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**EXPORT PLAN OF THE
PRODUCT “CATNIP” AND DIAGNOSIS OF
THE COMPANY ECUAMINERALES CIA.
LTDA. FOR OBTAINING FAIRTRADE AND
BASC CERTIFICATIONS**

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DEDICATION

To Gonzalo and Lorena, my parents. Thank you for your infinite love, for both of you being my guide and the wind under my wings so that I could fly.

Without your effort, sacrifice, and words of encouragement, this achievement would have been nothing more than an unattainable dream.

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Anayeli Desireé Armijos Delgado

DEDICATION

To my dear parents, whose love and sacrifice have been the fundamental pillar that has sustained my dreams and aspirations. Thank you for your love and unconditional support, for believing in me and, especially, for your dedication and tireless effort that have allowed me to achieve all my goals.

To my grandmothers Celina and Dorinda, for being sources of wisdom and guidance on my path.

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Vanessa Natasha De Villa Benenaula

EXPORT PLAN OF THE PRODUCT "CATNIP" AND DIAGNOSIS OF THE COMPANY ECUAMINERALES CIA. LTDA. TO OBTAIN FAIRTRADE AND BASC CERTIFICATIONS

RESUMEN

Las empresas ecuatorianas cuentan con el potencial para realizar operaciones de exportación hacia el mercado internacional. Por ello, en el presente proyecto se ha realizado el análisis de la empresa cuencana Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda., para determinar si es apta para exportar su producto de consumo felino “Catnip” y, además, certificarse en Fairtrade y BASC. Por tal razón, el objetivo del presente proyecto ha radicado en generar el plan de exportación de Catnip, posterior al diagnóstico de la empresa y la determinación de requisitos para dichas certificaciones. A través de un estudio exploratorio, los resultados obtenidos han demostrado que Ecuaminerales sí puede en un futuro aplicar para su certificación en Fairtrade y BASC, ya que cuenta con bases sólidas de cumplimiento de los estándares requeridos que bajo acciones correctivas mínimas se podrán cumplir en su totalidad. Además, por medio de entrevistas y la elaboración del plan de exportación, se ha demostrado la apertura del mercado colombiano para la importación del producto “Catnip”, y Ecuaminerales la factibilidad para llevar a cabo este proceso de exportación.

Palabras clave: Comercio exterior, plan de exportación, Fairtrade, BASC, Catnip.

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ABSTRACT

Ecuadorian companies have the potential to export to the international market. For this reason, in this project, the analysis of the Cuenca company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. has been carried out, to determine if it is suitable to export its feline consumer product "Catnip" and, in addition, to be certified in Fairtrade and BASC. As a consequence, the objective of this project has been to generate Catnip's export plan, after the diagnosis of

the company and the determination of requirements for these certifications. Through an exploratory study, the results obtained have shown that Ecuaminerales can apply for Fairtrade and BASC certification in the future, since it has solid bases of compliance with the required standards that under minimum corrective actions can be fully complied with. In addition, through interviews and the elaboration of the export plan, the Colombian market has demonstrated its openness to the import of the "Catnip" product and Ecuaminerales the feasibility of carrying out this export process.

Keywords: Foreign trade, export plan, Fairtrade, BASC, Catnip.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In an increasingly globalized business environment, Ecuaminerales faces significant challenges when executing its export operations to the international market. Therefore, through the "Catnip" product, Ecuaminerales can obtain greater international recognition by complying with quality and safety standards; in addition to having certifications that differentiate their product and give them an improvement in their competitiveness (Puerto, 2010). While it is true, the lack of Ecuadorian products in the international market is not the only problem to be evaluated, but also the absence of products that make Ecuadorians proud and that overcome challenges such as trade barriers, fluctuations in exchange rates, global competition, logistical complexities, political and economic risks, as well as cultural and marketing adaptation for the same product (Jordan, 2017). To increase the value and safety of this export plan, Ecuaminerales must conduct thorough research of international markets. This will allow you to identify the opportunities and challenges you face and, in this way, develop an export plan that is viable and profitable. Therefore, for Ecuaminerales, the value of this project lies in the opportunity to expand its operations internationally, allowing the company to access new markets and thus generate greater income through its sales (Villarreal, 2006).

To this end, this work is structured in several chapters that respond to the objectives set for the correct execution of the project. Within them, it is intended, firstly, to analyze and diagnose the current status of Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. in the areas and processes relevant to obtaining Fairtrade and BASC certifications. Following this, identify the requirements and processes to obtain the certifications for an adequate export process of the "Catnip" product to Colombia. And finally, develop an export plan for the same product in an efficient and profitable way for the company.

Justification

Developing an export plan for an Ecuadorian company represents a great opportunity for market expansion and income generation not only for the company itself, but also for the country. Allowing Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. to export its product "Catnip" to new international markets such as Colombia, would improve its competitiveness within the industry and strengthen the brand's image, generating more sales and thus increasing its recognition globally (Pérez, 2016). To this end, it is necessary for Ecuaminerales to obtain international certifications that guarantee the quality and safety of the product, triggering a positive impact on the company, such as increased consumer confidence, access to new markets, as well as cost reduction (Mora et al., 2020). It is important to recognize that the international market for pet products is quite large and competitive (Coll & De La Rosa, 2018); for this reason, to be successful in this sector, Ecuaminerales must implement a strategy that allows it to compete within the international market. Taking on the challenge of taking on a local brand and through this being able to capture the possibility of contributing to well-being and economic development, have been the main reasons for the elaboration of this research project, hoping that it will materialize and generate long-term results.

Theoretical framework

1. Export Plan

For the purposes of exporting the "Catnip" product to the international market, it is necessary, first of all, to define the concept of market, in order to detail the factors that it covers and take into account its main characteristics. According to Manual 5: the market and marketing (2018), the 'market' can be defined and interpreted as a group of people who want to buy or sell a good or service; In this group, buyers are the ones who determine the demand for the good or service, while sellers determine the supply.

Within this market, the product called 'Catnip' is sought to be sold and positioned, which is a perennial plant native to Europe that belongs to the mint family. When cats come into contact with this plant and/or manage to perceive the smell, they rub themselves with it, lick it and chew it. Importantly, it doesn't affect all cats; however, those who smell or eat it usually show a behavior of euphoria and happiness thanks to the effects of it (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2022).

On the other hand, it is important to determine the meaning of an export plan. According to Cervantes (2022), an 'export plan' is a guide that shows the entrepreneur where export investment is headed and how to compete with their products and/or services in the international market. An export plan is a prerequisite for an adequate export (Cervantes, 2022), because it helps to plan the viability of the company and define the market, competition, international market prices, product demand, logistics, and other activities necessary for export.

From this, 'export' can be defined as an important factor in a country's economy and international trade, where the sale of goods and/or services produced in a country are marketed abroad (Ureta, 2022). Similarly, Ureta (2022) mentions that, in order to be successful in exporting, it is important to know the 'competitors'; that is, the products, prices and strategies present in the rest of the market. This information can help the exporting company develop a strategy that allows it to compete effectively.

In addition, the 'supply chain' encompasses different processes and activities for obtaining raw materials, suppliers, distribution locations, machinery, inventory, transportation, etc., and, in this way, being able to transform this raw material into a manufactured product that will aim to reach its customer or final destination, thus adding greater added value (Bonilla *et al.*, 2020).

According to Castellanos Ramírez, 'logistics', on the other hand, is defined as the management of storage and the operational process to get the product from its place of origin of production to where it is going to be used and/or consumed. Within logistics, the planning and control of the goods is very important, as it optimizes cost reduction and ensures greater efficiency for the delivery of the product to its final destination (Castellanos Ramírez, 2021).

