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## WILD COLLECTION

By the mid-2000s RUNO had become one of Poland's largest wild collection companies with a network of 20 purchase centres. Each purchase centre has an appointed manager, which is responsible for the identification of raw herbal material, quality control, and proper labelling. RUNO works with around 500 registered collectors engaged in the wild harvesting activities. It is noteworthy that some collectors have been collecting for RUNO for 25 years. Around 90% of the collectors are elderly and retired. Around 10% of the collectors are unemployed and harvesting provides the only chance for them to earn some money. In general, the majority of the collectors are well qualified and highly experienced in wild collection activities.

To ensure a high quality of raw herbal material RUNO has developed an internal quality control system. Each paper bag with harvested material has a sticker with the ID number of a collector, a collection date and place, and the amount collected. Based on RUNO's experience, this internal system works well to guarantee a high quality of the harvested material. In 2014, there were only two cases in which the harvested material did not comply with the organic requirements, requiring exclusion from the batch and further investigation. Apart from this, the collectors provide a high quality of herbal materials harvested in a sustainable manner.

## Implementation of FairWild certification scheme in Poland

**BACKGROUND** The Białowieża Forest, a UNESCO World Heritage Site situated on the watershed of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, is one of the last and largest remaining primeval forest areas in Europe. The border between Belarus and Poland runs through the centre of this remnant European wilderness area. Only 20 km from the Belarussian border, the nearest town to the forest in Poland is Hajnówka. This is where the FairWild-certified operation 'Runo Spółka z.o.o.' (hereafter 'RUNO') works on the sustainable wild collection and resource management of medicinal plants growing in wet meadows, edges of forests and within forest where permitted.

RUNO was founded in 1991 and provides more than 200 different kinds of wild-collected herbs from the north-eastern areas of Poland. Wild collection provides an important source of income to households in this largely rural area, helping to keep traditional knowledge and practice alive. Much of the material collected in the meadows surrounding the Białowieża Forest is destined for export to Germany, as a major processing and trading centre within Europe, prior to re-export to markets worldwide for use in a range of industries.

**CERTIFICATION** RUNO has a history of innovation with adoption of international standards. By 2002 it was the first Polish company to achieve organic certification for some of its wild collection areas through the German inspection and certification body LACON GmbH. Since 2014, the company also has held National Organic Program (NOP) certification that allows exporting herbal raw material to the US market. Around 60% of the collectors are involved with harvesting wild plant ingredients under the scope of organic certification, and of these a sub-set of households are engaged in the FairWild programme, as described below.

**FAIRWILD** In 2008, RUNO met with a potential US customer at the Biofach trade fair, the world's largest organic fair, to discuss the feasibility of implementing the FairWild Standard (FWS) for their wild harvesting operations. According to RUNO, the main challenge in relation to the implementation of the FWS and certification scheme was the language barrier, i.e. the FWS and all relevant methodologies were only available in English at that date.

Following RUNO's work to initiate implementation of the certification scheme requirements, in 2009, the Institute for Marketecology (IMO), an authorised inspection and certification body for determining compliance with the FWS, issued a FairWild certificate to RUNO for 18 medicinal plant species, among others Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus*, English Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, and St. John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum*.

Although RUNO initially joined the FairWild system in 2009 with 18 medicinal plant species, eventually they narrowed the scope of their certification to only two species – Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale* – because there hasn't yet been sufficient market demand for all of the herbs with the added costs of certification. These two ingredients are currently used by the US customer to manufacture herbal medicinal teas.



Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, CREDIT: Corvinus University/Peter Radacsi

Regarding good experience of implementing FairWild, RUNO notes the importance of establishing closer relationships with collectors and to be in more frequent contact with them through meetings and trainings at which they could learn about sustainable wild plant harvesting. RUNO also mentions that they can learn about the history of herbal medicine and traditional collection practices from collectors.

**FAIRWILD PREMIUM FUND** At the moment, four purchase centres participate in the FairWild certification scheme. The roughly 60 families who collect plants for RUNO receive a fair trade price for their Dandelion roots and Nettle leaves and also benefit from the FairWild Premium Fund, an amount that has been increasing steadily since 2009.

The main US customer for FairWild materials initially purchased about 6,730 kg of raw materials in 2009 and by 2012 the annual quantity of certified botanical materials reached nearly 30,000 kg. From the 2012 sales of FairWild Dandelion and Nettle, about USD7,200.00 were placed into the FairWild Premium Fund account for the families to collectively decide on how to use these towards social development at the community level.

Each year, RUNO's purchase centre managers discuss directly with the collectors how to best use the funds, whilst RUNO's quality control manager serves as the trustee and disburser of the Premium Fund. In 2014, the harvesters voted to use the premium fund to purchase new household goods such as bed linen, blankets, pillows, washing powders, and firewood. However, the company and other stakeholders involved with FairWild are also supporting the collectors to identify options for use of the Premium Fund in longer-term social development projects for the community.



Visit to RUNO by FairWild Foundation and US customer, May 2013. CREDIT: TRAFFIC /Anastasiya Timoshyna

**FUTURE VISION** RUNO will continue implementing FairWild certification scheme. The company has been successfully selling Dandelion root and Nettle to a US manufacturer for around six years. In general, RUNO would like to have more clients interested in FairWild-certified ingredients. However, due to high certification costs in the near future the company does not plan to expand an assortment of FairWild products unless it finds new clients.

Given the fact that the number of people involved in collection in the region are in overall decline (as they are across Central Europe) due to the ageing of collectors, urbanization and ever changing lifestyle choices, RUNO would like to engage more collectors in wild collection in the future to maintain traditional harvesting practices in the region and support local communities.

All in all, RUNO's experience with the FairWild certification scheme represents a successful example of sustainable wild harvesting and fair trade. Runo believes that the interest in FairWild certified ingredients will continue to grow, helping to keep traditions of wild collection alive and supporting achievement of biodiversity conservation goals.



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## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE HARVESTING

In addition to the fair trade aspects, Runo continues to implement the ecological requirements of the scheme, developing management and monitoring systems for wild collection and training collectors in sustainable harvesting techniques. For instance, in accordance with the resource assessment conducted in 2013, the collection area of Dandelion made up about 130 hectares (ha). Estimates showed that 156 tonnes of Dandelion were available for annual harvesting in this area, 117 tonnes of which (75%) could be sustainably harvested in practice. RUNO conducts two to three training sessions annually on Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP) and FairWild requirements.



Collector of RUNO, CREDIT: TRAFFIC/Anastasiya Timoshyna

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