TRUSTEA SUSTAINABLE TEA FOUNDATON

INDIA I INSTITUTATIONAL JOURNEY REPORT

trustea
ENVIRONMENT • SAFETY • LIVELIHOODS

INTEGRATION OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE TEA CERTIFICATION

A journey of Sustainability Code development, field implementation and Regenerative collaboration | 2013–2026



Code Evolution • REGEN • TeaNext • Sustainability Impact

2023
Regenerative practices enter Code v3.0

2024
HUL-funded REGEN Program begins

2025
Code v3.1.0, TeaNext & Global Recognition

INTEGRATION OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE TEA CERTIFICATION

The *trustea* Journey Towards Soil Health, Climate Resilience and Sustainable Tea Production in India - An Institutional Journey Report

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REPORTING PERIOD: 2013–2026

Documenting the institutional evolution of *trustea* and its contribution to advancing regenerative tea cultivation in India.

CHAPTERS



01. Sustainable Tea Code- the foundation

Since 2013, *trustea* has evolved its Sustainable Tea Code to promote responsible tea production, with Version 3.0 (2023) and Version 3.1.0 (2025) strengthening the integration of regenerative agriculture for soil-health management and energy management.

02. Regenerative Agriculture - REGEN Program

Initiated in 2024 with funding from HUL, the REGEN Programme translates regenerative principles into field-level practices, including composting, mulching, green manuring, soil-health monitoring and integrated nutrient management..





03. Inclusion of Small Tea Growers— TeaNext

Introduced in 2025 with HUL's support, TeaNext encompasses STG livelihood through training, technical guidance on better leaf harvesting techniques, improved pesticide-regulatory compliance and implementation of regenerative agriculture.

04. Recognition and Impact

trustea's receipt of the Unilever Sustainability Impact Award 2025 and ISB Report- 2026 recognised its contribution to sustainability in the Indian tea value chain and highlighted the importance of industry collaboration in advancing responsible tea production.



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Integration of Regenerative Agriculture in Sustainable Tea Certilification



2013

Sustainable Tea platform launched

trustea establishes an Indian tea sustainability Code and verification system.



2023

Code Version 3.0 — Regenerative transition

Regenerative agriculture becomes an explicit focus, including soil health, water conservation, energy management & biodiversity.



2024

REGEN — From framework to field

The HUL-funded Tea Regenerative Agriculture Programme initiates translating sustainability commitments into on-ground action.



2025

Implementation and inclusion

Code Version 3.1.0 strengthens implementation guidance, while *TeaNext* extends capacity-building for small tea growers.



2025

Sustainability Impact Award

trustea is recognised as a winner of the Unilever Sustainability Impact Award 2025, acknowledging its contribution within the partnership framework

Executive Summary

Integration of Regenerative Agriculture in Sustainable Tea Certification: The *trustea* Journey Towards Soil Health, Climate Resilience and Sustainable Tea in India (2013–2026)

1,011 mkg
tea verified in 2025 (~74% of national output)

43,000+ ha
under REGEN across the country

–15% | +3%
chemical N | yield (midline evalution 6600+ ha)

7000+
STGs under TeaNext as in 2006 2000 ha under Regenerative Agriculture

*trustea and HUL programme records, 2025–26

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This report traces the institutional evolution of the *trustea* Sustainable Tea Foundation (TSTF) from 2013 to 2026, examining its transition from an India-specific sustainability Code towards a broader framework integrating regenerative agriculture, climate management, smallholder development and responsible tea production. It brings together four interconnected developments: the evolution of the *trustea* Code, implementation of the REGEN programme, extension of sustainable farming practices to small tea growers through TeaNext, and institutional recognition through the Unilever Sustainability Impact Award 2025. alongwith reporting by Indian School of Business (ISB), which is available at https://hbsp.harvard.edu/product/ISB573-PDF-ENG

PRINCIPAL FINDING

***trustea* has established substantial institutional reach and a growing implementation platform for advancing regenerative tea cultivation in India. The next challenge is to demonstrate that the reported changes translate into measurable, attributable and lasting outcomes.**

The programme verification coverage, revised Sustainable Tea Code, field-level interventions, smallholder training and institutional recognition represent important milestones. Early programme-reported results suggest potential improvements in soil health, nutrient-use efficiency, productivity and greenhouse-gas performance.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Scale of the standard

As on 2025 *trustea* verified 1,011 million kg of tea, about 74% of India's output and up 16.5% from 868 million kg in 2022. Code Versions 3.0 (2023) and 3.1.0 (effective January 2025) added requirements on soil health, organic-matter replenishment, biodiversity, nutrient optimisation and climate. The trustea Emission Calculator, TeaPlus advisory services and traceability systems support these requirements.

2 REGEN program puts the standard to work at scale

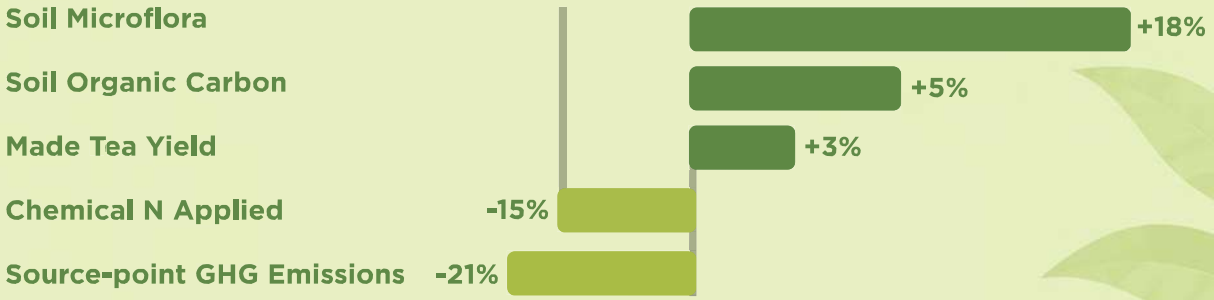
Initiated in 2024 with Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) funding, the Tea Regenerative Agriculture programme (REGEN) covers about 43,000 ha across the Indian tea growing regions, with over 7,000 small growers taking part. Its delivery record includes more than 3,500 soil samples analyzed, with a significant number tested in trustea laboratory, which is set up under the program, over 300 composting demonstrations and more than 300,000 shade trees planted. Compost output is reported as 75,000 t.

3 Early results point the right way

Against a baseline of 1.06% soil organic carbon (SOC), pH 4.73, yield of 1,828 kg/ha and 132 kg N/ha, from the 151-estate assessment reports:

Every Signals, 6000+ ha: Soil Life up 18%, Chemical Nitrogen down 15%

Change vs Baseline (gardens under 2 year of REGEN program)



If the yield and nitrogen changes are directly comparable, they imply a calculated estimate of 21% more tea per unit of chemical nitrogen. End-2026 projections are more than 350,000 kg of additional tea, more than 600 t of urea avoided and about 22,000 t CO_2e.

4 Smallholders have begun to join

In mid-2025, the REGEN program was extended to the small tea growers' (STG) segment with the nomenclature 'TeaNext'. Starting with 14 bought leaf factories and 4800+ STGs, the program currently encompasses 22 Bought Leaf Factories in Dibrugarh, Golaghat and Tinsukia districts of Assam encompassing 7000+ STGs and 2000 ha under regenerative agriculture. The goal is to improve green leaf quality, impart awareness regarding pesticide regulations and implement regenerative agriculture in the small holdings. Training and field implementation is underway and currently covers about 3% of India's small growers.

5 Awards and Institutional Recognition

trustea's institutional standing is reflected in two significant milestones. In 2023, *trustea* achieved ISEAL Code Compliant tatus, recognising its sustainability standard-setting and assurance system. In 2025, *trustea* Sustainable Tea Foundation received the Unilever Sustainability Impact Award at Unilever's Partner to Win Global Summit in London on 2nd April, acknowledging its contribution to sustainability across India's tea value chain. The Indian School of Business (ISB), in 2026, reported that trustea has helped drive the adoption of responsible agricultural and manufacturin practices across the tea value chain and has reached a significant scale within India's tea industry (https://hbsp.harvard.edu/product/ISB573-PDF-ENG)

Conclusion

trustea initiative of integrating regenerative agriculture in sustainability certification represents an important development in the institutional management of India's tea sector. Its established verification system, the REGEN program implementation, TeaNext smallholder engagement and its expanding technical tools create opportunities to integrate soil health, climate management, responsible production and livelihoods within a common framework.

The principal challenge is no longer simply to expand programme reach, but to demonstrate the durability and significance of its outcomes. A reconciled dataset, consistent field-level monitoring, transparent carbon accounting and credible impact evaluation will help establish which interventions deliver the greatest benefits, under what conditions and at what cost. By making measurable outcomes the next phase of programme development, trustea targets the strengthening of its contribution to a more resilient, resource-efficient and responsible Indian tea industry.

CHAPTER 1

TRUSTEA SUSTAINABLE TEA CODE

Recent Activities, Implementation, Performance Evidence and Strategic Priorities for India's Tea Sector















trustea

Advancing Sustainable, Regenerative and Climate-Resilient Tea Production in India

Programme achievements, recent developments and the next phase of sector-wide progress | 2013–2026



Executive Summary

Launched in July 2013, ***trustea*** has developed into a major India-focused sustainability programme for the tea sector, bringing together tea estates, bought-leaf factories (BLFs), small tea growers, packers and other supply chainstakeholders around a common framework for responsible production. The trustea Sustainable Tea Code integrates environmental management, safety and livelihoods with implementation guidance, verification, training, traceability and monitoring. This integrated approach helps translate sustainability expectations into practical systems across a diverse tea industry.

