

Certified Elephant Friendly™ Standards



**Certified Elephant Friendly is a program developed by Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network
and the University of Montana Broader Impacts Group**

The Certified Elephant Friendly™ standards have been designed for landscapes where agricultural facilities growing tea apply production practices to protect Asian Elephants, mitigating human-elephant conflict and thus enabling co-existence



Overview

Certified Elephant Friendly™ tea is sourced from plantations that meet high standards for the protection of elephant habitat and water resources, reducing human-elephant conflict and mortality, and reducing barriers to elephant movement between elephant habitat areas.

Asian elephants are a wide-ranging species with an important ecological role. As mega-herbivores, elephants feed on a large variety of plants and disperse seeds throughout the forest in their droppings. Asian elephants are endangered globally, primarily due to habitat loss and human-elephant conflict related mortalities. Despite the conversion of prime elephant habitat for human settlements and agricultural uses, elephants travel along ancient movement routes. Across Asia this deeply engrained habit brings elephants in close contact with people, especially around large-scale agricultural areas, including tea plantations and their surrounding communities. Shrinking habitat leaves elephants few options to avoid areas of expanding human development.

Asian elephants use tea plantations as rest stops as they travel between foraging areas. The tea shrub, *Camellia sinensis*, is native to India, but inedible to elephants. Because of the close proximity of elephants to tea-growing communities, plantation workers are highly vulnerable to human-elephant conflict. Additionally, some tea plantation management practices can increase the risk of conflict and may be harmful — or even deadly — to elephants.

Pesticides and herbicides can poison elephants when elephants drink water that contains toxic levels of chemicals or consume fertilizers or other substances not stored properly. The salts in some agrichemicals have been known to attract elephants, and some of these substances can be highly toxic if ingested. There are documented cases of elephant associated with substances or waste materials commonly found on or near tea plantations, including agrochemicals. These incidents highlight the need for improved plantation management practices to reduce harm and risks to elephants.

Electric fencing, when amperage-dropping stock fence energizers are not used, can be especially dangerous to elephants and humans as an electrocution hazard. Deep, narrow drainage ditches can be especially hazardous for juvenile elephants to traverse, and each year injuries and fatalities are reported. Razor wire and other deterrent fencing made of sharp metal have been increasingly documented as sources of severe injury and death for elephants. Fencing of all kinds, used to keep out elephants and other wild or domestic animals, can also force elephants to move into surrounding areas with higher human activity, amplifying human-elephant conflict and contributing to the injury or loss of life of humans and elephants.

Furthermore, when elephants lack access to natural forage, they may be driven by hunger to raid crops and enter villages seeking food, bringing them into direct conflict with people. If chased or harassed, they may respond with aggression, potentially leading to attacks on people or property. Male elephants in *musth*, a natural state associated with heightened hormone levels and competition for mates, are particularly prone to aggressive behavior and should be treated with particular caution as part of any human-elephant conflict mitigation strategy.

Ensuring that people can safely work and go about their daily activities within elephant movement zones is critically important. When communities feel safe and see tangible benefits from conservation, they are more likely to support efforts to protect elephants and their habitat. Elephant Friendly™ tea plantations not only implement practices that reduce risks to elephants, but also prioritize the safety of their workforce and engage local communities in elephant conservation and conflict mitigation efforts

that generate shared benefits.

Certified Elephant Friendly™ tea is sourced from plantations that proactively safeguard elephants, support local communities, and reduce environmental hazards through responsible production practices.

Certified Elephant Friendly™ is a voluntary program. Its requirements do not supersede national or state legislation.

Scope of the Standards

These standards operate under the Certified Wildlife Friendly® guidelines as species-specific criteria for enterprises operating in Asian Elephant landscapes.

Certified Elephant Friendly™ standards apply to the certification of agricultural facilities growing tea, defined as *Camellia sinensis*, and their efforts to mitigate human-elephant conflict, specifically focusing on Asian elephants, *Elephas maximus*, in India. They are also applicable to the production of spices where such spices are grown on the same certified facility.

Integrating spice production into Certified Elephant Friendly™ landscapes strengthens the ecological and economic value of tea estates, providing consumers with a broader range of responsibly sourced products that support conservation efforts.

