

## Toward a Healthy and Prosperous Planet

### Empowering Teachers and Advancing Student Achievement Around the World

In an era of global trade and instant communication, decisions in one part of the world can have a dramatic effect on the lives of people who live oceans away. While it is undeniable that our resource-intensive way of life has improved the standard of living for many, it has also strained our natural resources to the breaking point. Each year 32 million acres (13 million hectares) of forestland, roughly equivalent to the size of New York state, are converted to farms and ranches, resulting in the loss of biodiversity, migration routes and longstanding local traditions. Forests that are essential to our very survival are threatened by staggering population growth expected to reach 10 billion by 2100.

In order to rise to these challenges—and to create the foundation for a sustainable future in which we can meet the needs of today without compromising resources for the next generation—we must transform the very basis of our relationship to our planet. This strikes at the heart of our mission here at the Rainforest Alliance. In order to affect lasting, substantive change, we must touch the hearts and minds of the next generation—the teachers, business leaders, policy makers, parents and consumers of tomorrow. The Rainforest Alliance launched its Education Program in 2002 with the aim of equipping our future leaders with the knowledge and skills they will need to navigate a rapidly changing world and ensure a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for the planet and all its inhabitants.

In the face of climate change, energy shortages and the growing instability of our food supply, it has become clear that we cannot rely on yesterday's thinking. Rather than simply accepting the transfer of information from teacher to student, we must foster deeper learning through critical analysis and solution-driven pedagogy—the type of thinking that for the past 25 years has driven constant innovation at the Rainforest Alliance.

#### Essential Learning for the 21st Century

Each grade-level curriculum is designed to provide teachers with the necessary tools to create an educational foundation for critical thinking about sustainability for early childhood through eighth grade. The lessons use real-world examples



*Rainforest Alliance staff at a teacher training in Ghana demonstrate how to measure a tree to calculate the amount of carbon it contains.*

that encourage children to think analytically about conservation within the context of English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies lessons. Through hands-on projects such as river clean-ups, we encourage civic engagement and pique students' curiosity about their local environments, while also promoting a sense of global citizenship. Our practical approach helps teachers bring core academic subjects to life and encourages children to engage simultaneously with their communities and the world beyond.

Because we firmly believe that all school districts should have the same opportunities to support their teachers in sustainability education and bolster the academic achievements of their students, we are committed to keeping our top-notch multidisciplinary curricula accessible online and offering intensive professional training to support educators as they implement the lessons.



#### OUR MISSION

*The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior.*

[www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org)



*Rainforest Alliance staff lead a teacher training event in Guatemala.*

### **Lessons from a Leader in Conservation**

For 25 years, the Rainforest Alliance has been an internationally recognized pioneer in conservation. We have collaborated with businesses and forest communities around the world, transforming the way they manage their natural resources to help conserve ecosystems, protect wildlife and ensure that people can earn sustainable livelihoods. With our considerable field expertise and an extensive network of international partners, we are uniquely qualified to help young people understand how their everyday actions affect ecosystems across the planet.

Developed in partnership with Antioch University New England Graduate School, Project Learning Tree and education experts at public schools, the Rainforest Alliance curriculum is built upon case studies drawn from the farming and forest communities where we work. Each grade focuses on a particular geographic area and conservation project in an age-appropriate manner. Lesson plans also encourage students to explore their local environment through biodiversity assessments, science journaling, terrarium building and animal studies.

Designed to fulfill mandated learning standards, the curriculum is aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics. Our program has earned praise from the United Federation of Teachers, the National Science Teachers Association, Project Learning Tree and the North American Association for Environmental Education.

### **Professional Development for Teachers**

In recognition that the strength of any curriculum depends on the mastery of the educator, we created a free online Learning Site (<http://rainforest-alliance.org/learningsite>) that includes detailed lesson plans; stories in English, Spanish

and Portuguese; presentations; species profiles; posters; and rubrics to assess student learning and achievement. To date, the site has received nearly 16 million page-views.

We also offer an extensive training program to support teachers in the implementation of the lesson plans and the integration of conservation and sustainability themes, through core subject units, into their existing curriculum. Using a train-the-trainer model, we bring together educators from different schools for intensive workshops that prepare them to turnkey the curriculum to their colleagues. This allows trained educators to work collaboratively with colleagues and advance teaching practices while expanding the scope of the program throughout the entire school.

We have conducted workshops around the world, as well as in New York City, New Jersey and Florida. In less than a decade we've reached tens of thousands of students and thousands of teachers in more than 100 schools in the United States, Colombia, Ghana and Guatemala. One public school district in Jacksonville, Florida, has integrated our program into approximately 25 percent of its public elementary schools, showcasing how this model can be applied across a range of schools and grade levels to advance academic achievement while preparing students with 21st century skills.

### **Engaging Young People, Locally and Globally**

Beyond classroom learning, the Rainforest Alliance encourages students to become active citizens in their local communities, fostering the critical local-to-global awareness that is the bedrock of our conservation work. Through local volunteering and fundraising projects, students put their critical thinking skills into practice, researching area wildlife, investigating sources of local pollution and cleaning up natural areas nearby.



Students at Ruth Upson Elementary School in Jacksonville, Florida participate in a web of life activity to learn how the various parts of an ecosystem are connected.

Our program encourages students to connect their local experiences to those of other children around the world. One of the most memorable elements of the program, educators tell us, is the thrill of seeing their students making connections with their peers in rainforest regions through arts exchanges and video conferences organized in conjunction with the nonprofit organization Creative Connections.

Today's urgent challenges call upon us to instill in our children a deep understanding of their place in the world, innovative problem-solving skills and the information they need to take responsible action. If we are to ensure a sustainable future for all, we must give all of our young people the complete toolbox of skills they need to see the big picture and act upon what they've learned, locally and globally.

"The neat thing about the Rainforest Alliance curriculum is that it's designed for you to go deeper and to make it more local to your needs ... [to get teachers to] really dig deeper into how they can coordinate the activities and the learning into interdisciplinary units."

– Kimberly Harrison,  
Principal, Jacksonville, Florida

### Effectiveness of Rainforest Alliance Training Workshops Among Teachers

From teacher and principal year-end feedback, 2012

■ teachers ■ principals



agreed that the teacher training was important to the success of the rainforest unit



felt that the rainforest unit helped students understand local and global environmental issues



would recommend a school partnership with Rainforest Alliance

Photo by David Dudenhofer

For more information, visit [www.rainforest-alliance.org/work/education](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/work/education) or contact us at 212-677-1900 or [education@ra.org](mailto:education@ra.org)