The programme's scale is reflected in its verified tea volumes. ***trustea*** reported 954 million kg in 2023, 979 million kg in 2024 and 1,011 million kg in 2025. The 2025 figure represents an increase of 57 million kg, or approximately 6% over 2023. **trustea's** published timeline records national production shares of 70%, 77% and 74% for the same years, demonstrating the programme's substantial presence within Indian tea production [2].



trustea's development has also moved beyond verification coverage. Standard Version 3.0, introduced in 2023, brought regenerative agriculture and energy management into sharper focus. Version 3.1.0, effective from 1 January 2025, continues this direction through updated requirements and implementation materials. Digital initiatives include TeaPlus for small tea growers, Tracetea for farm-to-gate traceability, and the Trustea Emission Calculator (TEC), a tea-specific carbon accounting application developed with the Inhana Organic Research Foundation (IORF) and supported by Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL). An advanced TEC version was launched in 2025 [1,2,7,13]. which has been verified by i-NoCarbon, UK.

Recent programme activity has included regenerative agriculture, field and classroom capacity-building, structured energy audits, greenhouse-gas measurement, certification-body training, and maximum residue limit (MRL) awareness workshops for small tea growers in Assam and North Bengal. ***trustea's*** public resources also include the Outcome Report 2024, monitoring and evaluation material, updated assurance protocols, and policies covering diversity, equity and inclusion, safeguarding, impartiality, responsible sourcing, data governance and privacy [3,10].

These achievements position ***trustea*** as more than a certification label: it is a sector-wide platform for strengthening production practices, improving supply-chain assurance and enabling the Indian tea industry to respond to evolving expectations on climate, quality, worker welfare and responsible sourcing. The next phase offers an opportunity to connect this extensive reach even more visibly with comparable, outcome-oriented evidence on soil health, energy performance, water management, chemical stewardship and livelihoods.



1 Purpose, Scope and Approach

This report reviews ***trustea's*** development, Sustainable Tea Code, implementation arrangements and activities through 2026. It draws on official programme timelines, Code documents, the Year Book 2023, monitoring and evaluation publications, newsletters, governance documents, Outcome Report listings and selected sector references [1–16].

It covers four key areas: verified tea and stakeholder engagement; Code and assurance system evolution; initiatives in regenerative agriculture, climate action, digital tools and chemical stewardship; and monitoring frameworks for continuous improvement. Published figures are retained in their original context, with baseline indicators distinguished from programme activities and long-term outcomes.

trustea | Theory of Change

ENHANCING THE AVAILABILITY OF TEA FOR THE CONSUMERS PRODUCED IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SUPPLY CHAIN THAT FOSTERS ECONOMIC VIABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

Sectoral Landscape Governance

A robust, credible, and self-financing verification scheme for the Indian domestic tea market (driven by a combination of market demand and ownership of the tea industry stakeholders who continues to own, manage, and retain this code).

Field level

Buyers are able to source and producers are striving for continuous improvement in addition to assurance of the sustainability practices for their product line.

Business Practices

Improved smallholder livelihood through gains in productivity, productivity, and access to services, improved worker welfare particularly in relation to wages, occupational health, and safety.

OUTCOMES

Environment:

- Climate-resilient
- Good natural capital management
- Circular economy in the tea industry

Society:

- Entities become socially responsible
- Entities focus on a safe working environment
- Empowered women and youth

Economy:

- Resilient, economically viable working environment
- Living wage and living income
- Availability of safer, sustainably produced tea

OUTPUTS

Benefits to consumers/buyers–risk management, traceability of supply, marketing, etc.

Responsible producers are able to gain brand recognition and maintain long-term market access.

Supporting Purchasing Policies

Other producers adopt improved practices through learning, replication, and supportive policies.

Certified producers and supply chain are able to demonstrate a supply of responsibly produced tea

ACTIVITIES

Relevant and trusted tea code

Credible Assurance System

Accessibility and Understanding of Trusted Tea Code

Supportive Government Policies

Code Revision

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

Review of Assurance Process

Implementation of Partnerships

Stakeholder Engagement → **Research and Development** → **Training, Support, and Advice**

Awarenessing Government

Enabling Environment

Advocacy with government/ regulatory bodies

Advocacy and partnership building with industry

Advocacy and partnership building with consumers, retailers, NGOs

Assumptions

- A sustainable verification and certification mechanism will be established.
- Changed practices of entities, verified by a certification process, will lead to Environmental, Societal, and Business-related benefits leading to achievement of sustainability goals.

- IPs will be interested in and will be able to provide support to entities.
- Entities will be represented and interested in certification.
- Entities will change practices.
- Credible code will be established.
- Entities will be able to get certifications.

- Trustea will be able to create and maintain a relevant code through research, monitoring, secondary data, and evaluation of code.
- Manage implementation agencies and CB partnerships.

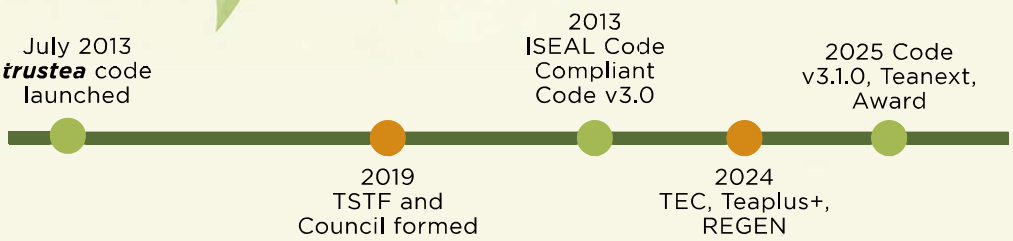


2 *trustea:* Background and Strategic Role

Launched in July 2013, ***trustea*** established its Secretariat alongside the programme. The first producer was verified through a pilot in November 2013. Initiated with support from Hindustan Unilever Limited, Tata Consumer Products and IDH, ***trustea*** has evolved into a sustainability standard and verification system tailored to the Indian tea industry [2,4,11]. GTPP joined as a funder in 2017.

In May 2019, the ***trustea*** Sustainable Tea Foundation was incorporated as a Section 8- not for profit company, followed by the formation of the multistakeholder Sustainable Tea Council in September 2019. This governance structure promotes value-chain collaboration and shared sustainability expectations.

trustea's three pillars—Environment, Safety and Livelihoods—address sustainability across tea production and supply chains. Environment covers soil, water, biodiversity, agrochemicals, waste and energy; Safety includes food safety, traceability, manufacturing practices and occupational health and safety; and Livelihoods addresses labour rights, worker welfare, equality and workplace conditions. General management and recordkeeping support effective implementation [1,11].



2.1 Evolution of the System

trustea has progressed from programme establishment to wider adoption, stronger assurance and a greater focus on sustainability outcomes. Early tools included implementation guides, audit protocols and farm diaries, followed by expanded small-grower engagement and digital traceability.In 2023, ***trustea*** marked its tenth anniversary, introduced Code Version 3.0, (launched the verified seal-on-pack initiative) to check launch date and attained ISEAL Code Compliant status. TeaPlus and TEC followed in 2024, with an advanced TEC application and Code Version 3.1.0 introduced in 2025 [2,4].

Milestone	Development	Contribution to the programme
July 2013	trustea programme and Secretariat launched	Established a common Indian tea sustainability framework
November 2013	First producer verified through a pilot	Started implementation and verification
2014 onward	Implementation guides, audit protocols & farm diaries developed	Built practical tools for consistent adoption
2017	System-assurance audit process commenced	Strengthened consistency of verification
May–Sep 2019	Foundation incorporated & Sustainable Tea Council formed	Formalised governance and multistakeholder participation
2023	Code Version 3.0 & seal-on-pack initiative; ISEAL Code Compliant status reported	Elevated regenerative agriculture and strengthened programme visibility
2024	TeaPlus and TEC* launched	Expanded smallholder digital support and carbon measurement
2025	Code Version 3.1.0 and advanced TEC launched	Continued refinement of implementation & climate tools

trustea Emission Calculator

3 Programme Scale and Certification Trajectory

trustea's verified tea volume increased from 954 million kg in 2023 to 979 million kg in 2024 and 1,011 million kg in 2025—a rise of 57 million kg (approximately 6%) over two years. The programme's published timeline reports corresponding shares of Indian tea production of 70%, 77% and 74%, respectively [2].

The share of national production provides context for trustea's sectoral reach. The Tea Board of India's 71st Annual Report records 1,315.77 million kg of tea production in FY 2024–25, down 66.26 million kg from 2023–24 due to adverse weather in major tea-producing states [12]. Against this backdrop, the growth in ***trustea***-verified volume indicates expanding programme reach.

The Year Book 2023 reported 704 verified entities, including 341 bought-leaf factories and 255 estates, alongside other categories. ***trustea*** supported 315,250 small tea growers, including 24,524 newly added in 2023, and reached 383,131 female and 301,001 male workers. It also recorded 1,418 registered e-learning users, 265 recertification audits, 89 certification audits and 56 system-assurance audits [4]. In 2025, programme reporting listed 885 verified entities and outreach figures of 365,304 female and 286,576 male workers [8].





These indicators demonstrate ***trustea's*** engagement across producers, factories, smallholders and workers. Consistent definitions and reporting periods will further strengthen comparisons and communication of progress over time.