Tea estates that adhere to Certified Elephant Friendly™ standards demonstrate a commitment to sustainable land management, habitat conservation, and human-elephant coexistence. These same production practices and certification criteria can be extended to the cultivation of spices—such as cardamom, black pepper, cinnamon, and cloves—when such spices are grown within or alongside certified tea estates/gardens.

Note: Spice production must follow the same Elephant Friendly criteria, and demonstrate the following key conservation and coexistence outcomes:

- *Maintain wildlife corridors essential for elephant movement.*
- *Eliminate fencing, chemicals, or infrastructure that could harm elephants or fragment habitat.*
- *Reduce human-elephant conflict risks through land-use planning that supports coexistence.*
- *Promote Wildlife Friendly agriculture, benefiting both elephants and broader ecosystems.*

Future adaptation of these standards to other types of agricultural produce is possible.

Understanding the Certified Elephant Friendly™ Standards

This document describes the criteria that must be met for certification to be granted. It is expected that enterprises who wish to gain *Certified Elephant Friendly* status for their product(s) will meet most, if not all, of these criteria. However, failure to meet some of the criteria need not be a barrier to certification if the applicant can provide a written compliance plan with acceptable actions and a timeline to resolve the outstanding issues.

Some criteria are marked with the symbol **C** and are considered to be **Critical**; failure to meet a critical criterion is considered a critical non-compliance and will result in certification being denied or suspended until corrective action is taken and the criterion is met.

Some criteria are highlighted as **Recommended** and reflect the aims and principles of the *Certified Elephant Friendly* program but are not mandatory for certification to be granted. **Recommended** criteria signpost best practice for enterprises seeking to gain *Certified Elephant Friendly*® status for their product(s).

If an enterprise receives a critical non-compliance at the initial evaluation, it cannot be certified until corrective action is taken and the issue is resolved. If an operation receives a critical non-compliance at re-evaluation, it may be suspended from the *Certified Elephant Friendly*® program and will have to stop using the label or logo until corrective action is taken.

Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network, WFEN

Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network (WFEN) was formally established in 2007 to advance wildlife conservation by promoting responsible production practices, supporting enterprise development, encouraging education, engaging local communities, and leveraging branding for conservation. WFEN works to protect threatened wildlife while enhancing the economic vitality of rural communities. The mission of WFEN is to safeguard wildlife in wild places and agricultural landscapes by certifying enterprises that assure coexistence and mutual prosperity for people and nature. WFEN's global network includes conservationists, businesses, artisans, farmers, ranchers and herders, harvesters and indigenous peoples and local communities from around the world.

The University of Montana and its Broader Impacts Group

The University of Montana, home to North America's top-ranked Wildlife Biology Program, has long been dedicated to the conservation of species and their habitats. Through its Broader Impacts Group (BIG), the university leverages its transformative research to address global challenges via innovative partnerships and solutions. In collaboration with Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network (WFEN) and a broad range of expert advisors, the University of Montana co-designed and developed the Elephant Friendly™ certification program. This partnership aimed to create a model that integrates science, agriculture, and business incentives, addressing the root causes of the decline of the globally endangered Asian elephant.

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1. Participation in the Certified Elephant Friendly™ Program

1.0 Regulations

See also Section 5 below on labor.

1.0.1 **C** Certified tea plantations must ensure they meet all relevant regulations including, but not limited to:

- Tea Marketing (Control) Order
- Tea Waste (Control) Order
- Environmental clearances (for tea processing)

1.1 Mapping the plantation

1.1.1 **C** There must be a detailed map and GPS location of the tea plantation site. The map must include the following:

- Perimeter boundaries
- Fence lines
- Roads and other infrastructure
- Tea growing zones
- Water bodies
- Employee housing and other employee facilities
- Forested areas (if applicable)
- Crop fields (if applicable)

1.1.2 **C** Certified tea plantations must provide information to the local Forest Department regarding any known elephant movement patterns based on the map required by 1.1.1.

2. Elephant and other wildlife conservation

2.0 Monitoring elephants

2.0.1 **C** Official surveys by the Forest Department for monitoring elephant population must take place in the region where the certified tea plantation is located.

Note: The purpose of this criteria is to ensure there are wild elephants in the ecosystem surrounding the tea plantation, as an operation cannot be Certified Elephant Friendly in the absence of elephants. Tea plantation personnel may assist with collection of data (e.g. setting up remote cameras, etc.), but the monitoring protocols should be those officially recognized by the relevant authority.

