

# **HIGHLIGHTS OF PRODUCT CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP**

Leslie Carothers

Science and Technology for  
Sustainability Roundtable

April 2, 2009



# Workshop Objectives

- Assess strengths and weaknesses of certification as a sustainable consumption strategy
- Identify problem-driven research topics for academic and analytical community
- Determine any need for a National Research Council consensus study on principles
- Elicit what is needed from the institutional actors to foster system improvements

# Certification Workshop Participation

- January 2009 workshop involved 40+ participants engaged in aspects of certification
- Participants represented developed and developing countries, primary and manufactured products, private sector, government, NGO, and academic perspectives
- Despite diverse perspectives, much commonality in terms of challenges faced, and interest in learning across sectors/systems

# Certification as a Tool

- Voluntary tools
  - Education
  - Good practice codes
- Market-Driven tools
  - Product/process certification
- “Demand? What Demand?”
  - Program success due to NGO targeting of large-scale purchasers and producers
  - Most schemes need corollary efforts to build awareness and demand

# Towards Better Systems

- Choice of products and processes (who/how)
- Performance goals and measures of impact
- “Once you are on the ladder, you have to keep climbing.” (tiering and raising the bar)
- Approach to weak performers (capacity building; exclusion)
- Financing the system

# Sustainable Certification Programs Need

- Consumer preferences
- Economic advantage to producers
- Government adoption
  - Procurement
  - Regulation

# Challenge of Measuring Impacts

- Proliferation of certification standards without criteria for success in advancing sustainable production and consumption
- Lack of a small set of measurable impacts that can work across different products/sectors
  - “We all know what they are.” (e.g. carbon emissions, water, habitat protection.)
- Monitoring and measurement are difficult and costly. (Can’t count the fish; global operations)

# Areas for Further NRC Work

- Synthesize existing impacts literature and other sector-based efforts to analyze certification
- Develop impact indicators which could be broadly adopted and applied (esp. biodiversity)
- Commission case studies of notable certification schemes – if possible, compare performance vis-à-vis regulation and alternatives
- Outline a research agenda which could be taken up by academia and other primary research institutions