4 Architecture of the trustea Code

The **trustea** Code comprises General Management and three pillars: Environment, Safety and Livelihoods. Version 3.1.0 is supported by an implementation guide, audit protocol, sample annexures, revision history, transition plan, public consultation materials and Code Development Committee records [1]. Together, these resources guide participating entities in understanding requirements, preparing evidence and integrating sustainability into routine management.



Pillar / area	Core themes	Contribution to responsible tea production
General Management (G)	Management responsibility, documentation, training, records and systems	Builds accountability, internal coordination and an evidence base for continuous improvement
Environment (E)	Soil health and fertility, water conservation, agrochemicals, biodiversity, waste & energy	Supports responsible resource use, healthier production landscapes and climate resilience
Safety (S)	Green-leaf and made-tea traceability, food safety, good manufacturing practices, occupational health and safety	Strengthens product integrity, supply-chain transparency and protection of workers and consumers
Livelihoods (L)	Labour rights, worker welfare, equality, statutory wages and benefits and safe workplace	Promotes responsible employment practices and attention to people across the tea value chain



The Code distinguishes mandatory control points from other criteria and uses a progressive compliance model, enabling entities to strengthen implementation over time. For tea, soil-health requirements include pre- and post-certification soil-test reporting on soil organic matter, total soil microbial mass or diversity, and earthworm count [4]. These indicators complement routine production measures by addressing soil biology and physical health.

Common requirements and entity-specific control points provide a shared framework adaptable to estates, bought-leaf factories (BLFs) and smallholder-linked supply chains operating at different scales.

5 *Version 3.0 / 3.1.0: Regenerative Agriculture and Energy Management*

trustea Standard Version 3.0 was issued on 11 July 2023, with a transition plan for updated requirements. Version 3.1.0, effective from 1 January 2025, is the current published standard [1,14,15]. It strengthens the focus on soil health management through regenerative agriculture, environmental performance and operations.

Regenerative agriculture receives greater emphasis, linking soil condition, water management, biodiversity and agrochemical stewardship. Practical measures include soil-cover management, organic-resource recycling, composting, mulching, nutrient-use efficiency and practices that sustain soil function across harvest cycles.

Energy management is another priority. Tea processing consumes thermal and electrical energy during withering, drying, rolling, fermentation, sorting, packing and utility operations. Energy records and structured audits help identify efficienc opportunities, control costs and improve competitiveness.

The implementation guide, transition plan, revision history, consultation summary and Code Development Committee records support consistent application, clarify requirements and document the Code's evolution through sector experience and stakeholder input [1].



6 *Governance, Assurance and Credibility*

trustea's governance and assurance systems underpin programme credibility. Th Sustainable Tea Council guides programme direction, implementation quality and emerging priorities.

ISEAL Alliance records independent evaluations against its earlier Standards-Setting Code in 2022 and Assurance and Impacts Codes in 2023. These informed improvements in consultation transparency, recordkeeping, assessor competence, appeals independence, suspension safeguards and monitoring and evaluation. ***trustea*** reported achieving ISEAL Code Compliant status in 2023 [2,4,11].



7 *Recent Activities and Developments, 2024–2026*

During 2024–2026, ***trustea*** continued moving towards an integrated programme model, combining an expanding verified base with regenerative agriculture, digital services, carbon accounting, energy management, training and governance improvements.

Links to the Digital Tools – free to use with Offline mode

Tracetea App Link:
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.tracetea.mobile
trustea Emission Calculator (TEC) Link:
https://apps.apple.com/in/app/trustea-carbon-calculator/id6504613649
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.trustea.tec

Tea Plus App Link :
https://apps.apple.com/in/app/tea/id6504126492 ,
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.teaplus

Period	Milestone or activity	Significance
2023	Code Version 3.0 introduced; 954 million kg verified; ISEAL Code Compliant status reported	Marked the programme's tenth year and strengthened the regenerative and assurance agenda [2,4,11]
2024	979 million kg verified; TeaPlus and TEC launched	Extended digital support for small growers and introduced a tea-specific carbon calculator [2]
January 2025	Sustainable Tea Council reviewed smallholder impact, chemical compliance, audit quality, governance, staff systems and information security	Kept programme performance and quality assurance in focus [9]
2025	Activities included regenerative agriculture, energy audits, TEC development, certification-body training and MRL workshops in Assam and North Bengal	Expanded implementation support and practical sustainability capacity-building [7,8]
2025	1,011 million kg verified; advanced TEC introduced; Code Version 3.1.0 published	Extended verified reach and strengthened the programme's climate and implementation tools [2]
April 2026	trustea's Code page linked to the Tea Board Plant Protection Code updated in April 2026	Connected chemical-management guidance with the latest published sector reference [1]
2026	Publication repository listed Newsletter Volume 23, the 2025–26 audit report and updated governance resources	Continued programme communication and public access to key system documents [3,10]

Chemical stewardship has remained an active field priority. trustea's 2025 updates report Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) awareness workshops for small tea growers in North Bengal and Assam, covering responsible pesticide use, banned chemicals and the TeaPlus app. Reported touchpoints were 253 in North Bengal and 233 in Assam in July; 143 in Bengal and 195 in Assam in August; and 252 in Bengal and 162 in Assam in September [8]. These activities promote safe, compliant crop protection.

trustea also strengthened its digital and assurance systems through data-governance and privacy resources, system-assurance protocols and certification-body development [9,10], combining field-level action with institutional improvements for reliable implementation at scale.

8 *Regenerative Agriculture and Soil Health*

Regenerative agriculture is central to trustea's Version 3.0 approach, linking soil management, water conservation, biodiversity and agrochemical stewardship to long-term tea-production resilience.

The Year Book identifies pre- and post-certification soil-test reporting requirements covering soil organic matter, total soil microbial mass or diversity, and earthworm count [4]. **The M&E report found that approximately 64% of surveyed respondents rated soil-conservation implementation as rigorous or very rigorous [5].**

Baseline soil-fertility findings recorded 11.76% of cases as high, 52.94% moderate, rest 35.29% were unassessed at the time of the survey [5]. These findings provide a reference for expanding soil assessment and regenerative practices.



Relevant measures include improved soil cover, mulching, composting, biomass recycling, precise nutrient management, erosion control and practices supporting biological activity. V3.1.0 indicates that given the regional differences in soil, climate, slope and production systems, locally appropriate practices should be monitored against soil indicators, yield, leaf quality, input use and costs. The Code provides a common framework for adopting, documenting and improving these practices.

9 Climate Action, Greenhouse-Gas Accounting and TEC

The Trustea Emission Calculator (TEC), developed by trustea and the Inhana Organic Research Foundation (IORF), with funding from Hindustan Unilever Limited, provides a tea-specific digital approach to estimating greenhouse-gas emissions and carbon sequestration [7]. Its initial application launched in 2024, followed by an advanced version in 2025 [2].

TEC supports structured emissions measurement and mitigation planning, covering tea-relevant emission sources and sequestration considerations. Programme material identifies India-specific shade-tree sequestration data as Tier 3 data [7]. The published TEC overview states that its Basic version can achieve “95% plus” accuracy using standard producer-maintained data; this represents the programme’s stated performance description [7].

The advanced version extends the platform’s climate-management capabilities. The App has been verified by i-NCarbon, UK. Consistent documentation of system boundaries, activity data, emission factors,

allocation rules and assumptions will support comparisons across entities and over time. TEC can help estates, factories and supply-chain stakeholders identify emissions hotspots, compare operating scenarios and prioritise mitigation.





10 *Energy Audits and Factory Decarbonisation*

Energy audits under the ***trustea*** Code help tea factories improve efficiency and reduce emissions by assessing thermal and electrical consumption, identifying process losses and evaluating measures such as improved combustion, equipment optimisation, heat management and efficient utilities.

A case study by a Bureau of Energy Efficiency-accredited energy auditor associated with IIT Indore examined an integrated CTC and Orthodox tea extraction and processing facility in North-East India. The audit identified potential annual savings of 0.37 million electricity units, 260 metric tonnes of coal and 20,500 standard cubic metres of CNG. Estimated annual monetary savings were approximately ₹61 lakh, equivalent to about 12% of the energy bill, with potential annual emissions reduction of 18.5% [7]. These findings illustrate the opportunities that systematic energy assessment can reveal.

Energy data and audits connect sustainability with cost management and competitiveness. *trustea* is working towards implementation of the audit report suggested- energy saving measures to build evidence on efficiency opportunities, and practical interventions that can enable operational cost savings for the tea factories while also enabling factory based GHG emission reductions.



11 Chemical Compliance, MRL Training and Food Safety

Responsible chemical management supports environmental stewardship, worker health, consumer safety and market confidence. ***trustea's*** Code addresses responsible agrochemical use, safe practices, food safety and supply-chain management. Awareness of permitted products, application methods, pre-harvest intervals and residue requirements is essential for consistent tea quality.

In 2025, ***trustea*** conducted MRL-awareness workshops for small tea growers in North Bengal and Assam, covering responsible pesticide use, banned chemicals and TeaPlus [8]. Continued field training, accessible guidance, digital communication and appropriate corrective action can strengthen chemical stewardship and food-safety confidence across the supply chain.



12 Small Tea Growers, Digital Tools and Traceability

Small tea growers are vital to India's tea economy. trustea combines its common Code with field engagement, training, digital tools and supply-chain partnerships to support inclusive sustainability. The Year Book 2023 records 315,250 small tea growers supported, including 24,524 newly added growers that year [4].