2.1 Reducing human/elephant conflict

2.1.1 **C** There must be a written plan for human-elephant conflict management. This must include:

2.1.1.1 A site map (this can be part of the map developed for standard 1.1.1)

2.1.1.2 A list of any provisions the site provides to allow unrestricted and safe passage of elephants.

2.1.1.3 Employee guidelines for reducing human-elephant conflict and supporting safety for elephants and people within the tea plantation boundaries.

2.1.2 **C** Action must be taken to prevent non-employees from entering the tea estate to harass elephants.

2.1.3 **C** All full-time employees must review the certified site's Human-Elephant Conflict Management Plan at least annually.

2.1.4 **C** The local Forest Department, or governmental agency assigned with the role of overseeing conservation of and conflict with elephants, must be contacted in the event of on-site conflict, injured or dead elephants being found or any other problem with wild elephants within the tea plantation.

Note: The Forest Department is the government agency charged with overseeing conservation of and conflict with elephants in India.

2.1.5 **C** Any incidence of loss of human or elephant life as a result of human-elephant conflict must be reported

- A report must be made to the Forest Department immediately.
- A WFEN incident report must be submitted to the designated Certified Elephant Friendly™ Coordinator in a timely manner.

Note: The WFEN incident report can be submitted via SMS

2.1.6 **C** All non-lethal incidents of human-elephant conflict must be reported to the designated Certified Elephant Friendly™ Coordinator as part of the certification renewal process.

2.1.7 **C** Certified tea plantations must collaborate with the Forest Department to share information on elephant movements, crop and home raids, and any human injury relating to elephants.

2.1.8 **Recommended**

Recommendations from the Human-Elephant Conflict Management Plan should be posted for employees in illustrative form and/or in local language(s)

2.1.9 **Recommended**

Certified tea plantations are encouraged to provide outreach to local communities on elephant conservation and human-elephant conflict reduction to improve outcomes beyond the boundaries of the tea plantation.

2.2 Habitat and other wildlife conservation

- 2.2.1 **C** Certified tea plantations and their employees must not reduce, degrade, or otherwise negatively impact elephant habitat within the boundary of the tea plantation. The following activities are prohibited:

- 2.2.1.1 Firewood removal,
- 2.2.1.2 Livestock grazing,
- 2.2.1.3 Replacement of native vegetation for crop production, and/or
- 2.2.1.4 Illegal harvest of forest products.

- 2.2.2 **C** Wildlife of any species must not be hunted or trapped within the boundary of the tea plantation. Fishing is permitted if conducted in accordance with government regulations.

Note: On a case-by-case basis, hunting of non-key species for subsistence, or cultural use may be permitted. Note also that rats and mice are not included as wildlife for the purposes of this standard.

- 2.2.3 **C** Wildlife must not be held captive within the boundary of the tea plantation, except for properly regulated activities, in compliance with local and international law by those authorized and suitably equipped to house and care for them humanely.

Note: This includes temporary captivity of protected wildlife species e.g. for photo opportunities.

2.2.4 **Recommended**

Certified tea plantations should collaborate with relevant agencies to protect and restore habitat for elephants either within tea estate boundaries or for local habitat recovery projects off site. Permanent signage should be provided noting protected area boundaries and regulations for protecting natural resources in close proximity to certified tea plantations.

2.2.5 **Recommended**

Certified tea plantations should provide low-impact, low energy consumption fuel sources (such as sustainably grown wood within the tea plantation boundary) to full time resident tea workers so that nearby deforestation/wood removal can be minimized.

Note: In India, tea plantations situated on government revenue lands are required to supply fuel sources to their full time resident workers.

3. Infrastructure at the tea plantation

3.0 Drainage ditches, water channels, wells, ponds and other water sources.

The map and known elephant movement patterns identified in section 1.1 will identify corridors and pathways that are used by elephants. If these pathways go to or cross drainage ditches, ponds, water tanks or other water sources the following standards apply.

