

TIMB rebrands to promote sustainable tobacco production

TIMB recently rebranded to reimagine, reinvent and rethink the tobacco value chain to ensure sustainable tobacco production in Zimbabwe.

Sustainable tobacco production is the efficient production of quality tobacco, under conditions that limit negative impact on the environment. This also entails best agricultural practices that improve the socio-economic conditions of tobacco growers and communities in tobacco producing areas.

The persistence of deforestation as well as child and forced labour in tobacco production is unacceptable. The need to curb these negative practices renewed TIMB's commitment to drive action to eliminate all negative practices in tobacco production.

This commitment to solving environmental, social and economic issues in the production and marketing of tobacco is embodied in the Board's new vision – Towards Sustainable Tobacco Production, enhanced marketing systems, and improved livelihoods in Zimbabwe by 2025.

It is also personified in the Board's new tagline, For Livelihoods. For Sustainability. The tagline is a strong stance by all tobacco value chain players through the regulator to promote sustainable practices and operations for improved social and economic wellbeing of tobacco growers and their families.

Sustainable tobacco production is an industry-wide initiative developed through the Sustainable Tobacco Program (STP), an international initiative by tobacco merchants with other industry players to bring together best practices from across the industry and drive continuous improvement. It helps to drive standards in agricultural practices, environmental management, key social and human rights areas.

TIMB is also increasingly creating awareness on sustainability topics through empowerment-based on-site trainings of farmers and farmworkers. These trainings are aimed at enhancing the capabilities of farmers and farmworkers to produce good quality tobacco that is economically viable with reduced negative impact on the environment.

Tobacco growers are continuously encouraged to run their farming operations as proper businesses. Each grower should follow proper business practices where their ledger includes costs for labour and sustainable curing fuels. This dissuades tobacco growers from cutting down indigenous trees as well as employing child and forced labour in the fields.

Every tobacco grower is also encouraged to establish a woodlot on their land, of at least 0.3 hectares of wood per every hectare of tobacco grown. This is because it takes more than fifteen years for an indigenous Musasa tree to reach reasonable maturity yet it only takes seven years for some eucalyptus tree varieties to reach the same stage.

In partnership with the Sustainable Afforestation Association (SAA) TIMB is also working to establish eucalyptus plantations. To-date over 20,000ha of plantations have been established. Several other afforestation programs are ongoing so that in due time these woodlots are used to cure tobacco preserving the national forests and the environment. In working towards curbing deforestation, tobacco contractors have also been mandated to give growers coal and wood from sustainable woodlots as curing fuels.

It is the role of all stakeholders in the tobacco industry to promote sustainability as it will sufficiently improve workplace safety, health conditions, environmental conservation, and income for farm workers, livelihoods and eventually support the national economy for positive growth.