TeaPlus, a free to use digital app in 5 languages, launched in 2024, extends digital advisory on good agriculture practices, quality leaf harvesting techniques, pest calendar, chemical and non- chemical options for pest control, month-wise activity calendar, Plant Protection Code of Tea Board and FSSAI regulations; and a newly launched AI feature which enable the STGs to click photos of pest from the farm for its identification and control options. [2,8].

Tea Plus App Link: https://apps.apple.com/in/app/tea/id6504126492 , https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.teaplus

'Tracetea', ***trustea's*** proprietary farm-to-gate traceability solution, enables certified factories to source green leaf from certified supply chains and track custody until made tea leaves the factory, strengthening recordkeeping and consumer assurance [13]. This App helps to reduce bookkeeping burdens for the tea factories and enhance sourcing transparency. The Year Book 2023 recorded 61,922 farmers, 601 aggregators and 104 BLFs associated with Tracetea adoption [4].



13 *Monitoring, Evaluation and Selected Results*

trustea's monitoring and evaluation publications provide evidence on programme scale, environmental management, worker reach, training and digital adoption. The indicators presented in the October 2023 M&E report, Year Book 2023 and subsequent programme communications offer a baseline for future reporting and help identify areas where consistent data can demonstrate progress over time [2,4,5,7,8].

Indicator	Published figure	Programme significance
Verified tea volume	954 million kg (2023); 979 million kg (2024); 1,011 million kg (2025); respective shares reported as 70%, 77% & 74%	Shows the scale of verified tea and continued growth in volume [2]
GHG intensity baseline	Approximately 1.43 kg CO_2e/kg tea using 2022 data	Provides an early reference point for tea-sector carbon measurement [5]
Water-use indicator	1.16 litres/kg tea reported for 2022; 29.41% of entities reported maintaining water-use data	Introduces a factory/process-water indicator and identifies a clear pathway for expanding data coverage [5]
Afforestation	2022: 688 ha across 104 reporting units; 2023: 543 ha across 58 reporting units	Records reported planting activity and offers a basis for tracking area and participation over time [5]
Soil conservation	Approximately 64% of surveyed respondents described practices as rigorous or very rigorous	Indicates an established base of reported soil-conservation practice [5]
Soil fertility survey	High: 11.76%; moderate: 52.94%; 35.29% not assessed at the time of reporting	Provides baseline categories for strengthening soil assessment and follow-up monitoring [5]
Workers reached	383,131 women and 301,001 men in the 2023 Year Book	Demonstrates the reported scale of worker engagement [4]
Tracetea adoption	61,922 farmers, 601 aggregators and 104 BLFs in the 2023 Year Book	Shows the breadth of actor participation in the traceability initiative [4]
Training and audits	1,418 registered e-learning users; 265 recertification audits, 89 certification audits and 56 system-assurance audits in 2023	Reflects the learning infrastructure and recurring assurance activities that support implementation [4]

Future reporting can build on this foundation through longitudinal data linking coverage with implementation and outcomes. Water-use data can support resource management, while soil indicators can track changes alongside regenerative practices.

trustea provides a common sustainability platform for India's fragmented tea supply chain through its national Code, training, verification, traceability and field implementation. This supports consistent expectations across estates, bought-leaf factories (BLFs) and small tea growers, particularly where the factories source green leaf from numerous growers.

Climate and efficiency initiatives offer both environmental and commercial benefits. Energy audits and implementation of the energy saving measures is helping the tea factories to reduce fuel and electricity costs and emissions. Trustea Emission
Calculator (TEC) is helping the entities to assess their emissions profiles. Traceability and stronger records also support buyer assurance and credible supply-chain information.

Smallholder and worker inclusion remains important. TeaPlus, Tracetea, training and the Code's livelihoods provisions help extend information, good practices and responsible sourcing expectations across the sector.

Together, these initiatives help connect sustainability commitments with practical management, evidence-based climate action and improved production and supply-chain performance.



Conclusion

Since its launch in 2013, trustea has evolved into a widely used Indian tea sustainability programme built on its Code, implementation support, verification, training, digital traceability and monitoring. ***trustea's*** central contribution is a common platform for coordinated sustainability action across India's tea value chain.

In 2025, it reported 1,011 million kg of verified tea, alongside the development of TeaPlus, TEC- advanced carbon-calculation functionality and Standard Version 3.1.0 [2]. These achievements reflect its scale and continued adaptation to emerging sustainability priorities.

Its Environment, Safety and Livelihoods pillars provide a common framework for responsible production, strengthened by implementation of regenerative agriculture, mandatory energy audits, MRL training and awareness, smallholder digital support and governance [3–10].

The current phase focus is to connect programme coverage more clearly with measurable outcomes through stronger monitoring, practical implementation support and integrated action on climate, soil health, resource efficiency, traceability and livelihoods.



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CHAPTER 2

REGEN PROGRAMME OF HUL AND TRUSTEA

Regenerative Tea Cultivation, Soil Health, Climate Resilience and Low-Carbon Tea Production in India

Programme scale, scientific baseline, early performance signals and strategic priorities | 2024–2026



HEALTHIER SOILS • RESILIENT FARMS • LOWER EMISSIONS

REPORTING PERIOD: 2024–2026

Based on the supplied programme reports, technical manuscripts, trustea publications, HUL disclosures and Tea Board of India data.







REGEN:
Restoring Soil Function at Scale

trustea
ENVIRONMENT • SAFETY • LIVELIHOODS

An integrated approach to regenerative, climate-resilient tea production in India | 2024–2026

Executive Summary

The Tea Regenerative Agriculture Programme (REGEN), funded by Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) and implemented by the trustea Sustainable Tea Foundation (TSTF) since 2024, is designed to make regenerative management practical across Indian tea-growing systems. It links soil-health restoration and organic-resource recycling with nutrient-use efficiency, productivity, climate resilience and greenhouse-gas (GHG) accounting. The Regenerative Agriculture practices include on-farm composting, integrated nutrient management, mulching, green manuring, and shade-tree management. [1–3]

The programme expanded from an initial study phase of more than 6,600 hectares to approximately 43,000 hectares, and over 7,000 small tea growers by 2026. HUL's September 2026 update stated an ambition to reach 100,000 hectares by 2030. The programme reports more than 3,500 soil samples analysed, over 400 training and capacity-building activities, more than 300 composting demonstrations and substantial compost production or mobilisation.



These measures describe implementation reach; they are distinct from measured environmental outcomes. [1–3]

Baseline records show mean made-tea productivity of 1,828 kg/ha, synthetic nitrogen application of 132 kg N/ha and nitrogen-use efficiency of 14.2 kg made tea per kilogram of N applied. Mean soil pH was 4.73 and mean soil organic carbon (SOC) was 1.06%. Early descriptive assessments reported around 5%+ higher SOC, 18% higher soil microflora, 3% higher productivity, 15% lower chemical nitrogen use and 21% lower source-point GHG emissions. The directions are encouraging; longer-term paired measurements and statistical testing are needed to establish the magnitude and persistence of changes. [2,3]

PROGRAMME REACH	SOIL ASSESSMENT	EARLY SIGNALS
~43,000 ha 7,000+ small growers	3,500+ soil samples 100+ compost samples 151-estate baseline	SOC +5% Microflora +18% Yield +3% GHG emission down by 21%

The central REGEN proposition

Combine field-level regenerative practices with soil diagnosis, agronomic records and transparent carbon accounting, so progress is tracked through changes in soil condition, productivity, nutrient use and GHG intensity rather than practice adoption alone.

1 Why Regenerative Agriculture Matters for Indian Tea

Tea (Camellia sinensis) is a perennial crop whose performance depends on soil condition, rainfall distribution, temperature, nutrient availability and management over many seasons. Declining organic matter, nutrient imbalance, erosion and inadequate moisture retention can weaken productive resilience, while heat and rainfall variability add pressure to estates and smallholders. Research cited in the supplied manuscript associates rising temperatures above a threshold of approximately 26.6°C with declining tea yields in Assam; the exact response varies with location and study conditions. [8,9]



The national production context reinforces the importance of resilience across the full supply chain. The Tea Board of India's 71st Annual Report for 2024–25 records production of 1,315.77 million kg, down by 66.26 million kg from the previous year, and 249,318 small tea growers contributing 54.55% of national tea output. These figures make smallholder access to practical soil, nutrient and climate-management support a core sector priority. [4]

2 Origin and Institutional Relationship with trustea

The REGEN program began in 2024 as a HUL-funded initiative implemented by TSTF. It builds on trustea's established sustainability Code and verification platform by placing greater operational emphasis on soil regeneration, organic-resource management and climate performance. trustea Code Version 3.0 (2023) and Version 3.1.0 (effective January 2025) provide a wider framework for regenerative practice, soil conservation, nutrient management and documented implementation. [3,5]

The REGEN program and trustea Code serve complementary functions. The Code sets management expectations and implementation requirements; while REGEN program supports field activities such as composting, soil testing, input optimisation and carbon- footprint assessment. Compliance records alone do not prove that soil carbon or emissions have changed; such outcomes require consistent measurements over time.

3 Programme Growth and Implementation Scale

Table 1. Programme stages and the distinct datasets used in the supplied materials. Source: HUL update and TSTF technical manuscripts. [1–3]

Stage	Reported scale	Role in this chapter
Initial study phase (2024)	6,600+ ha; 2,000+ soil samples	Initial implementation and baseline/regional assessment
Baseline dataset	979 million kg verified; TeaPlus and TEC launched	Baseline yield, N use, soil health and GHG emission
Expanded programme (2025–26)	~43,000 ha; 7,000+ small tea growers	Wider implementation, soil testing and capacity-building

The implementation footprint includes Assam, the Dooars region of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Because soils, weather, biomass availability, and productivity differ among these settings, the programme uses regional baselines rather than treating every estate as identical. Programme coverage and measured agronomic results are reported separately throughout this chapter.