As for 'distribution', it is the set of strategies that make it possible to transfer the goods to their customer or final destination. This term is balanced with the supply chain and logistics, since carrying out this process requires an adequate distribution policy that allows the customer's requirements to be determined, thus maintaining its stability and adaptability in the face of any change (García, 2023).

2. Certifications

Although it is true, several companies have international certifications that help them to better manage their export plan. 'Certifications' are a voluntary process that is carried out by an independent organization, called a certification body (Espinoza *et al.*, 2022). This body

evaluates the compliance of a product, service, process or system with the requirements established in an international norm or standard. These certifications demonstrate the tangible and competent value that the company has acquired at a global level, as they are recognized and awarded to accredit compliance with certain standards required in different areas that are handled within the organization, such as the area of quality, management, logistics, safety, among others (Puentes & Hernández, 2022).

Mora *et al.* (2020) argues that 'international certifications' can be of various types, according to their scope of application. Some of the existing certifications are:

1. **ISO 9001:** this certification focuses on quality management and is widely recognized worldwide (Ulloa *et al.*, 2020).

2. **Fairtrade:** focuses on the search to create a more sustainable and equitable supply chain, guaranteeing fair prices, decent conditions for producers and workers in developing countries, as well as respect for the environment (Espinoza *et al.*, 2022).

3. **BASC (Business Alliance for Secure Commerce):** is a program that helps companies ensure that their supply chain operations are secure through security certifications (Véliz & Díaz, 2019).

Regarding the classification of certifications, there are product certifications, which are those that certify that a product complies with safety, quality or environmental requirements. In addition, service certifications certify that a service meets the requirements of efficiency, quality and safety. Process certifications, on the other hand, certify that productivity requirements are ensured. Finally, system certifications, the same ones that ensure that a management system complies with the requirements of an international standard (Ceballos, 2016).

Taking into account the definition of the different key terms relevant to this research, it is also important to define the 'responsible consumption' of the product. When referring to this term, mention is made of the attitude that can be adopted to help create a more sustainable and just world (Cervantes, 2022). Finally, consuming 'sustainably' means choosing products that are environmentally friendly, ethically produced, and do not have a negative impact on society (Gil-Pérez & Vilches, 2023). The social commitment to contribute to the well-being of society implies being aware of its needs and the measures that can be taken to help meet them.

State of the art

1. Growing Population of Cat Owners

More than 50% of the world's population owns pets. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, people have sought companionship within their own homes. For this reason, many have chosen to become pet owners, as well as benefiting themselves and their families both in their mental and physical health. A quarter of pets worldwide are cats and in countries such as the US and Russia, they outnumber dogs (HeathForAnimals, 2022). The remote work that has become popular after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 also inspires people to seek companionship at home and have pets (Larkin, 2021).

The population of pets worldwide is increasing, this, because it is the time when millennials begin to form their own families. This generation has the tendency to choose to have pets and not children, although the care of their pets has become a priority and they seek rigorous care for them. Having a pet is less expensive than a baby; however, it is clear that medical, food and recreation costs have to be covered. Millennials love their pets and seek to provide them with the best quality of life possible (McReynolds, 2019).

2. Markets and agreements with Colombia

Ecuador is a member of the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), an international political-economic organization that includes, in addition to Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Peru. Being part of this integration brings several benefits for its members, such as a free trade area, a common external tariff, and trade facilitation through various tools.

According to data extracted from the Andean Community of Nations (2021):

Work is planned in different areas, including: Advance Rulings on customs valuation, origin and tariff classification; Andean Database on Customs Valuation; interoperability between Single Windows for Foreign Trade (VUCE); Digital certificates of origin; customs clearance authorization prior to the arrival of the goods; Andean Authorized Economic Operator; Community Strategy for Trade Facilitation in the Face of Risks; mainstreaming of National Trade Facilitation Committees in the work of trade facilitation measures; revision of the Andean Community Strategic Plan on Trade Facilitation in Customs Matters; Automation of Customs Transit; promotion of the development of electronic networks for the interconnection of customs administrations that allow the exchange of information; improvement in easy export processes aimed at micro and small entrepreneurs;

Ongoing training of customs officials and private sector operators in international trade, customs and related issues. (par. 1)

In Colombia there is a growing investment in the pet products market. Previously reaching the figure of \$3 billion dollars per year in this market and, in turn, indicating the forecast for 2023 of the growth of this figure to more than \$5 billion. Colombia also stands out among the Latin American countries with a wider market for these products. It is the fourth fastest growing market in this area after Mexico, Brazil, and Chile (Durán, C. B., 2022)

3. Importance of FairTrade Certifications in Latin America

According to Wilson and Mutersbaugh (2015), Fairtrade certification seeks to guarantee the well-being, payment and fair treatment of agricultural workers and small producers, as well as of the raw material in general, thus creating better living conditions for them, recognizing their work and giving value to the individual, the company, the environment and the economy. This is what is sought with respect to the countries of the Global South, while in the countries of the Global North the focus is on environmental sustainability, transparency in the supply chain and the implementation of companies that have business models with socially just policies.

According to Suárez (2023), FairTrade has social, economic, and organizational benefits for individuals, groups, organizations, and the state. Through this, the standard of living of the families of producers and farmers can be improved, who can access education thanks to the increase in household income due to fair accountability to the merchants of their products. Product prices at the local level are regulated and greater confidence in the market is generated. Organizations are managed in a better way, in addition to being democratic, these being the characteristics of FairTrade that have a positive impact on a country.

Rubio and Amaya (2020) evaluate the impacts of certifications at the level of Central and South America, indicating the ecological, economic, and social impacts generated by the certification of good agricultural practices and fair trade. In the ecological field, the reduction in the rate of deforestation and the use of pesticides can be observed, in addition to greater biodiversity, increased saving measures, water quality and greater protection of the ecosystems surrounding the plantation. On the economic side, greater productivity and price stability stand out, as well as higher net incomes, greater access to associative groups

and access to credit. Finally, there is a modernization of the production system. Among the social impacts, the increase in the use of personal protective clothing and equipment is reflected, thus improving the safety and well-being of workers in the production process. In the same way, the quality of life in households and the reduction of poverty are improved, and with it, the opportunity for formal education is created. As a result, and combination of the three ecological, economic and social aspects, there is an increase in education and training on production processes due to the improvement in production systems and the greater efficiency that is presented thanks to the impact of FairTrade certification.

4. Increasing Benefits of BASC Security Certification

According to Fontalvo and Morelos (2014), the BASC (Business Alliance for Secure Commerce) certification has benefits for the company in terms of integration of processes to accomplish goals, increases confidence both inside and outside the company, where its commitment to safe business practices, transparency, consistency of results and management in the cost-time relationship is demonstrated.

World BASC Organization (2024) indicates that BASC certification has benefits for certified companies, such as international recognition by belonging to the World BASC Organization (WBO). They obtain a competitive advantage of differentiation by implementing the BASC Control and Safety Management System (SGCS). In addition, they benefit from control entities, customs and international organizations with Memorandums of Understanding signed by WBO, generating trust and greater representativeness and facilitation of contacts in foreign trade, thanks to the database of companies certified in WBO. Its processes reflect a reduction in costs and risks derived from their control, as well as greater experience and knowledge in Supply Chain Security complemented by training courses related to the security of international trade.

Ana María Izurieta (2023), General Manager of BASC Ecuador, argues: "BASC certification is a fundamental tool to strengthen the security of the logistics chain, which translates into greater confidence for customers and business partners, and an improvement in the competitiveness of the export sector."

5. Appreciation of certifications in Latin America

Mora-Córdova *et al.* (2020) argues that, in Latin America, international certifications have acquired transcendental importance, this because they have become a key factor in generating greater competitiveness and success within companies. In an increasingly

globalized environment, where economies are in a process of constant evolution and where compliance with standards has become an imperative for a company's positioning, they test their ability to adapt to new scenarios and face problems. Therefore, these factors have been the main reasons why international certifications have great value, especially in Latin American countries.

