and duty for the order are on our [UK trade page](#).

FAQ

Is Fairtrade better than Rainforest Alliance? ^

They do different jobs. Fairtrade is about price and Premium for producers, Rainforest Alliance about farm practice. Pick the one your customer and your story need.

Can a factory be Fairtrade certified? v

How long does certification last? v

Can I use the logo if my supplier is certified? v

Does Rainforest Alliance cover EUDR? v

8. Next Steps

- Indian tea and coffee: [tea](#) and [coffee](#).
- Organic on the same goods: [organic certification](#).
- Deforestation rules for coffee and cattle leather: [EUDR due diligence](#).
- Cotton grown where you're told: [cotton traceability](#).
- Social audits for the factory side: [social audits](#).

All in, both marks are worth what the checking behind them is worth, and the checking takes minutes.