“At Marks & Spencer we are deeply concerned about the impact that soya production can have on the landscape and communities where it is grown” says Fiona Wheatley, Sustainable Development Manager at the UK retailer M&S. “That is why as part of Plan A, our 180-point sustainability plan, we have made a commitment to source all our soya from sources that do not contribute to deforestation by 2015”.

Although this sounds simple, in reality this is a complex challenge for any retailer. Soya finds its way onto UK supermarkets shelves in a wide range of products. “Soya is a major ingredient in products like soya milk, tofu and soya sauce, but more often it only accounts for a tiny proportion of the product” says Fiona. “Soya is high in protein so is a common component of animal feed, this means it is indirectly used to produce chicken, pork and beef, as well as dairy products and eggs.”

Faced with this complexity M&S are looking for practical, implementable solutions and this is where RTRS comes in. “We recognise we can’t do this alone,” Fiona says, “we need to work alongside expert partners to find the right solutions. RTRS provides an effective tool for us to address multiple challenges. M&S has committed to only using non-GM soy in our products, and as RTRS are developing a non-GM module, this gives us a practical way to meet our customers’ expectations on non-GM ingredients as well as preventing deforestation.”

M&S has been a member of the RTRS since 2008 and considers the multi-stakeholder nature of the RTRS a real strength, “we believe that getting all the key players in the supply chain – producers, traders, buyers, NGOs- to sit round the table and find a solution that suits all parties, is crucial. Yes, it can involve compromise and it takes time to roll out the scheme across the wide range of industries and sectors that use soy, but the real value is its potential to affect the industry at scale. Anything else will only ever produce a minor benefit for the landscape and communities we are concerned about”.

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