In a volatile and uncertain environment, international certifications have been gaining space within the business environment (Puentes & Hernández, 2022). On the other hand, Zavala *et al.* (2021) mentions that since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ecuador, this country has been quite affected by the increase in unemployment today. For this reason, various companies with the purpose of generating an increase in the employment rate of the country seek certifications, mainly international, in order to guarantee the value of their work and be competitive in a work environment worldwide.

Ecuador, like the rest of the countries, was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the business environment. In this country, only 35% of companies remained profitable after the lockdown. This event left the country with the need to increase the number of companies, counteract the payroll and the destruction of jobs (Bachas *et al.*, 2020). For this reason, international certifications are a means of helping companies, since the certainty of the quality of the production processes that these certifications affirm is a characteristic that drives companies to their internal growth and foreign trade (Ikram *et al.*, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The present work consists of two phases; within the first phase, the diagnosis of the company has been carried out through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling to find out if it is suitable for obtaining the Fairtrade and BASC international certifications, which will help to facilitate the access of the product to new markets and to improve its export plan if it is applied. as well as the production process of the "Catnip" product. Therefore, for both the first and second stages, it has been considered necessary to base the case study under the mixed approach. Likewise, the second phase consists of an export plan for the same product, for which market research has been carried out with a non-probabilistic sampling for convenience through surveys of the Colombian population, as well as the analysis of data and evaluation of information provided by experts within the Ecuaminerales industry and experts external to the company. In this way, it has been possible to know the demographic

characteristics of consumers, their consumption habits and their perceptions regarding the Catnip brand, thus obtaining an exploratory scope of study.

Finally, with respect to the qualitative variable, the literature review was carried out through the consultation of books, scientific articles, reports and documents, both internal and external, of the same company. Likewise, in the quantitative approach, the type of design has been longitudinal, this because the statistical/numerical information obtained has included data on the population, income and purchasing power of consumers, being a compilation at various points over time, which has allowed changes and trends to be observed. Similarly, in order to develop a more complete and effective export plan that will help the company achieve its export objectives, this information has been reviewed and obtained through research in different international organizations and periodic visits to the company's facilities and its managers. In addition to consulting with an external customs agent, where costs and budgets have been determined that have influenced Ecuaminerales' ability to create brand awareness and generate greater demand in the target market.

Participants

In the first phase of the project, all the members of the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. participated, who through semi-structured interviews have been able to contribute with relevant information for the business diagnosis, and have allowed to obtain a comprehensive perspective of the different departments and areas of the organization. Likewise, the farmer of "Catnip" was interviewed, whose collaboration was fundamental to understand both the production process, his agricultural practices, the challenges he faces and his current situation with the company.

In the second phase of the project, non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used for the selection of the surveyed participants. This type of sampling was chosen due to the accessibility and availability of participants within the target population. Surveys were distributed online through social networks and cat owner forums in Medellín. The inclusion criteria for participants had no age limit, but their residence in Colombia was required, in addition to owning at least one cat or working in the pet products sector. The collection of valid surveys provided a sufficient database for the quantitative analysis of the acceptance and potential demand of Catnip in the Colombian market. This selection and data collection allowed obtaining a representative view of the interest and disposition of the local market

towards the product, thus facilitating the analysis of the feasibility of exporting catnip from Ecuador to Colombia.

Instruments

For data collection in the second phase of this case study, a questionnaire designed by the authors of this research project was used, specifically to evaluate the feasibility of exporting Catnip from Ecuador to Colombia. This questionnaire included a series of closed questions to measure various variables related to the acceptance and demand of Catnip.

- Variables and categories of analysis:

1. Demographics of the participants. -

Variables: presence of cats in the home, place of residence.

2. Knowledge and use of Catnip

Variables: level of knowledge about catnip, frequency of use, sources of information about catnip.

3. Preferences and opinions about Catnip. -

Variables: preference for natural vs. synthetic catnip, willingness to pay, perception of quality, benefits of catnip and recommendations.

4. Purchasing Factors. -

Variables: price, quality, presentation.

Procedure

In this research project, a first approach has been made via telephone, thus being able to coordinate the meetings on the appropriate date, place and time for the interviewee. In addition, a self-application questionnaire has been used with the help of the Google Forms platform, which has been sent directly to the population of Colombia through social networks.

CHAPTER 1

1. DIAGNOSIS OF THE COMPANY WITH RELEVANCE IN OBTAINING INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

1.1 Background of the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda.

Ecuaminerales is an Ecuadorian company incorporated in the city of Cuenca, dedicated to the industrialization of non-metallic minerals. Its main objective is to seek the benefit of the parties involved in the livestock sector, industry, and, above all, pet care. Its company incorporation dates back to 2012, where Ecuaminerales is recognized through its corporate name MINMETEC ECUADOR Cia. Ltda. Among its main activities as a company, Ecuaminerales receives great income thanks to the commercialization of its own brand, as well as the maquila of its products both nationally and internationally. After an in-depth analysis of the company's capacity to have the necessary industrial machinery and its commitment to offer high-quality solutions, innovation and responsibility, the idea of diversifying its product portfolio and creating a new line aimed directly at feline welfare, Catnip or also known as *Nepeta Cataria*, arises.

Table 1
Timeline of the company Ecuaminerales

2012	Constitution of Ecuaminerales. Company name: MINMETEC ECUADOR, Cia. Ltda.
2019	Strengthening of the product line for animal nutrition.
2021	Start of exports.
2023	Catnip production.

Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024)

The company Ecuaminerales arises from the management and business vision of its members, which helped them to be governed by ethical guidelines aimed at the production and commercialization of minerals such as: coolin, industrial oils, barium sulfate, and calcium carbonate. In addition, due to the increase in demand for these products, the production of its cat litter officially begins. Their constant work and effort to want to be better, allows the demand for this product to increase for the year 2021, making Ecuaminerales stronger and more interested in animal nutrition. For this reason, in the same

year, the company decides to start the export process of the new sand, its main destination being the Colombian market. The product in which the company is currently interested is Catnip, whose plantations are located in the Déleg canton, Cañar province. Factors such as the climate, the care and irrigation of the plantations, have allowed the quality of this plant to be taken into account to be its new export product.

Currently, the company is innovating with respect to its products, because it seeks to be a leading brand, socially responsible, environmentally and sustainably alienated. This is becoming possible thanks to the implementation of its clean production protocols for the sale of this new line of products, which has also allowed them to attract new customers throughout the Ecuadorian and Latin American territory, thus offering a wide range of quality and safety inputs.

The company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. has the following departments:

- Managerial: within this department there are three general managers, the same ones who are in charge of the operations and management of the company.
- Administrative: made up of four people focused on process management, administration and accounting. Similarly, there are four people in charge of the Purchasing Department.
- Production: this department is made up of 75 people in charge of industrial work.
- Human Talent: there is a head of human talent and an administrative assistant.
- Logistics: two people are in charge of the warehouse, the inventory, as well as the forklift operator within the company.
- Commercial: a single person is in charge of commercial management within the company.

1.2 Diagnosis of the company in the economic area

According to data extracted from the Superintendence of Companies, Securities and Insurance (2022), the economic activities of Ecuaminerales or Minmetec Ecuador are:

The manufacture of prepared food for farm animals (poultry, cattle, cattle, pigs, etc.). Manufacture of raw natural phosphates and raw natural potassium salts. Manufacture of other chemical products for agricultural use. Processing of other non-metallic items into secondary raw materials, usually through a mechanical or chemical transformation process; recovery of materials from waste streams: separation and

classification of recoverable materials from non-hazardous waste streams (garbage); Separation and sorting into distinct categories of mixed recoverable materials such as: paper, plastics, used beverage cans, and metals. Among the mechanical or chemical transformation processes that are carried out are the following: mechanical crushing of metal waste, such as: used cars, used washing machines, used bicycles, etc., for subsequent classification and separation; dismantling of cars, ships, computers, television sets and other equipment for the recovery of materials; mechanical reduction of large volumes of metal, such as railway cars; shredding of scrap metal, discarded vehicles, etc.; other methods of mechanical treatment, such as cutting and pressing to reduce volume. Retail sale of fertilizers in specialized establishments. Retail sale of feed and fertilizers in specialized establishments.