4 The Regenerative Intervention Package

The REGEN program treats soil health, nutrient-use efficiency, crop productivity and climate performance as connected objectives. The package is not a single prescribed input; it combines locally suitable practices and evaluates them with soil, crop and carbon indicators. A minimum compost-application target of around 1 t/ha is described in the technical manuscript as an entry threshold, facilitating initial adoption across participating estates while recognising constraints in biomass availability and compost production capacity. The longer-term objective is reducing chemical nitrogen by up to 25% where soil tests and crop needs support it. [2,3]

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Theory of Change

HEALTHIER SOIL | STRONGER COMMUNITIES | A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

NEED

- Adverse impact of climate change and agrochemicals usage in tea cultivation.
- Bringing forth **Sustainability** in the Indian Tea Industry through induction of **REGEN-Ag Practices** that will fundamentally drive the improvement of **Soil Health**, and **Bush Resilience** to climate change; while enabling **Reduction of Carbon Footprint**.

INPUTS

- Upscaling the **depth of intervention** in trusted verified Tea Estates
- Financial and people resources for **deep Field Induction** of REGEN-Ag Practices towards improvement of Soil - Plant Health, reduction of Urea and Chemical Pesticides
- Expertise from Research Institutes viz. TRA, UPASI and Agri-Universities

ACTIVITIES

- Creating **alignment** on the mission and need with trustea verified Tea estates
- Provide **REGENAg Training** to the Tea Estates
- Undertake **RII** (*Retain, Improve & Introduce*) Approach for **Field** Induction of REGENAg
- Develop **Protocol & Manual** for REGENAg tea
- **Trials** to identify promising non-chemical Packages/ inputs and technology
- **Standardization** of Shade/ Bush **population/ Social forestry**
- Increasing area under manual weeding/ mulching, etc.,

OUTCOMES

- The Tea Plantations start **integrated soil management** (application of compost in combination with fertilizers) in contrast to present practice of solely applying chemical
- The Plantation achieves **higher NUE** as compared to the present through training
- The Plantations produce and apply **better quality compost on-farm** for integrated soil
- The Plantations start making **nature based solutions** on-farm for use in Integrated Nutrient Management and Integrated Pest
- The Plantation **create areas** for Biodiversity restoration and **reduce** GHG emitting hot
- The Plantation reduce reliance on chemical herbicides and reduce the deterioration of soil health

IMPACT

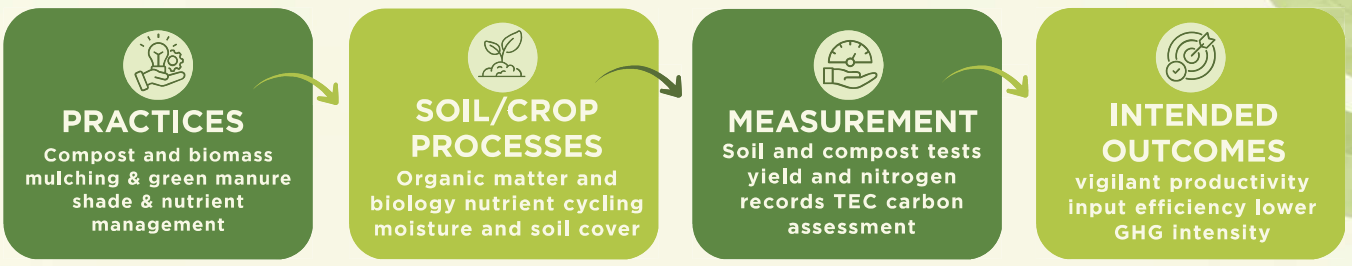
LONG-TERM (6+ YEARS)

- **Reduction** in **GHG Emission** through Reduction in Chemical-N by 25%
- **Yield sustenance** (from climate risk) and **improvement** by 10-15% (cumulative)
- **Improvement** of **Soil Organic** Matter by upto 25%
- Enable reduction of Overall Carbon Footprint through **Soil C. Sequestration** (about 250-500 kg/ha)

Table 2. REGEN components, intended mechanisms and evaluation indicators. Mechanisms are expected pathways; their results depend on site conditions and implementation quality.

Component	Intended mechanism	Indicators for tracking
Compost and biomass recycling	Returns organic matter and nutrients; supports aggregation and biological activity	Compost quality and quantity; SOC; nutrients; microbial indicators
Mulching and residue retention	Protects soil surface, limits evaporation and runoff, returns residues	Soil cover, moisture, SOC and erosion indicators
Green manuring / cover crops	Adds biomass and nutrients; may support N cycling and soil cover	Biomass, nutrient return, mineral N and yield
Shade-tree management	Can moderate microclimate and contribute litter and vegetation carbon	Tree survival, canopy, litter inputs, soil conditions and yield
Soil-test-based nutrient management	Matches nutrient supply to soil status and crop needs	Synthetic and organic N inputs, yield, nutrient balance and NUE
TEC carbon assessment	Connects farm activity records with estimated emission intensity	kg CO_2e/kg made tea; source-level emissions; documented assumptions

REGEN links field practice with soil diagnosis climate measurement



the framework is integrated: individual practices may contribute to several outcomes

Figure 1. Programme logic: field practices feed into soil and crop processes, which are assessed through agronomic and carbon indicators.

5 Baseline Profile:

The baseline records show considerable variation across participating estates. Mean yield and nitrogen use provide a reference for input efficiency, while soil data show why site-specific management is needed. Regional yield averages were approximately 1,774 kg/ha in Assam, 2,128 kg/ha in the Dooars and 1,790 kg/ha in South India; these differences reflect varied production settings and should not be read as treatment effects [2,3]

Table 3. Selected baseline indicators.

Indicator	Baseline value	What it suggests for management
Made-tea productivity	Mean 1,827.8 kg/ha; range ~766–3,467	Substantial variation in production performance
Synthetic nitrogen application	Mean 131.8 kg N/ha; range ~67–200	Opportunity to better match N inputs to crop demand
Nitrogen-use efficiency	Mean 14.2 kg made tea/kg N	Useful benchmark for input-output performance
Soil pH	Mean 4.73; range 4.12–6.36	Strong acidity is common; amendments and nutrients must be site-specific
Soil organic carbon	Mean 1.06%; range 0.50–2.97%	Different starting levels of soil-carbon concentration
SOC stock, 0–30 cm	Estimated range 11.79–64.76 t/ha	Stock comparisons require consistent depth and bulk-density methods
GHG emission (Field+Factory)	~2.31 to 3.92 kg CO_2e/kg made tea	Wide footprint variation; source-point estimate uses a narrower boundary

6 Early Performance: Soil, Productivity and Climate Indicators

The program records early changes in five mean indicators: approximately 5% higher SOC, 18% higher soil microflora, 3% higher productivity, 15% lower chemical nitrogen application and 21% lower source-point GHG emissions. The pattern is consistent with the programme's intended direction: soil indicators improve while output is maintained or slightly higher and synthetic N use declines [2,3] Soil health was analyzed following standard analytical procedures and GHG emission was calculated using the tustea Emission Calculator (TEC)

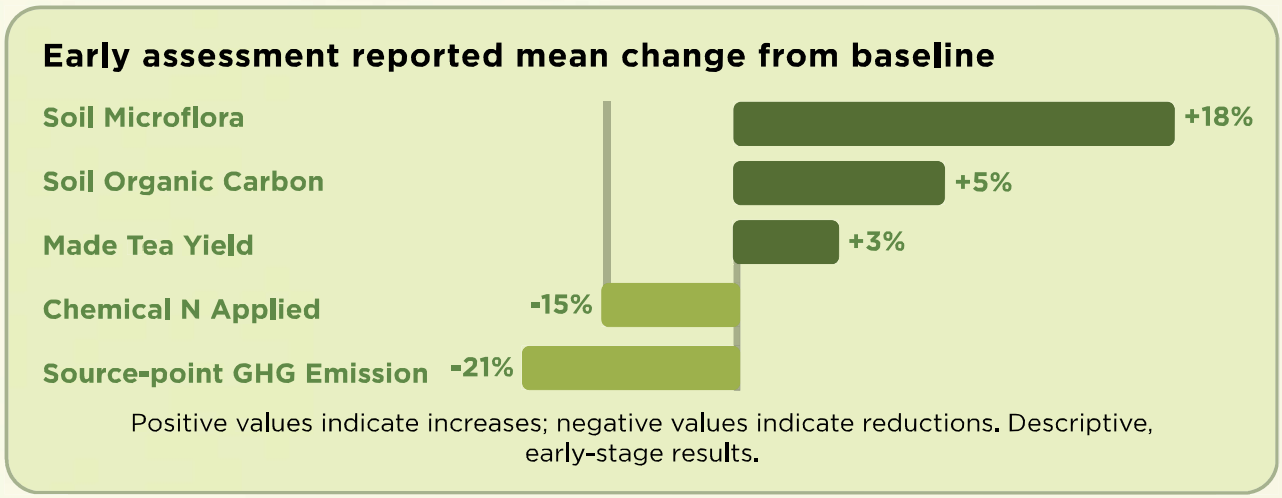


Figure 3. Reported early-assessment changes from baseline. A decline in chemical N use or source-point GHG emissions is shown as a negative percentage. The indicators should not be interpreted as independently verified causal effects. [2,3]

Projected 2026 outputs as per field documentation

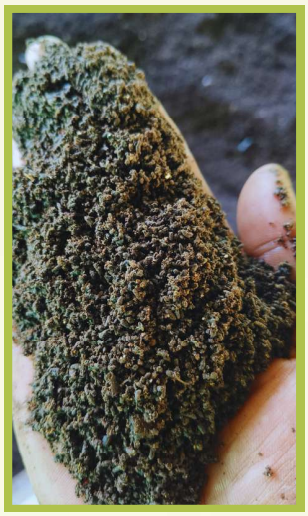
End 2026, the program estimates 350,000+ kg of additional made tea, over 600 tonnes of avoided urea application and approximately 22,000 t CO_2e lower source-point emissions.

