BACKGROUND

The different worldwide coffee crises lead to the lack of care in the productive process, as strategy for reducing costs, generating reduction in the productivity (11% between 1995/96 and 2003) and consequently the loss of income. On the other hand, there is an emergence of certification schemes related to changes in consumption patterns, aimed to food safety, attention to environmental problems associated with the production, and the interest for the improvement of social conditions of producers and workers.

Thus, the certification of the production appears as an opportunity for the coffee growers, with advantages such as (Giovannucci 2003): better administration of the natural resource, rural self-sufficiency, community development, reduction of the financial risk and of the fluctuation of the prices, greater access to the market information, increase in the use of rural workforce and lower risks to the human health and to the environment.

The scope of these benefits is determined, among others, by the compliance of the requisite of certification, which includes the observance of the national legislation, and depends on the perception of the producers about their appropriation, impacts, independence of the actors, coherence and application according with the criteria of selection.

RESULTS

The main legal framework applied to the AFSC in Costa Rica are divided in three types:
- Those that control and promote the coffee growing activity: regulation of the price, positioning of the quality of the coffee, generation of spaces for representation of the producers and the constitution of the National Fund for Coffee Stabilization – FONCAFE.
- Rules relative to the forestry component.
- Rules related to the compliance of certification standards regarding the fair payment to workers.

The legislation and certification promote the adoption of the Agro Forestry Systems, not necessarily in multistrata systems or with products associated to the market. The supply of certified coffee does not reach the whole, market with a price that stimulates an assured maintenance of the agro forest systems of coffee; that explains the combination of labels by producers as alternative to reach different clients and demand niches.

The regulatory framework to the coffee price is applicable as far as the control is exerted directly on the transactions between coffee processors and exporters, being a model that generates equitable distribution of income. Likewise, the FONCAFE fee is of mandatory payment by the coffee processors, being an efficient collection thanks to the information submitted to the ICAFE.

The Payment for Environmental Services program (PES) even in its AFSC support component, does not constitute yet an incentive to coffee producers, that promotes the forest component in general terms because of the lack of knowledge of the benefits and procedures. This results from a lack of knowledge at famers level of the benefits and the procedures to access the program.

The forest component was only reflected as a commercial activity in Perez Zeledon's region; in other regions the knowledge of the Forest Law is aimed to the protection of the water sources.

The costs of access to the legality and to the certification for the analyzed case studies ranges from 398 to 748 USD/ha-year, being the social security and the contribution to FONCAFE, the most important(Table 3).

CONCLUSION

The incidence of the producers on the proposal and follow-up of laws and certification schemes not only can work for its adjustment to particular situations, but also as a mechanism of disclosing requirements and consequence of breaches. In this respect, the participative design of standardization mechanisms to organizations, in case of certification schemes, appears as a feasible strategy. Here is fundamental that the appropriation of the “force rules” by the producers, so that benefits and costs from being in the legality or from certifying the produced coffee can be clearly understood in that way, viability and sustainability can be guaranteed from these rules. Microeconomic sensitive analysis from case studies shows that certification costs are the least relevant (0.001 to 1.3%), while social security payments are those that affect most the profitability of production systems (8 to 61%).