- 3.0.1 **C** Natural water sources must remain available for access by elephants.
- 3.0.2 **C** Drainage ditches and other water channels must not put elephants that wish to cross or access water at risk of injury.
- Drainage ditches and other water channels must not pose a danger of entrapment of elephants.
 - Ditches and water channels must be angled, terraced or stepped to allow elephants, including juveniles, to cross or access water safely. OR
 - Drainage ditches and other water channels must be bridged with grates, culverts, drainage pipes or similar options that are designed so that they do not trap or otherwise injure elephants and other wildlife.
- 3.0.3 **C** Man-made tea garden water storage ponds, tanks or wells must be designed and managed so as not to put elephants and other wildlife at risk of injury or death.
- Water tanks or wells must be elephant-proof to ensure elephant safety.
 - The slope of the sides of man-made ponds must allow safe entry and exit by elephants, and there must be terracing/steps on at least one side of the pond that will allow elephants of all ages to access water safely OR
 - Man-made ponds must exclude elephants such as with fencing that meets the requirements of these standards (see section 3.1 below).
- 3.0.4 **Recommended**
- Certified tea plantations should collaborate with agencies and groups to secure water quality and availability for elephants beyond the borders of their plantation, with special attention to ensuring prevention of waste from the tea plantation operations and employee housing areas doesn't impact surrounding water sources.

3.1 Electricity and electric fences

Elephants are at risk of death or injury by electrocution from low-hanging electrical lines and electrified fencing that does not meet animal and human safety specifications.

- 3.1.1 **C** Electrical service lines must be underground or secured at such a height to avoid contact by elephants moving through the plantation.
- 3.1.2 **C** Electric fencing must not cause a risk to humans or elephants.
- 3.1.3 Only energizers specifically designed for livestock fencing should be used.

3.2 Other Fencing/Barriers

- 3.2.1 **C** Elephants must be able to move freely into and out of the certified tea plantation without being blocked by fences or other barriers.
- 3.2.2 **C** Within individual tea plantations elephant movement must not be blocked by fences or other barriers, with exceptions listed in standard 3.2.3.
- 3.2.3 When it is necessary to use fences or other barriers to protect elephants from hazards, the fence/barrier should not completely exclude elephants from foraging areas, natural water sources or corridors and pathways used by elephants.

Note: See section 1.1 for identification of corridors and pathways used by elephants.

4. Land and Crop Management

4.0 Use and storage of toxic substances

Certified Elephant Friendly™ recommends organic production of tea under this standard, and if the plantation carries current USDA organic, IndoCert certification or an equivalent certification, then this section will be scored automatically as compliant. For alternative organic certificates to those listed above, the applicant can submit a petition to WFEN to include their current organic certificate and may be asked to provide full organic test results. Farms moving towards organic production should indicate their plans and timelines toward receiving organic certification.

However, recognizing that the risk of accidental death to elephants is acute across the tea growing regions, the great majority of which are non-organic, we are prepared to allow certification for non-organic tea subject to the criteria below. Applicants should note that *Certified Elephant Friendly™* is undergoing further research into the impact of chemicals used in tea production on the health of the local ecosystem, and we reserve the right to require organic certification in the future should we determine that chemicals used on non-organic plantations pose a serious long-term threat to workers, elephants and/or other wildlife. Certified, but non-organic tea plantations would then have a grace period to commit to convert to organic to maintain their *Elephant Friendly™* certification.

- 4.0.1 **C** Synthetic chemical storage must be elephant-proof.
- 4.0.2 **C** There must be a written plan for the use and storage of chemicals. The plan must include:
 - 4.0.2.1 A list of all synthetic chemicals used to include fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides.
 - 4.0.2.2 How and where synthetic chemicals are stored.
 - 4.0.2.3 How equipment is cleaned to remove synthetic chemical residues.
 - 4.0.2.4 How any synthetic chemical waste is disposed of.
- 4.0.3 **Recommended**
Certified tea plantations should work towards organic certification.

Note: Some chemicals – such as urea – are known to be potential attractants to elephants and have been linked to elephant deaths.

- 4.0.4 **C** Pesticides and other hazardous chemicals must not be applied within 5 meters of any permanent water body.
- 4.0.5 **C** Anyone using agrochemicals on a *Certified Elephant Friendly™* plantation must be trained and competent to do so.

Note: Training must include information on the mixing, use, and disposal of agrochemicals.

- 4.0.6 **C** Anyone using agrochemicals on a *Certified Elephant Friendly™* plantation must have appropriate personal protective equipment.
- 4.0.7 Unless the certified farm is organic certified according to the introductory paragraph in section 4.0 of this document, WFEN and its partners reserve the right to conduct chemical residue testing of water, soil and/or plants to verify that they are meeting safe usage practices for chemicals and that contamination levels do not exceed internationally recommended limits for agrochemicals.