7 Practical Delivery: Composting, Soil Testing & Carbon Accounting

7.1 On-farm composting and the Novcom process

On- farm available resources like weeds, leaf litter and animal manure and other suitable biodegradable materials can be recycled through composting. This can return organic matter and nutrients to the soil and may reduce the need to transport raw residues or finished compost over long distances. The program records approximately 75,000 tonnes of compost produced, mobilised or applied and more than 300 composting demonstrations, with about half of the reported applied volume produced using Novcom technology, and the rest through vermicompsting. [1–3]

The programme documents Novcom as a rapid composting process capable of producing compost in about three weeks, compared with roughly 90 days for conventionalvermicomposting; they also report lower labour and cost requirements and no need for dedicated fixed infrastructure.





SOIL REGENERATION IN PRACTICE

Organic-resource recycling is one part of a wider package that includes soil testing, integrated nutrient management, mulching, green manuring and suitable shade-tree management. Its contribution is being tracked through soil and crop indicators over time.

7.2 Soil assessment and laboratory methods

The programme reports more than 3,500 soil samples and over 100 compost samples analysed. A major part of the soil analysis done in ***trustea*** laboratory which was set up under the programme. Sampling was described on an approximate 5–6 ha grid, with topsoil and subsoil observations. The reported laboratory programme included soil texture and bulk density, pH and electrical conductivity, SOC, available N, P, K and S, and plate-count estimates of bacteria, fungi and actinomycetes. [2,3]

7.3 TEC and GHG accounting

The trustea Emission Calculator was developed by TSTF in collaboration with Inhana Organic Research Foundation (IORF), and is based on ACFA Version 2.0. It estimates emissions from field and factory data comprising fertiliser and pesticide use, energy, irrigation, fuel, field operations and factory production.

The assessment scope includes tea estate, bought leaf factories and small tea grower farms. The application follows the IPCC 2006 and 2019 methods, GHG protocol and ISO 14067:2018 principles. The reported functional unit is kg CO_2e per kg of made tea. Soil-carbon stock change and operational emission reductions are assessed separately, and follows the defined carbon accounting rules. [2,3,6,7]



8 Small-Grower Inclusion

TeaNext and the small-grower pathway

TeaNext, introduced in Assam in 2025, provides a complementary channel for extending training and practical support to small tea growers. HUL's programme description identifies operations in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia through 14 Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs), involving about 4,900 small growers, and an ambition to reach approximately 50,000 growers by 2030. These figures describe TeaNext's specific reported coverage and should not be added to REGEN's broader 7,000+ small-grower figure without confirming programme boundaries and reporting dates. [1–3]





9 Strategic Priorities for the Next Phase

Priority	Practical next step
Strengthen outcome measurement	Use paired estate-level observations, suitable comparison groups, uncertainty estimates and consistent sampling intervals.
Harmonise reporting	Clearly define hectares covered, compost produced/mobilised/applied, sampling populations and reporting dates.
Connect soil and carbon evidence	Report SOC concentration separately from stock; keep soil-carbon change distinct from operational GHG reductions.
Improve input-efficiency reporting	Track synthetic and organic N, yield, nutrient balance and yield-scaled emissions together.
Scale inclusive delivery	Continue small-grower support, field demonstrations, soil-testing access and context-specific guidance.
Make projections traceable	Label targets and forecasts separately from measured results, and update them through documented follow-up.



Conclusion

REGEN is building a practical pathway for regenerative tea cultivation by combining organic-resource recycling, site-specific nutrient management, soil-health assessment and tea-specific carbon accounting. By 2026, its reported implementation scale—approximately 43,000 hectares, more than 190 estates and over 7,000 small growers—provides a substantial platform for learning across different production environments. The early indicators point in a promising direction, especially the combination of lower chemical nitrogen use with maintained or slightly higher productivity. The programme's long-term contribution will depend on carrying this scale forward with consistent monitoring, transparent methods and a clear separation between measured results, programme-reported outcomes and projections.

KEY MESSAGE: *Regenerative progress in tea is most credible when field practices, soil diagnostics, crop performance and carbon accounting are assessed together over time.*



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CHAPTER 3

TEANEXT PROGRAMME OF HUL AND TRUSTEA

Small Tea Grower Livelihood, Regenerative Agriculture and Sustainable Tea Supply Chains in India



TEA SMALLHOLDER EMPOWERMENT • SOIL HEALTH • RESPONSIBLE TEA

REPORTING PERIOD: 2025–2026







TeaNext:
Building Capacity Across India's Small Tea Grower Sector

Farmer-centred programmeextension, regenerative agriculture and sustainable supply-chain practice | 2025–2030

Executive Summary

The TeaNext Programme, launched by Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) in March 2025 and implemented by trustea Sustainable Tea Foundation (TSTF), is a capacity-building initiative to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of small tea growers' (STGs) farms. It connects three practical priorities: green-leaf quality, pesticide regulatory compliance and regenerative agriculture. The program started in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam, working through 14 Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs) and approximately 4,900 growers, and has extended to Golaghat district encompassing a total of 22 BLFs and 7000+ STGs.

The programme responds to the growing importance of smallholders in Indian tea production. The Tea Board of India's 71st Annual Report 2024–25 enumerated 249,318 small tea growers nationally, cultivating about 213,904 hectares and contributing an estimated 54.55% of national tea output. Assam accounted for 133,864 growers and approximately 126,108 hectares. A TeaNext 2.0 event in Golaghat in February 2026 brought together about 256 growers and BLF representatives. [2–5]





In addition to classroom and field trainings, trustea's wider soil-testing work, the TeaPlus digital advisory platform and the trustea Emission Calculator (TEC) offer complementary support. Continued monitoring is in progress which to help establish whether training translates into sustained farm-level and supply-chain benefits. [1,2,9,10]. Baseline encompassing farm demography, crop yield, fertilizer use, pesticide application and sustainability practices has been created, to enable midline and endline impact assessment.

Key message

Through field-level training on green-leaf quality, pesticide regulatory compliance, and the adoption of regenerative agriculture, the TeaNext programme is strengthening the knowledge and capabilities of the STGs to build resilience-ensuring long-term supply chain continuity and sustainability.

1 Why Small Tea Growers Matter for Indian Tea

The sustainability of Indian tea depends increasingly on the technical capacity and economic resilience of small tea growers, who now account for close to 54% of the total Indian tea production. With smallholders accounting for more than half of national tea output, their practices influence green-leaf quality,

crop-protection compliance, soil condition and the reliability of raw-material supply. Tea Board data place the national small-grower population at 249,318 as of 31 March 2025, with Assam alone accounting for 133,864 growers. These figures establish the scale of the smallholder segment and the importance of practical, accessible support. [3]

Smallholders can face interconnected challenges: soil deterioration, rising nutrient- management costs, variable weather, pest and disease pressures, green-leaf quality requirements and pesticide-residue compliance. Because farms are often small and geographically dispersed, regular specialist advice can be difficult to deliver consistently.

TeaNext provides an industry-led mechanism for connecting growers with field level trainers and demonstration hubs so that practical guidance can be adapted to local farm conditions. [1,4]

Table 1. Main implementation milestones and how the figures should be interpreted.

Milestone	Reported information	Interpretation
Public launch	27 March 2025, Assam	Launch event included 300+ growers and industry stakeholders; 26 growers recognized. [4]
Initial coverage	14 BLFs; about 4,900 growers	Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. [1,2]
Training reported by HUL	4,892 growers in 2025–26	Training on quality leaf harvesting techniques, MRL compliance and regenerative agriculture. [2]
TeaNext 2.0 event	About 256 growers and BLF representatives, Golaghat, February 2026	Programme extended to the Golghat district. [5]

2 The Three Strategic Pillars of TeaNext

TeaNext combines green-leaf quality improvement, pesticide regulatory compliance, and regenerative agriculture. These priorities reinforce one another: sound agronomy and quality plucking techniques can support leaf quality; adherence to crop protection regulations helps reduce residue-related risk; and soil management can support the long- term productive capacity of farms. The programme therefore treats sustainability as a combination of agricultural practice, environmental condition and downstream supply-chain requirements. [1,4–6]

Table 2. TeaNext pillars, practical activities and appropriate outcome measures.

Pillar	Activities described in programme materials	Indicators for assessment
Public launch	Pruning cycles, plucking standards and Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs).	Leaf quality grades, and yield.
Initial coverage	Plant Protection Code (PPC), FSSAI regulations, pre-harvest intervals (PHIs) and Integrated Pest Management (IPM).	Residue compliance, pesticide records, and IPM adoption.
Training reported by HUL	Compost and green-waste recycling, soil cover, mulching, shade trees, border vegetation and standardized input application.	Soil health, especially organic carbon, crop yield, manuring records and GHG emission.

