

FSC® CERTIFICATION AND LCA CAN BE COMPLEMENTARY TOOLS



Many of the direct threats to the stability of our planetary systems occur while sourcing natural resources. The context of climate change, biodiversity, soil fertility loss, water scarcity, and other environmental problems demands that we systematically minimize the negative impacts of our growing use of natural resources, as well as applying practices that reduce our overall use of virgin resources.

Assessing the environmental sustainability of production is often a first step towards changing production processes to reduce negative environmental impacts.

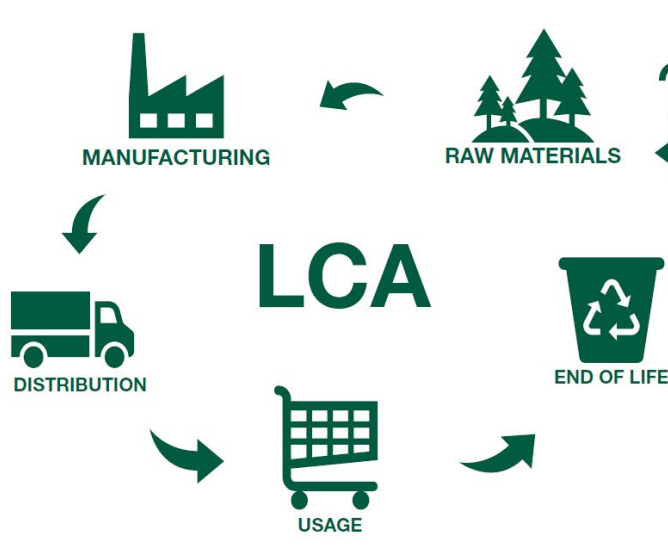
Currently, the most common tool is life cycle assessment (LCA), used to monitor and inform clients about the environmental performance of a product, and by governments and standard-setters to prepare binding or voluntary minimum requirements for products.

While LCA helps to understand some of the environmental impacts of production processes, it is not well equipped to assess impacts on surrounding ecosystems. This is particularly the case when forestry, fishing, mining, or agriculture are at the start of the supply chain. In addition, LCA does not cover social impacts related to the sourcing of virgin materials.

Current sustainability assessment or rating systems that are based solely or principally on LCA, run the risk of under-estimating impacts on the providing ecosystem or the natural resource base. Critical impact areas like land use change, biodiversity and ecosystem services loss and social dimensions are not captured by current LCA-based systems of sustainability assessment.

Certification systems that promote responsible management of our resource base provide a credible complement to an LCA assessment.

THE BLIND EYE OF LCA



LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT (LCA) IS A USEFUL TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF PRODUCTION PROCESSES.

BUT IT HAS LIMITATIONS WHEN FORESTRY ARE AT THE START OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN.

LCA IS LIMITED IN CHARACTERIZING PRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES INCLUDING:

- BIODIVERSITY
- CLIMATE & CARBON COMPLEXITY
- LAND USE CHANGE
- ECOSYSTEM SERVICES
- REGULATORY COMPLIANCE
- INDIGENOUS PEOPLES RIGHTS
- HEALTH & SAFETY
- SOCIAL & WORKING CONDITIONS



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FSC calls upon all those who use or require LCAs to recognize its limitations, and to address these with assurance that negative impacts beyond the scope of LCA are prevented or minimized.

For forest-based products, FSC certification is the best way of doing this.

For LCA practitioners, and those who rely on LCAs as a policy tool:

[You can download the full paper here.](#)

Limitations of a LCA can be addressed

While the life-cycle perspective is important to consider in product-level assessments, it should be complemented with other tools in order to cover the most important impacts.

Forest certification is based on expert-informed and well-supported prioritization of the most significant impacts and life-cycle stages of timber products – in the forest.

FSC certification, when fully implemented, promotes the positive aspects of forestry at the beginning of a product's life cycle and alleviates the negative impacts, while promoting improved holistic forest management. This can extend our understanding of a product's life cycle, giving us a systems view beyond just the product.

But FSC certification does not measure emissions from the manufacturing phases, so it does not address, for example, impacts from water effluence during the pulp phase.

LCA helps to understand the manufacturing, transport and end-of-life phases to further address any significant impacts in supply chains.

Combining LCAs with (FSC) certification will address the most relevant environmental problems in a practice-, geography- and process-specific manner.

Forest certification by FSC

Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) is an independent non-governmental organization that globally promotes environmentally sound, socially beneficial, and economically prosperous management of the world's forests.

FSC sets standards for forest management, which include legal, environmental, social and economic, and monitoring requirements. Foresters who comply with these requirements can become certified and use this status in their communications and trade. Granting of certificates and regular verification of performance is carried out by independent certification bodies.

To ensure that wood harvested in FSC-certified forests ends up in FSC-labelled products in a reliable manner, FSC has also developed standards and procedures for companies active in the supply chain. FSC labelling of certified products is allowed only when all the companies in such a chain are FSC-certified.