Table 2
Profit and Loss Statement 2023 in USD

Revenue	6.195.442,43
Cost of sales	4.730.725,90
Gross Margin	1.464.716,53
Operating Profit	206.817,88
Earnings before interest and taxes	131.303,67

Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024).

The profit and loss statement clearly indicates how the company's financial situation has been maintained in its activities during 2023. That year it has obtained a significant sum of profits or gross margin, which constitutes 23.64% of revenues. As well as the profit before interest and taxes, which shows us the increase in revenue, productivity and investment of the company with 2.12% of total revenues.

Table 3
Ecuaminerales 2023 Statement of Financial Position in USD

ASSETS	3.146.461,87
LIABILITIES	2.482.754,86
HERITAGE	663.707,01

Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024).

Within the company's statement of financial position, the assets, liabilities and equity of the company are highlighted. Table 3 shows the economic solvency of the company, as USD assets significantly exceed liabilities. These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with IFRS for SMEs and based on historical cost, which is the fair value of the company's transactions, i.e., for selling an asset or receiving a payment on a liability during the accounting period. For the preparation of these financial statements, accounting policies are required within the company, in addition to assumptions and estimates such as portfolio impairment, the useful life of the plant property, and an estimate of Retirement and Eviction (Superintendence of Companies, Securities, and Insurance, 2022).

1.3 Diagnosis of the company in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. is a company that has expanded machinery and two industrial warehouses located in the city of Cuenca; As a result, its production and demand have increased over the years. When conducting a diagnosis of the area of corporate social responsibility, it is important, first of all, to consider the cross-border nature of its operations and the need to establish strong strategic alliances. For this reason, Ecuaminerales, in order to start its Foreign Trade operations, has chosen Peru, Chile and Colombia as ideal countries to carry out its raw material import operations. In addition, due to the growth in demand for cat litter, the company has managed to export its product to countries such as Chile, Colombia and the Dominican Republic, these being its main commercial allies. Within the export process to these countries, it is important to note that they do so through the bulk maquila of their products to one of the allied industries in Colombia, while in other companies of Colombian, Chilean and Dominican origin, the product is manufactured so that they can package it with their brand. and products are also shipped under Ecuaminerales' own brand.

Another of the strategic alliances that Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. has, is the validity of its contract with a private company that provides them with the security guards present in their facilities and that, in addition, are certified in BASC. Similarly, to carry out a correct transfer of their products, the company has hired a private transport company, which not only supplies them with the container trucks, but also provides them with security seals to help ensure that the cargo is not handled in any way. Given the inherent complexity of international trade, the company has the help of customs agents, who contribute with advice on logistics and transportation. Finally, today the company belongs to different guilds such as: Mucho Mejor Ecuador, Chamber of Commerce of Cuenca and the Chamber of Industries

of Azuay, associations that have allowed Ecuaminerales to favor itself through relationships with new companies, business opportunities, training and greater influence within the business sector before various authorities.

Although it is true, Ecuaminerales is responsible for the exploitation, processing, marketing and export of non-metallic minerals, as well as the production of mixtures of the same and any other material or article based on this type of minerals. Therefore, within this industry, it is important to take into account the environmental practices to be implemented, in order to identify risks and avoid greater impacts. The company is currently working on its environmental policies so that they include procedures for the classification or selection of raw materials from waste that is destined for transformation, such as plastics or metals. However, it has a single certification called "Much Better Ecuador", which, in the environmental field, can be perceived as an initiative for the reduction of waste, as well as the incentive towards the creation of a more sustainable and environmentally friendly economic model. Finally, it is necessary to highlight that Ecuaminerales is managing the issue of Business Process Analysis (BPA) and Business Process Management (BPM), this in order to control suppliers regarding the sanitary registrations of the products, so that they are in conditions suitable for export and import. Despite this, the complete management of obtaining these good practices has not yet been achieved.

1.4 Diagnosis in the Control and Security area

Ecuaminerales, aware of the importance of guaranteeing the well-being and safety of its transport and logistics operations of its products, has implemented certain protocols regarding the safeguarding of the integrity of the cargo and protection of information issued by the company itself.

Figure 1
Security Protocol of Ecuaminerales, Cia. Ltda



Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024).

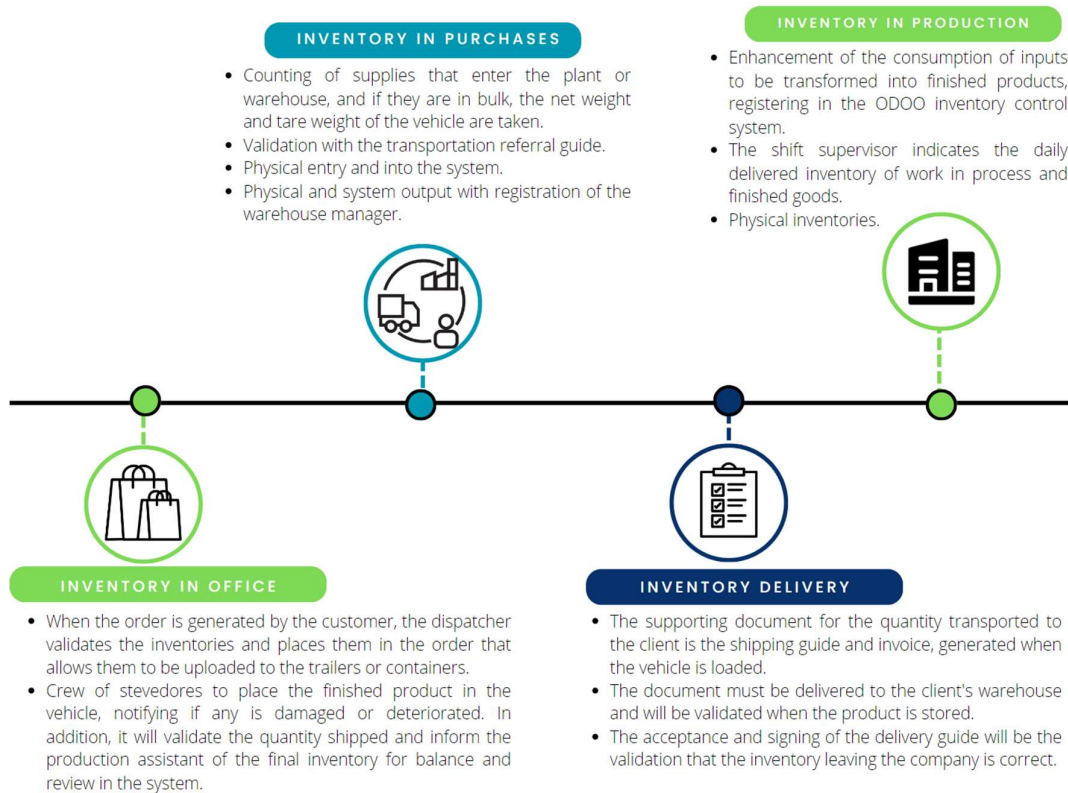
The company has established different guidelines for operational control within its facilities, in order to protect the safety and health of workers, contractors, visitors and customers, as well as to ensure the integrity of the institution's material resources. To this end, the protocol presented in Figure 1 covers the guidelines and control activities that must be carried out by security guards, both internal and external Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) managers, shift supervisors, area managers, departmental heads and human talent in the Factory and Warehouse work centers. These guidelines are in accordance with the regulatory framework of the Political Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, the Labor Code, the Internal Labor Regulations (based on Article 33 of the Internal Labor Regulations), and the Hygiene and Safety Regulations, both of Ecuaminerales.