2.1 Green-leaf quality and agronomic management

BLFs purchase green leaf from numerous growers, so the consistency of incoming raw material matters for processing and finished-tea quality is critical. TeaNext promotes better understanding of pruning, plucking standards and GAPs. Timely pruning and correct plucking can support bush management and more consistent harvesting, while crop nutrition and general field management influence plant condition. [1,4]

2.2 Responsible pesticide management and residue compliance

TeaNext training covers the Plant Protection Code, relevant pesticide regulatory standards, MRLs and pre-harvest intervals—the required time between application and harvesting. The programme also promotes IPM and suitable non-chemical measures where appropriate. The intention is scientifically responsible crop protection, rather than indiscriminate pesticide use. Because residue compliance is relevant to both farm practices and factory sourcing, BLF participation helps frame it as a shared supply-chain responsibility. [1,2,5]

2.3 Regenerative agriculture and farm-ecosystem restoration

TeaNext introduces regenerative practices as a longer-term approach to soil healt regeneration, organic-resource recycling, biodiversity and resilience to climatic stress. Programme communications describe recycling green waste into compost, maintaining soil cover, planting shade trees and standardized fertilizer

application. Compost and other organic materials can return nutrients and organic matter to soil; mulch can protect the surface and conserve moisture; & appropriately managed shade trees and vegetation can contribute to a more diverse farm environment. [1,6,7]

trustea has also highlighted border grasses and vegetation—including vetiver, Napier grass, citronella and mimosa—as potential living barriers around small tea farms. Where appropriately selected & managed, such barriers may slow surface runoff support infiltration and reduce the movement of topsoil during heavy rain. They may also provide biomass fo mulching. This is a practical, locally manageable example of linking soil conservation with biological resources. [7]



3 *Farmer-Centered Training and Demonstration-Based Extension*

trustea describes TeaNext's extension approach as community-driven and hands-on, drawing on lead farmers, peer-to-peer mentoring, cluster-level training and field demonstration activities. Practical learning can help growers observe techniques, discuss local constraints and assess whether recommendations are affordable and workable under their own conditions. This is important for small farms, where labour availability, timing and access to materials may determine whether a practice can be sustained. Training has greater potential to change practice when scientific guidance is connected with local experience and the realities of farm management. [6]

A trustea-published farmer story describes Abhijit Moran, a small tea grower from Talap in Assam, using bio-concoctions associated with Indigenous Technical Knowledge and cow-dung slurry for pest-management and nutrient-support purposes, with guidance from field officers. The example illustrates how locally accessible materials and field advice may be explored within a regenerative approach. The program will track impact on crop yields, soil health development and GHG emission through midline and endline evaluations. [8]

From participation to outcomes

Training attendance establishes programme reach. Farm records and repeated measurements will help to determine whether practices persist and improve environmental, agronomic or livelihood outcomes.



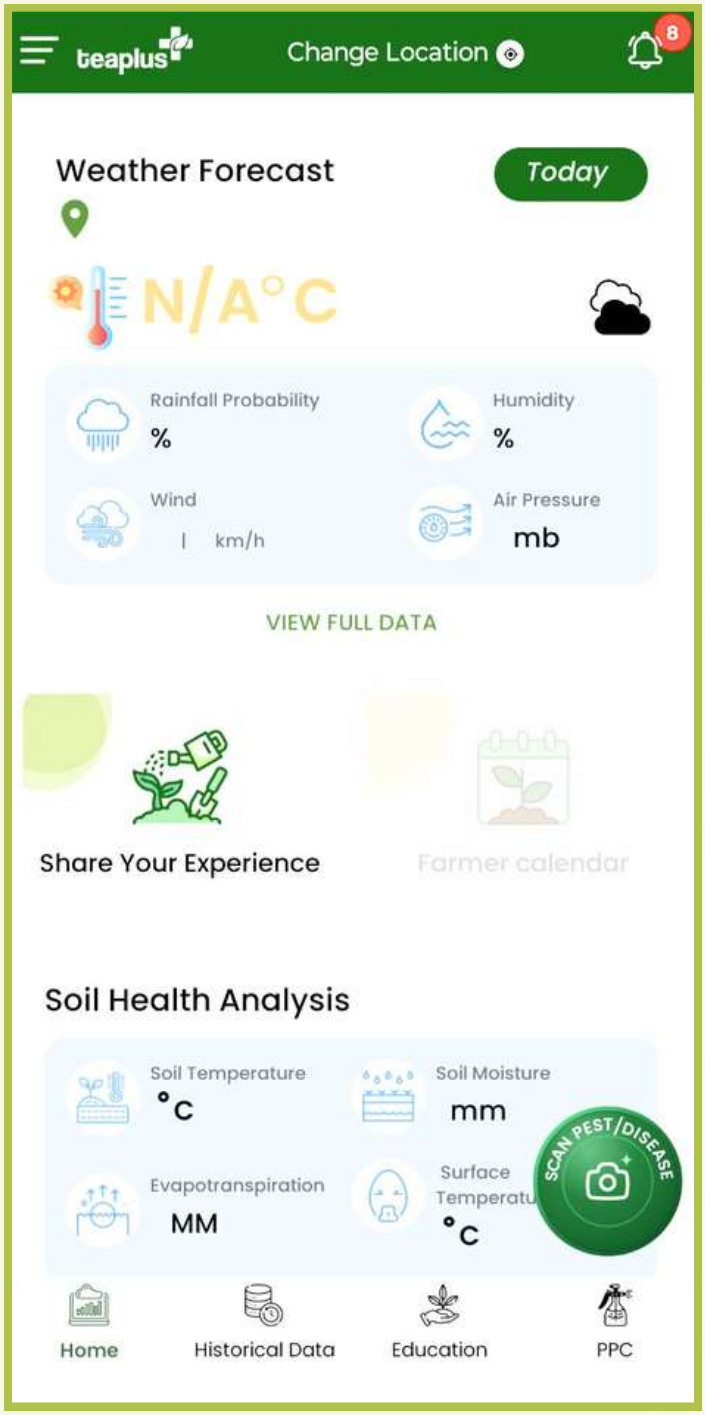
4 Soil Testing and Scientific Support Through the Wider trustea Programme

TeaNext's focus on soil health sits alongside the related HUL-funded regenerative-agriculture programme (REGEN) that is being implemented by trustea. Soil testing has been doen for more than 500 STG farms in its own soil-testing laboratory. Parameters include pH, electrical conductivity, soil organic carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur, using methods described by trustea as based on FAO standards. [1,2]

Soil analysis can help turn general messages about soil health into site-specific nutrient- management decisions. Soil pH and nutrient status affect the suitability and efficiency of fertiliser applications, while soil organic carbon can be a useful indicator when assessed consistently over time. The program has linked test results with recommendations and follow-up measurements, to strengthen the evidence base. [1,2]

5 Digital Advisory Support for Small Tea Growers

TeaPlus is a ***trustea*** free-to-use digital advisory platform intended to make agricultural information more accessible to the small tea growers. It extends digital advisory on good agriculture practices, quality leaf harvesting techniques, pest calendar, chemical and non-chemical options for pest control, month-wise activity calendar, Plant Protection Code of Tea Board and FSSAI regulations. A newly launched AI feature on this app enables the STGs to click photos of pest from their farm for identification and control options. This app, helps to reinforce field training between visits: weather information helps growers plan operations, while pest information and educational material support surveillance and better-informed decisions. [9]



The goal is a combined approach—field demonstrations, practical training and digital information— to provide multiple channels for continuing learning for the small tea growers.

6 Climate Action and Carbon Accounting

TeaNext program also contributes to climate mitigation or adaptation. Better soil cover, erosion control, organic-matter management, suitable shade trees and efficient nutrient use can provide environmental benefits. Avoiding unnecessary fertilizer and pesticide use may reduce expenditure, more importantly reduce the harm on soil and bush health while also contributing to emission reductions associated with agricultural inputs. Conserving soil moisture and protecting soil structure could support resilience during climatic stress. [1,2]

The *trustea* Emission Calculator (TEC), developed by TSTF in collaboration with Inhana Organic Research Foundation (IORF), provides a free-to-use carbon-footprint calculator for the wider Indian tea sector. Its stated scope includes agricultural inputs, energy, waste management and transport across STG farms, estates and BLFs. TEC helps identify emission sources and examine mitigation options, including nutrient optimization an improved farm management. To attribute reductions credibly, TeaNext is ensuring consistent activity data, a defensible baseline, a defined accounting boundary and appropriate verification. [10]



7 Industry Collaboration and the Role of Bought Leaf Factories

BLFs are central to TeaNext's implementation model because the STGs produce green leaf and factories purchase and process it into made tea. By bringing STGs, BLF management and sustainability certification into a shared platform, the programme can address leaf quality, residue compliance and farm practices within one supply-chain framework. [1,5]

For HUL, supporting smallholder capability can contribute to responsible sourcing and longer-term supply-chain resilience. For growers, the intended value is improved agronomic knowledge, compliance awareness and farm management, that can contribute to livelihood development. For BLFs, more consistent incoming leaf and better residue awareness may improve sourcing reliability.

Table 3. Suggested outcome indicators to connect programme delivery with measurable change.

Area	Possible indicators	Why they matter
Green-leaf quality	Quality grades, leaf consistency and yield	Tests whether agronomic training benefits farms and processing.
Pesticide compliance	MRL results, pesticide records, PHI adherence and IPM adoption	Assesses food-safety performance and MRL compliance.
Soil health	pH, SOC, nutrient status	Tracks the program impact over time using consistent methods.
Climate performance	Farm activity data and emissions under a defined baseline and boundary	Allows GHG reduction claims to be quantified rather than assumed.
Programme delivery	Training attendance, practice adoption, follow-up and participant retention	Separates participation from sustained implementation.