4.1 Wastes associated with tea production

- 4.1.1 **C** Plastic and other waste associated with production of *Certified Elephant Friendly™* products must be collected and disposed of without risk of elephants accessing the waste.

Note: Plastic and other non-biodegradable waste could include the packages that seedlings are wrapped in, polythene bags, empty chemical bottles and other plastics. This also includes waste generated by plantation workers and their households. Plastics and other solid waste have been shown to be ingested by elephants and other wildlife and pose a health threat if not properly disposed of.

- 4.1.2 **Recommended**
The use of single-use and non-biodegradable plastics should be minimized throughout the operation.

4.2 Water for tea and spice production

- 4.2.1 **C** A farm producing *Certified Elephant Friendly™* tea and spices must ensure the best use of water for crops while not depriving the community of water for other essential needs.

Note: If irrigation of crops is necessary and there is sufficient water to do so, irrigation must be managed so that water is not wasted. For example, irrigation should take place in early morning or evening when crops are not heat stressed and when evaporation is minimized.

4.3 Soil and land management

- 4.3.1 **Recommended**

Certified tea plantations should use terraces and/or plant trees, shrubs and ground cover alongside rivers, streams and other watercourses to prevent soil erosion and run-off.

4.3.2 **Recommended**

Weed management strategies should include coordination with the Forest Department to ensure weed invasions are addressed using the least toxic methods recommended by their agency.

4.3.3 **Recommended**

Native vegetation should be grown within the boundary of the tea plantation to deliver the following benefits:

- Help protect biodiversity within local ecological systems,
- Provide natural vegetation foraging opportunities for elephants along their movement paths,
- Support landscape connectivity,
- Improve carbon sequestration and mitigate the effects of climate change, and
- Encourage natural pest control for tea plants by natural predators such as bats, birds and spiders.

5. Employment on Certified plantations

Certified Elephant Friendly™ requires that certified plantations conform with best practice in the treatment of employees. If the plantation is currently certified to a global Fair-Trade standard that includes rules on modern slavery and human trafficking and child labor, or is a member of the Ethical Tea Partnership, they are considered to meet the requirements of this section. Small Tea Growers (STG) and Large Tea Growers (the organized sector) must comply with guidelines provided by the government.

In all cases it is required that Certified plantations conform with Indian labor law.

5.0 Labor conditions

5.0.1 **C** There must be no illegal child labor on Certified plantations.

Note: Child labor, as defined by the [International Labor Organization](#), refers to work that:

- *is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and*
- *interferes with their schooling by:*
 - *depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;*
 - *obliging them to leave school prematurely; or*
 - *requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work*

5.0.2 **C** There must be an implemented policy against modern slavery and commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation, trafficking, and harassment of or against anyone, particularly children, adolescents, women, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and minorities

5.0.3 **C** Certified plantations must not contribute to exploitation of women or disadvantaged communities or tribes.

Note: Exploitation includes any activity which promotes women or disadvantaged communities without their full consent or without their full integration into the decision-making process and benefits sharing.

- 5.0.4 **C** All certified plantations must adhere to local labor laws and compensation requirements. Compliance with these regulations is essential to ensure that workers are treated fairly and that their rights are fully respected.

Note: Legal, fair wages must be paid.

- 5.0.5 **C** Workers must not be made indebted to the plantation in such a way that traps them into employment.

- 5.0.6 **C** Workers must be given at least one day per week off.

- 5.0.7 **C** If workers are housed on site, they must be provided with adequate clean and safe housing for themselves and their families.

- 5.0.8 **C** Workers must have access to health care.

- 5.0.9 **C** Workers' children must have access to at least standard local education.

- 5.0.10 **C** If workers are provided with food as part of their compensation for their labor, this must be of reasonable quality and quantity and meet their customary needs.

- 5.0.11 **C** If workers grow their own food this activity must be included in the overall Human-Elephant Conflict Management Plan for the tea plantation, as per section 2.1.1.

- 5.0.12 **C** Any violations of the labor conditions required by law and/or within these standards must be reported to WFEN.

Note: WFEN reserves the right to terminate certification if the violations are considered serious enough, or in the case of repeated violations.