Similarly, there is the respective control procedure for the entry of technical visitors, suppliers and contractors, taking into account the documentary requirements for their entry, visit planning, alcohol and drug control, possible risks, the prohibition of the entry of electronic devices and the use of personal protective equipment. As for the hiring of security

guards, Ecuaminerales carries it out exclusively to those who are certified in BASC, this through a private company that guarantees the training of its employees in security, including the prevention of illicit activities that could put the cargo and reputation of the company at risk. In addition, with respect to the transportation of containers destined for Colombia, it is important to note that each truck is also provided by an external transport company that also provides seals and seals as security devices for the containers, and thus avoid the handling of the cargo during transit, as mentioned within the CSR area.

The land transport modality chosen by Ecuaminerales is that of Ex Works (EXW), which implies that the company's responsibility for the containerized cargo does not fall on it, since any risk or cost will fall on the Colombian buyer. Although this modality offers great economic advantages, it also poses various challenges during the traceability and control of the cargo until it reaches Colombian territory. Likewise, its mode of maritime transport to the rest of the countries is Free on Board (FOB), where the responsibility for costs and risks falls on the company until the goods are loaded on board the vessel. For this reason, to store and exchange information, the company has chosen to use a cloud called MEGA, a service that allows them to store data and information encrypted from end to end, where the only ones who have access to this platform are the managers and those in charge of the export and logistics of their products. Similarly, to exercise greater control, transport providers send Ecuaminerales the actual routes taken by the vehicles during the trip, exercising correct monitoring of the delivery along with supporting documents, such as remittance guides and invoices.

Figure 2
Measures to ensure product safety



Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024)

In the reception of raw materials and inventory, the company effectuates quality controls focused on the product, evaluating whether the inputs meet the established parameters. As for the shipments made especially in exports, inspections are executed on the vehicles before loading, checking that the loaded products comply with the specifications and, at the time of completing the shipment, a photograph is taken where the placement of the finished product is evidenced and an additional photograph is taken at the time of placing the tent or closing the container. As for the product's operations with the customer, what is done is a phone call to inquire about the arrival of the product and the news that is presented.

Due to Ecuaminerales' interest in being BASC certified, they are managing a control system for evaluating suppliers with respect to safety, since, for the moment, only the contract with the supplier is made, then the price negotiation and, after that, the relevant legal documents are requested for the execution of the contract. Similarly, the company has proposed to follow the guidelines that the BASC standard indicates regarding the mitigation of security risks in the supply chain and the prevention of sabotage and/or contamination of

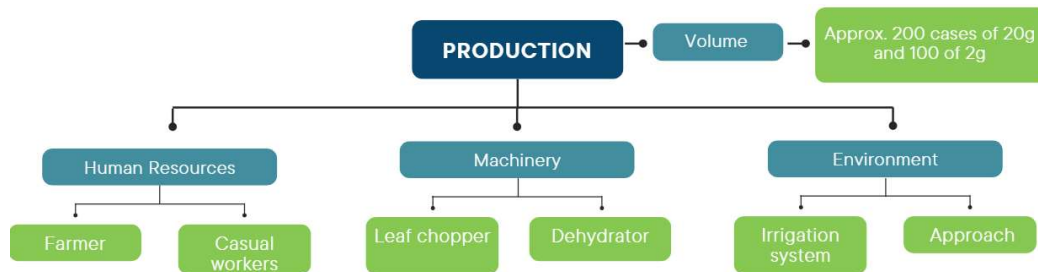
its products, since it does not yet have a specific plan to identify and prevent this type of situation.

1.5 Exploratory analysis of Catnip production

1.5.1 Supply: agricultural producer and supplier

For the elaboration of this research work, it is necessary to know the production processes of "Catnip", a product on which the export plan is focused and whose processes stand out as sustainable and socially responsible. In the same way, it focuses on the farmer as an important actor in this process. From this, this graph will describe in detail the steps, areas, resources, among other areas related to the production process from different approaches and analyses that the company executes to obtain the final product "Catnip".

Figure 3
Catnip Production



Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024).

By conducting a semi-structured interview, important data and information have been obtained that have allowed us to acquire a clear vision of the relationship between the farmer and the company, as well as the processes that are carried out for the production of Catnip as a product suitable for sale. The Catnip production and marketing project started in mid-2023. The biggest difficulty with this has been importing the plant/seed from Europe and the United States. Primarily, the plant must go through a two-month germination process, then it is harvested and the leaves are cut. *Nepeta Cataria* is a perennial plant, as it has a fertile time of more than two years and can be grown multiple times.

The human resources of the farm are made up of the owner, who performs various activities and is in charge of administration, distribution, as well as physical and manual work. Eventually, it hires personnel for specific activities such as the repair of machinery or installation of resources necessary for production, such as the construction of greenhouses. The farmer recognizes that growing Catnip is more convenient for his income, both because

of its ease of cultivation and marketing. For this reason, he seeks to produce only this product in the future for his economic sustenance and his business.

As for the production volume, this is approximately 2000 cases of 20g and 100 of 2g, respectively. It is important to note that the daily production of Catnip is relatively small and cannot be considered industrial, since the entire process involved is in moderate quantities of 1 kg. Regarding the machinery used for the processes, the farmer makes use of a leaf chopper and a dehydrator. Integrated to this, there is an irrigation system in the facilities, that is, the greenhouses where all the plantations are located.

1.5.2 Processes and packaging

When addressing the issue of the "Catnip" production line, with the focus on the steps that this process implies and the responsibility that falls on those involved in them, it is important to highlight the different resources in each area and their value to complete the path to reach the final product. These processes are carried out in different locations, changing the hands of responsibility at each step of the production process, depending on who it corresponds to. There is a linear and repetitive process for each production batch, which is interpreted in the following figure.

Figure 4
Steps of the Catnip Production Process



Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024).

In addition to the steps of this production process, it is essential to determine those responsible for providing and carrying out different aspects of it. The approach taken to classify the activities has been to determine the responsibility for the production of the by-products that will be integrated to be part of the final product "Catnip". These products are the *Nepeta Cataria* and the plastic sleeves, which make up the packaging of the final product.

Table 4
Catnip Production and Packaging Responsibility

Product	Responsible	Process
<i>Nepeta Cataria</i>	Local supplier, Farmer.	Germination of the plant for two months and subsequent growth of four weeks for harvest.

Plastic Sleeves	National suppliers. Printed product design.	Ecuaminerales hires an external company that provides plastic packaging sleeves on a monthly basis.
Catnip	The Farmer carries out the packaging process individually and delivers to Ecuaminerales once a week, the same period in which his payments are made.	Packaging is done at the farmer's facility. The delivery is made to Ecuaminerales in garbage bags. The farmer sells the product to Ecuaminerales by packaging units and by means of invoices.

Note: Adapted from Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. (2024).

For the elaboration of the "Catnip" product, it is highlighted that the farmer has a primary role in the process, acting as an agricultural producer, supplier, transporter from the locality of cultivation and packaging of the catnip to the company that is the distribution point. This is correctly collected by legal means and within the corresponding deadlines. The rate of production depends on the efficiency of the farmer in his tasks. The role of the Ecuaminerales company lies in obtaining the packaging, which is done through the contracting of external services that provide it. In the same way, they are responsible for the distribution for the sale of the product after obtaining the finished product, the same that will be shown in the following graph.