The strong monitoring and evaluation framework under the programme would collect baseline data and repeat observations at consistent intervals. Where feasible, comparable reference farms can help distinguish programme-associated changes from influences such as rainfall, pest outbreaks, seasona variation or input-price changes.

Reporting would define which growers and farms are included, distinguish TeaNext figures from wider *trustea* certification activities, and label targets and event attendance separately from cumulative training totals. As coverage expands, field monitoring, demonstration hubs, soil testing, digital advice and BLF engagement would be linked through a common, regionally adaptable reporting framework. [1,2]



Conclusion

TeaNext is an industry-supported initiative to extend sustainable and regenerative practices to India's small tea growers. Funded by HUL and implemented by trustea, it combines green-leaf quality improvement, pesticide regulatory compliance and regenerative agriculture within a farmer-centred capacity-building model. Its initial focus on Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, engagement with 14 BLFs, extended to golaghta district in 2026 engaging 7000+ STGs. Wider trustea resources in soil testing, digital advisory and carbon accounting complements the program. The next priority is to connect training reach with repeated measurements of farm practices, comparison with the baseline and to determine whether practices persist and improve environmental, agronomic or livelihood outcomes.





Key message : TeaNext aims to build STG capacity and resilience through practical training, responsible input use and regenerative farm management; supported by consistent monitoring &credible evidence of outcomes.

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CHAPTER 4

UNILEVER SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT AWARD 2025 & ISB REPORT 2026

Institutional Recognition, Regenerative Tea Cultivation and Sustainability Impact in India

Award significance, institutional partnership and sustainability impact in India's tea value chain | 2025–2026



RESPONSIBLE TEA • REGENERATIVE PRACTICES • INCLUSIVE SUPPLY CHAINS

REPORTING PERIOD: 2025–2026

Recognition with Reach: trustea and Sustainable Tea in India

Institutional recognition, regenerative practices and supply-chain collaboration | 2025–2026

Executive Summary



trustea Sustainable Tea Foundation (TSTF) received the Unilever Sustainability Impact Award 2025 at Unilever's Partner to Win Global Summit in London on 2 April 2025. The award was presented to Mr. Rajesh Bhuyan, Director of trustea, by Mr Heiko Schipper, President of Foods at Unilever. The recognition acknowledged trustea's contribution to advancing sustainability across India's tea industry and highlighted the role of collaboration between corporate buyers and sustainability institutions. [1–3]. The India 'Sustainability Impact Award' was subsequently bestowed to trustea by Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) in its "Partner to Win" event, held in Mumbai in August, 2025.

trustea's contribution is built on a sector-wide sustainability Code and verification platform engaging tea estates, small tea growers, Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs) and other value-chain participants. Published programme figures indicate that around 1,011 million kg of tea was trustea-verified in 2025, equivalent to approximately 74% of India's tea production. Unilever during the award ceremony also reported that the programme had positively affected the livelihoods of almost 150,000 tea smallholders (STG). These figures indicate reach and institutional scale of the program. [4,5]

trustea's work has increasingly connected sustainability requirements with regenerative tea cultivation. The award is an important institutional milestone; continued outcome measurement is underway to demonstrate how programme participation translates into sustained changes in soil health, climate performance and STG livelihoods. [4–7]

The Indian School of Business has recently published the report 'trustea: A SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE FOR AND BY THE INDIAN TEA INDUSTRY', on August, 2026; which is available at https://hbsp.harvard.edu/product/ISB573-PDF-ENG

The report assesses programme coverage of ***trustea,*** implementation progress and early environmental and agronomic indicators, while identifying priorities for strengthening monitoring, reporting, verification and long-term impact assessment.

The report mentions how trustea over the past decade, has helped drive the adoption of responsible agricultural and manufacturing practices across the tea value chain and reached a significant scale within India's tea industry. The publication highlights the power of multi-stakeholder collaboration in addressing complex sustainability challenges, from worker welfare and livelihoods to environmental stewardship, food safety, and regenerative agriculture.

Table 1. Award, programme reach and related sustainability pathways reported in the supplied sources.

Area	Reported evidence	Significance for the tea sector
Award recognition	Unilever Sustainability Impact Award 2025; presented in London on 2 April 2025 and subsequently by HUL in Mumbai- August 2025	Recognizes trustea's contribution within Unilever's supplier-partnership framework
Report	Indian School of Business, August 2026	Recognizes trustea's contribution towards the adoption of responsible agricultural and manufacturing practices across the tea value chain
Sector coverage	About 1,011 million kg trustea-verified tea in 2025; approximately 74% of Indian production	Indicates the reach of a shared sustainability Code and verification system
Smallholder livelihoods	Almost 150,000 smallholders reportedly reached positively	Highlights the importance of inclusion across the value chain
Regenerative delivery	Code focus on soil health management through regenerative agriculture along with HUL's large scale REGEN program	Links standards with practical implementation and environmental measurement

Key message: *The award recognizes trustea's contribution to sustainability across a large tea supply chain. Its longer-term significance is built on institutional reach and fieldimplementation with transparent evidence of environmental and livelihood outcomes.*

1 The Award and Its Significance

The Unilever Sustainability Impact Award was part of the Partner to Win 2025 recognition programme. Unilever's published award submission guide identifies four principal areas in its Sustainability Impact category: Climate, Nature, Plastics and Livelihoods. The framework places emphasis on project achievements and value generated for Unilever and its business partners. [3]

trustea's work is relevant to the Climate, Nature and Livelihoods dimensions because it addresses environmental management and social sustainability across the tea supply chain. Through its Code and associated implementation activities, trustea promotes regenerative agriculture practices, soil conservation, regulated plant-protection measures, biodiversity, traceability, workplace safety and improvements in the production capabilities of tea estates and smallholders. Its institutional role allows sustainability practices to extend beyond individual plantations to a broad network of producers. [1–3]

2 Integrating Regenerative Tea Cultivation with Sustainable Tea Standards

An important part of trustea's development has been a stronger emphasis on soil health, climate resilience and regenerative agriculture. trustea Code Version 3.0, introduced in July 2023, strengthened the programme's environmental orientation. Version 3.1.0, effective from 1 January 2025, refined implementation guidance and documentation requirements. [4]

The regenerative framework promotes practices that can improve soil functioning and nutrient cycling and support tea production under changing climatic conditions.

From compliance to outcomes:

The sustainability Code sets management expectations and documentation requirements; regenerative implementation supports field-level action. Changes in soil carbon, productivity and emissions are consistently measured over time rather than exclusive reliance on practice adoption or verification status alone.

This direction is relevant in India, where tea cultivation faces temperature fluctuations, irregular rainfall, soil degradation and pressure from agricultural input costs. Soil-health management and more efficient nutrient application may support productive resilience, while responsible pesticide use and environmental safeguards address wider supply-chain requirements. [4]

3 The HUL–trustea Partnership

HUL's relationship with ***trustea*** extends beyond the award. As a founding funder and industry partner, HUL has supported the development of sustainability practices across the Indian tea sector. The partnership provides a route for connecting the sustainability objectives of India's major tea buyers with the operational conditions and needs of producers across its supply chain. [5]

HUL's Annual Report 2025–26 states that the partnership with trustea is being used to expand regenerative practices, strengthen safe pesticide management and improve market access. This indicates continuing use of supplier collaboration to address environmental performance, product quality and smallholder resilience. [5]

For HUL, a more sustainable tea supply chain can support responsible sourcing and longer-term procurement resilience. For estates and growers, collaboration can provide access to technical guidance, sustainability requirements and practical management approaches. For ***trustea***, working with major buyers helps connect a common sustainability platform with commercial supply chains.

The value of this partnership lies in recognising that certification and procurement policies alone cannot deliver all sustainability outcomes. Progress also requires continuing engagement with growers, technical capability, credible verification and measures, that the producers can implement under local conditions.

4 Wider Implications for the Indian Tea Industry

trustea's receipt of the Sustainability Impact Award is significant as an example of corporate–industry collaboration in agricultural sustainability. It illustrates how an established sustainability institution can translate corporate sourcing objectives into common practices across a diverse producer base. [1–5]

The award also highlights the importance of measuring impact rather than relying exclusively on participation or verification numbers. Programme reach, growers trained and tea volume verified describe implementation scale. Consistent methods, clear reporting periods and transparent evidence is helping to distinguish programme activities from measured outcomes.

For ***trustea***, the recognition provides an opportunity to strengthen the link between standards, field implementation and outcome measurement. For HUL and other tea buyers, the partnership illustrates the value of sustained collaboration with sustainability institutions in developing a more responsible and resilient agricultural supply chain.

Conclusion

The Unilever and HUL 'Sustainability Impact Award' 2025, and the Report published by Indian School of Business (2026), mark an important milestone in trustea's contribution to sustainability across the Indian tea industry.

trustea's contribution rests on more than a decade of institutional development, a widely implemented sustainability Code and engagement with tea estates, small growers and Bought Leaf Factories. Its work has expanded to include regenerative agriculture, soil- health management, digital advisory services and GHG accounting, while TeaNext extends technical support and field level regenerative agriculture implementation in the small tea growers' farms.

KEY MESSAGE:

Institutional recognition provides momentum; transparent monitoring and sustained collaboration is helping to demonstrate how sustainability standards translate into real-world progress.

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