

Rubber Sustainability & Smallholder Challenges

EUDR Context

Field	Value
eudr_commodity	rubber
country_focus	Colombia
deforestation_risk	low
last_updated	2026-05-26

Overview

Natural rubber sustainability in Colombia is fundamentally a smallholder challenge. With the vast majority of the country's approximately 55,660 hectares of rubber managed by small-scale producers, the economics, environmental practices, and EUDR compliance pathways of the sector are shaped by the realities of rural poverty, limited technical assistance, and the legacy of armed conflict. The EUDR's compliance costs risk excluding smallholders from EU-bound supply chains unless cost-effective solutions are developed and deployed at scale.

Globally, approximately 85% of natural rubber is produced by around 6 million smallholder farmers, making rubber one of the most smallholder-dependent commodity supply chains. Colombia mirrors this pattern, with rubber plantations typically ranging from 5 to 20 hectares per family unit. The Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber (GPSNR) has highlighted the tension between EUDR compliance demands and smallholder capacity, noting that without targeted support, deforestation regulations may inadvertently push smallholders out of formal markets and into less regulated channels.

The distinction between natural and synthetic rubber is critical for EUDR scope. Only natural rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis* latex and derived products) is regulated; synthetic rubber (produced from petroleum) is excluded. In Colombia, domestic consumption relies heavily on synthetic rubber imports for tire manufacturing, while natural rubber production serves both domestic industrial markets and limited export channels. This means EUDR compliance efforts must focus specifically on the natural rubber supply chain.

Colombian Context

Colombian rubber smallholders face a convergence of challenges that affect both sustainability and EUDR readiness:

- **Economic viability:** Natural rubber prices are volatile and often insufficient to cover production costs for smallholders, especially compared to the higher and more immediate returns from coca cultivation that rubber was designed to replace. Many rubber farmers supplement their income with cattle ranching or other crops, creating mixed land-use systems that complicate EUDR documentation.
- **Technical capacity:** Rubber tapping requires specific skills and consistent practice to maintain tree health and optimize yields. Many former coca farmers who transitioned to rubber received initial training but lack ongoing technical support. The "South American Leaf Blight" (SALB, caused by *Microcyclus ulei*) is a persistent phytosanitary challenge that requires technical management unavailable to many isolated producers.
- **Land tenure:** In conflict-affected departments like Caquetá, Meta, and Putumayo, many smallholders lack formal land titles. The EUDR's legality requirement demands proof that production complies with national law, including land tenure law—a requirement that many smallholders cannot currently satisfy despite decades of occupation and cultivation.
- **Processing infrastructure:** Colombia has only one centrifuged latex processing plant, limiting value addition and creating bottleneck dependence. Most smallholder rubber is sold as coagulated field latex or cup lumps, which fetch lower prices and are harder to trace through the supply chain.

Certification offers a pathway to premium markets and EUDR alignment. The FSC certification achieved by 85 Colombian small producers—facilitated by Preferred by Nature—demonstrated that group certification models can make compliance accessible and affordable. Under this model, certification costs are shared across the group, a group manager handles documentation requirements, and individual producers receive training and monitoring support. Extending this model to more of the estimated 5,000+ rubber producers nationwide is the key scaling challenge.

EUDR Compliance Requirements

Addressing smallholder sustainability for EUDR compliance requires:

- **Group compliance models:** Establish cooperatives or producer associations that can aggregate smallholder data, share compliance costs, and interface with downstream buyers as a single documented entity. The FSC group certification model provides a proven template.
- **Mobile-first data collection:** Deploy smartphone-based tools for GPS mapping, photo documentation, and harvest recording that smallholders can use with minimal training. Data should flow to a central compliance database maintained by the cooperative or an implementing organization.
- **Land tenure formalization support:** Work with Colombia's Agencia Nacional de Tierras and local government to accelerate land title formalization for rubber smallholders, providing the legal foundation needed for EUDR legality compliance.
- **Integrated livelihood approach:** Recognize that rubber alone may not provide sufficient income, and design compliance systems that cover the entire smallholder land-use system (rubber + cattle + other crops), ensuring that no component involves post-2020 deforestation.
- **Buyer-financed compliance:** Encourage EU importers and downstream brands to invest in smallholder compliance infrastructure as part of their EUDR due diligence obligations, sharing the cost of traceability systems rather than passing it entirely to producers who can least afford it.

Revisión #1

Creado 2026-05-27 04:02:06 UTC por Gideon Blaauw

Actualizado 2026-05-27 04:02:06 UTC por Gideon Blaauw