Figure 5
20g Catnip Product



After evaluating the different areas of the company, its structure and the production of Catnip throughout Chapter 1, it is safe to say that the company Ecuaminerales or MINMETEC ECUADOR Cia. Ltda. has the potential for application to the internationally recognized Fairtrade and BASC certifications. Their practices show aspects that are required to be holders of these certifications. Both its transparency within the company's accountability, as well as its broad corporate social responsibility and interest in improving its environmental policies, help to positively define this company in terms of its distinction with quantifiable and corroborated data. In the same way, the production of "Catnip" demonstrates a wide aptitude to be exported to the international market. Therefore, throughout Chapter 2, the requirements and procedures that Ecuaminerales must comply with to obtain these international certifications will be explored in detail, and, in this way, be able to facilitate its export process of its new product, mainly.

CHAPTER 2

2. REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESSES FOR OBTAINING FAIRTRADE AND BASC CERTIFICATIONS

2.1 Certificación Business Alliance for Secure Commerce (BASC)

2.1.1 History and importance

The creation of BASC dates back to 1996, through the proposal of the Mattel Corporation to the Commissioner of the United States Customs Service in San Diego, California, on the implementation of mechanisms that help prevent any importing company from being used by illicit companies with respect to the transport of narcotics, and, In this way, put an end to the theft and contamination of cargoes of any company in the different sectors. Although BASC was created with the purpose of forming an anti-smuggling alliance, today, it is also recognized for its broad vision of creating a business alliance for safe trade, trying to facilitate and expedite international trade through legal security procedures applied directly to the logistics chain, associated with governments, authorities and companies around the world. Its global recognition allows BASC to be a model of cooperation between the private sector, governments, and international organizations (BASC, 2024).

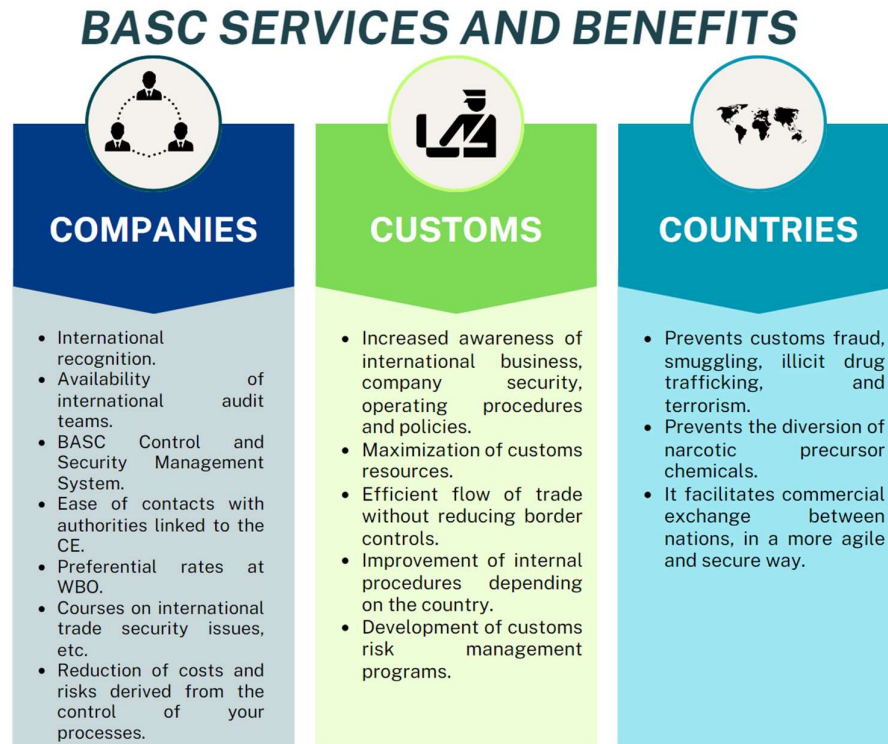
Figure 6
BASC Certification and Logo



Note: Obtained from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce (2024)

The BASC certification is issued by the headquarters of the World BASC Organization, which is processed by the members of the organization belonging to each of the BASC chapters, who must be authorized to process the audit and issuance of the certification, taking into account the policies of the WBO. The importance of obtaining this type of certification lies in the company's ability to mitigate any type of risk associated with international business activities. By adhering to the standards and procedures established by the World BASC Organization (WBO), the program managed by BASC and in which all those companies that provide services to other entities regarding the logistics chain of international trade, and in addition, that carry out productive or complementary activities to such services, can minimize the probability that the company will be involved in illicit activities, like smuggling, drug trafficking, terrorism, money laundering, among others. Such crimes not only pose a threat to national and international security, but could also have a significant and devastating impact on corporate reputation and financial stability.

Figure 7
BASC Certification Services and Benefits



Note: Adapted from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce (2024).

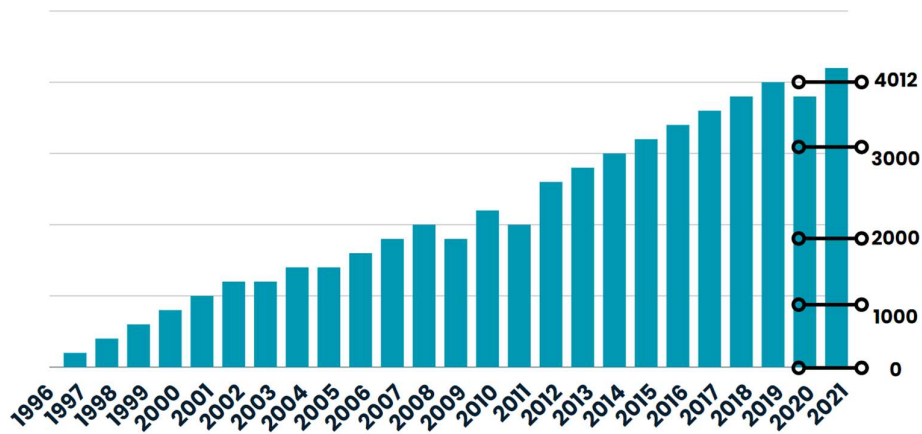
BASC's vision is to consolidate strategic alliances in order to become a benchmark for safe trade at a global level. For this reason, over more than 25 years they have developed different works and cooperation projects with International WBO Support Organizations, with the variety of BASC countries and with various customs, departments, directorates and services regarding customs control agencies. Finally, it is important to take into account the close relationship that BASC has with the different authorities for the control and direction of anti-narcotics and/or anti-crime.

2.1.2 Positioning in the world, Latin America and Ecuador

Within the same context, BASC (2024) argues that its program has different classes of members. The existence of National and Regional Chapters, endorsed by the World BASC Organization, complies with the policies established by the same organization at the country level, thus being able to develop its work from its materialization. Likewise, in order to promote safe practices in the foreign trade supply chain, these BASC chapters are established in the following countries: Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. In addition,

currently more than 4200 companies are certified in BASC around the world, achieving high recognition around logistics security by different international organizations and business partners, such as the Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) belonging to the security cooperation program with the United States (C-TPAT) and various Customs around the world.

Figure 8
BASC Certified companies worldwide until 2021



Note: Adapted from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce, (2024).

Regarding what is represented in Figure 8, it is important to highlight that the growth of BASC-certified companies has been a fairly progressive process, although, although it started from scratch, thanks to the strategies implemented by the organization itself (WBO), more and more companies have decided to bet on a good control and security management system that allows them to mitigate any type of risk associated with the intentional trade. At present, the number of affiliated companies worldwide compared to 2021 has increased, thus ensuring credibility and trust with government and private institutions.

Table 5
Number of BASC Certified Companies by National Chapter

Country	Number of companies
Colombia	1724
Costa Rica	120
Ecuador	1214
El Salvador	46

United States	37
Guatemala	49
Mexico	148
Panama	41
Peru	749
Dominican Republic	104
Venezuela	13
Non-BASC countries	26

Note: Adapted from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce, (2024).

Although it is true, within Latin America there are certified companies located in countries where there are no BASC chapters, such as: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay. However, companies existing in these countries can also become members and certified in BASC through the WBO headquarters. The BASC organization has its own auditors, who are previously trained to carry out audits regarding the BASC Control and Safety Management System of all those companies that wish to aspire to obtain the certification, and the companies associated with the existing Chapters and recognized by the same Organization. These auditors are identified as international and international certification auditors; the former are in charge of advising as long as they are linked to companies that have the authorization of the WBO, while the latter are authorized by the Chapters, so that they can carry out any type of evaluation and audit of companies that wish to obtain their certification or recertification.

In Ecuador, on the other hand, this alliance was created in 1999 through the incentive to private enterprise, together with the support of associations, government entities, chambers of production and the National Police. Its operations began in 2000, and currently have 1214 affiliated Ecuadorian companies (BASC Ecuador, 2024). On the other hand, the chapters that make up BASC Ecuador are located in the province of Azuay, Guayaquil, Pichincha and Manabí; thus reflecting its commitment to improving business conditions and its concern to discourage any factor that harms fiscal, economic and commercial interests in the country.

2.1.3 Standards for obtaining BASC certification

It is important to note that BASC has implemented a design through its Standard, where its standards are applicable to 18 sectors of the logistics chain, these being the beneficiaries of the implementation and BASC certification with security. However, the sectors that are not mentioned in the following figure, although less likely to obtain the certification, may still apply for it.

Figure 9
WBO Participating Sectors



Note: Adapted from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce, (2024).

In order to apply for BASC certification, it is important to carry out an exhaustive evaluation of business protection, taking into account the following standards issued by the same organization:

- 1. Corporate Policy.** - Within the company there must be procedures that correspond to concerns about the smuggling of goods and narcotics. In addition, the presence of policies that have a drug-free business environment and that serves as a manual for its employees is one of the main requirements for obtaining this certification.
- 2. Personnel administration.** - In this section, policies must be made for the selection, knowledge and hiring of continuous personnel, in order to carry out personal, criminal, referential or any other type of investigations against their own employees. On the other hand, drug awareness and training programs should be carried out, along with the help of posters posted in the company and press materials within the company.

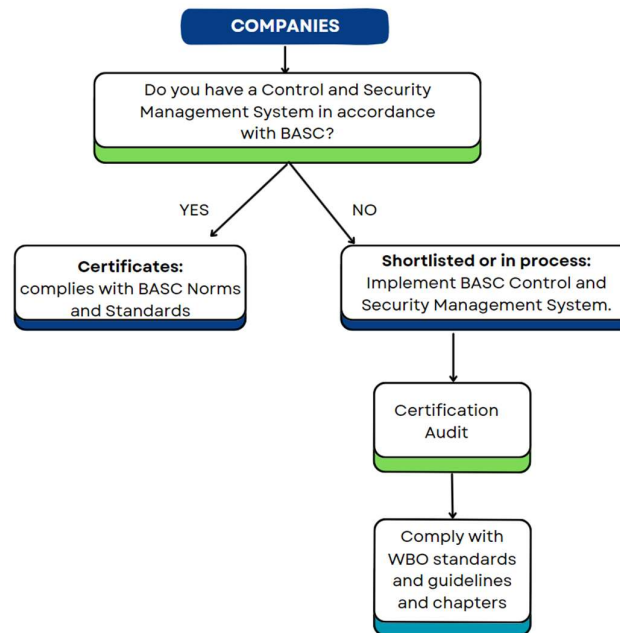
Similarly, random drug testing in case of reasonable suspicion is another key factor to implement. Finally, it is important to use codes, uniforms and the presentation of the identification document to know and take for granted the good security policies and standards within the company.

- 3. Physical security.** - Each of the document and cargo storage areas within the company must be protected against intrusion, through perimeter barriers in good condition, padlocks or locks. In addition, security personnel must guard the entrance and cargo doors. Such personnel must have their respective booth or checkpoint on the perimeter, both at the entrance and exit doors of the company, as well as in the storage areas of cargo, documents or valuables. The perimeter areas have to be illuminated and have operations areas that allow the surveillance function, and, from this, have an area for exclusive use to store keys for the different business departments. Finally, it is important to have security procedures in place for the inspection of cargo vehicles that receive and deliver cargo, as well as private vehicles.

2.1.4 Certification process and requirements

In order to be eligible for BASC certification, companies must go through a rigorous registration process for admission. First, each company interested in becoming BASC certified must apply for membership and certification through the different BASC chapters that are present in the eleven countries mentioned above. In the event that there is no chapter within the country where the company is located, they may apply to be part of the organization through the WBO Headquarters, located in Miami, Florida (BASC, 2024). Once the company submits to the BASC Chapter or the WBO all the legal documents required in the application process for admission, a documentary analysis will be carried out by the authorized auditors or competent bodies, so that they can decide whether or not the applicant enters as a BASC associate, presenting their business classification in the manner shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10
Classification of companies applying for BASC certification



Note: Adapted from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce, (2024).

In order for a company to be certified in BASC, it must meet the requirements of incorporation as a participant in productive activities or services related to the logistics chain of international trade. In addition, there must be records of honesty and logistical legality through its commercial history within the country and abroad, in order to determine if the company does not have any criminal record, either inside or outside its country of origin. According to this information, the application/registration process must be completed in accordance with the guidelines and policies of the World BASC Organization in their respective Chapters. Once the certification is already available, it will be valid for one (1) year, where companies will have annual audits to verify compliance and improvement of the BASC Control and Safety Management System. On the other hand, if a company is not selected to apply for this type of certification, it is not the association's competence to give any explanation for its decision to disapprove the application.

The BASC certificate is issued by the headquarters of the World BASC Organization and processed by each of the BASC chapters. Likewise, each certificate is issued under a consecutive number and written on a special security paper, material that helps to validate

it. A single and irreplaceable code will make the company identify and recognize itself for complying with the requirements and standards of the BASC Control and Security Management System. This code must consist of the following information:

Figure 11
BASC Code Information



Note: Adapted from Business Alliance for Secure Commerce (2024).

With respect to the code issued for each company, as can be seen in Figure 11, the first three letters correspond to the country of the company, the three letters following the BASC chapter to which it is linked. Following this, the five digits shown correspond to the company's unique certification number. After this number, near the first dash, is the number corresponding to the headquarters, indicating: -1 if it is the main one and -2 onwards for extensions or additions. The last digit after the second indent corresponds to the number of times the company has consecutively renewed its certification. Finally, if the case corresponds to a company located in countries that are not BASC, the code of the chapter will be replaced by the initials of the city where the company is located (BASC, 2024).

Through the diagnosis of Ecuaminerales, it has been shown that it meets many of the requirements to be part of the World BASC Organization and thus obtain its respective BASC certification. Likewise, the commitment and willingness of its members to integrate and improve BASC's guidelines within their processes is notorious; however, they continue to work towards their goals fully. This commitment has been reflected in the constant improvement within its security and control areas, which has validated the existing relationship with its suppliers, partners and customers. For this reason, it would be very positive for Ecuaminerales to position itself as a safe company by obtaining its certification, if it fully adheres to BASC standards.

2.2 Fairtrade Certification

2.2.1 History and importance

Fairtrade International, created in the 1980s, under the name at that time of Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, is a multinational non-profit association; This aims to coordinate the fair-trade system within a single strategy at the global level. Since 1997, this organization has implemented a global standard regarding products traded fairly, being responsible for implementing the standards that must be met by companies that seek to be part of this community and that wish to obtain Fairtrade certification. The certification that Fairtrade International offers have international validity and is highly recognized. Although Fairtrade certification is accredited by Fairtrade International, Flocert, founded in Germany in 2003, is the social certification and auditing body that is established as a subsidiary organization of Fairtrade International. This organization ensures and verifies the quality and credibility of the Fairtrade certification system, and is also responsible for carrying out independent inspections of producers and traders to ensure that they comply with the standards (Flocert, 2024).

Figure 12
Fairtrade Logos

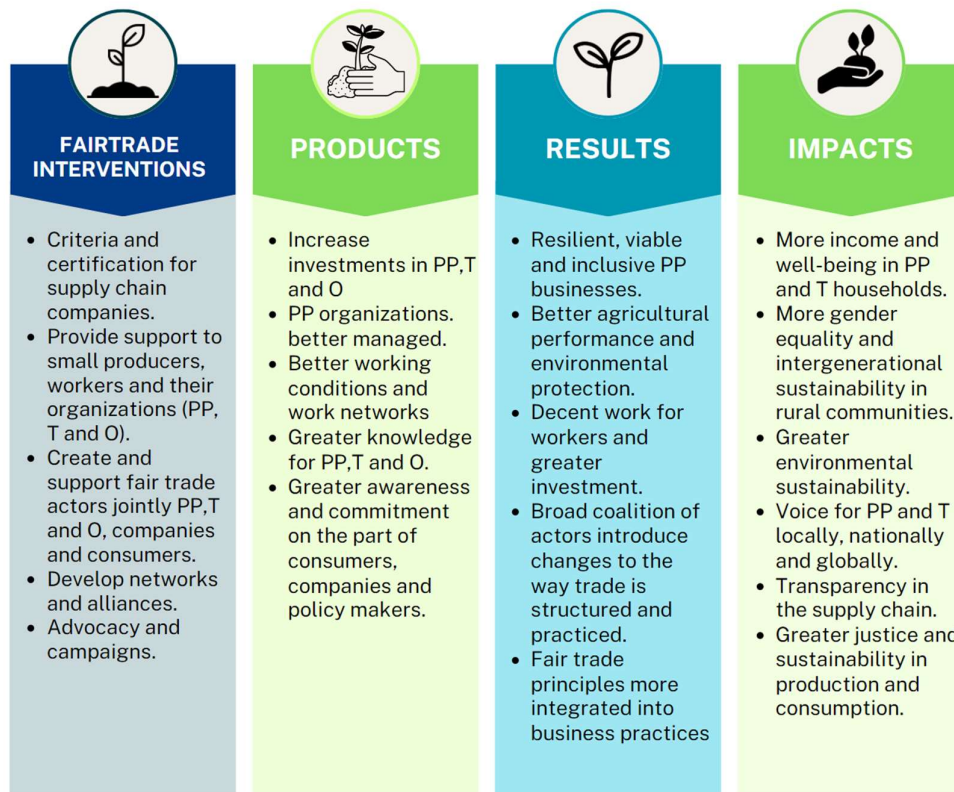


Note: Obtained from Fairtrade International (2024); Flocert (2024).

The importance of Fairtrade certification lies in the value it gives to the companies that have it, highlighting their good practices in environmental, social and economic areas. Environmental importance includes the protection of natural ecosystems, the reduction of chemical fertilizers, the care of water and the prevention of soil erosion. In the social area, the increase in the knowledge of producers and farmers and the strengthening of their social

organizations stands out. Finally, in the economic area, we can mention the increase in the income of producers and farmers, as well as the improvement in ease of access to farmers' markets (Pyk and Abu Hatab, 2018).

Figure 13
Fairtrade Interventions



Note: Adapted from Fairtrade International, (2024).

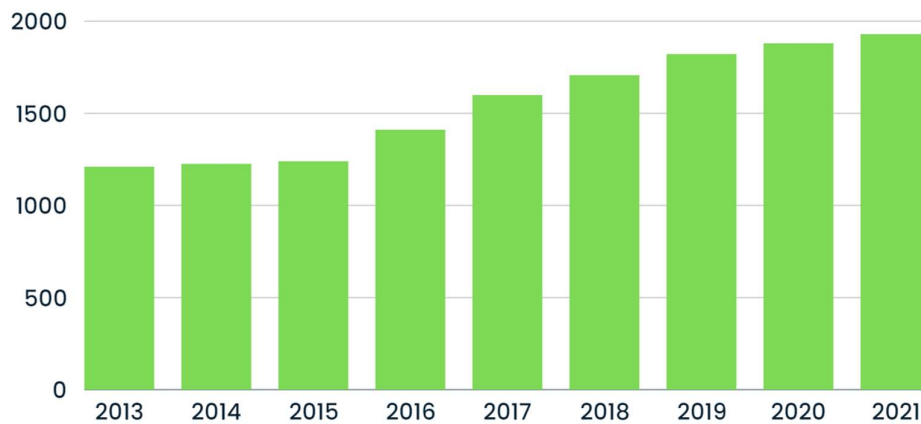
Figure 13 highlights the importance of Fairtrade in several areas, with interventions indicating who certification is aimed at, who it is intended to benefit from and the means to achieve it. The scope of products refers to the expected improvements with obtaining the certification and the benefit that would be obtained from the entities or individuals that are sought to be helped. As results, the consequences of the products are rescued, that is, the impact that the changes will have on the lives of the users of the certification, this in an objective and measurable way, while the impact section refers to the personal benefits and mostly, results that are not quantitatively measurable, but related to the improvement of the quality of life of farmers and other beneficiaries.

2.1.2 Positioning in the world, Latin America and Ecuador

The Fairtrade system is made up of more than 25 organisations, 1000 workers and two million farmers and producers, from 100 countries. Within its 2022 annual report, Fairtrade indicates what its global strategy and priorities are to be fulfilled until 2025. These priorities include redirecting power to farmers and workers, focusing on the growth and innovation of farmers' markets, advocating for the rights of communities, as well as improving the digitalisation of supply chains and improving the efficiency of the Fairtrade system.

Figure 14

Total number of Fairtrade producer organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean

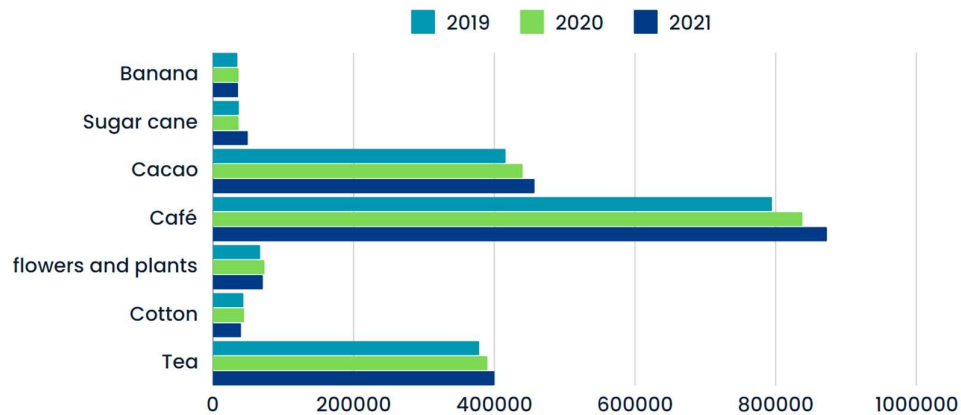


Note: Adapted from Fairtrade International, (2024).

The Fairtrade region that covers Latin America and the Caribbean indicates that there are 370,895 certified producers and farmers, which represent 18% of the total globally. Within the total number of producer organizations in this region, Fairtrade benefited 89% until 2022, constituting a total of 869 producer organizations. The support provided to these organizations was in the areas of FairTrade, the strengthening of communities, work on human rights, production and the environment. Fairtrade International has also provided emergency aid to more than 3,300 producers in nine countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region. This aid comes from the Fund for Climate Contingencies and Catastrophic Events that the organization has to provide support to the members of its network of producers.

Figure 15

Number of Fairtrade farmers and workers by product, 2019-2021



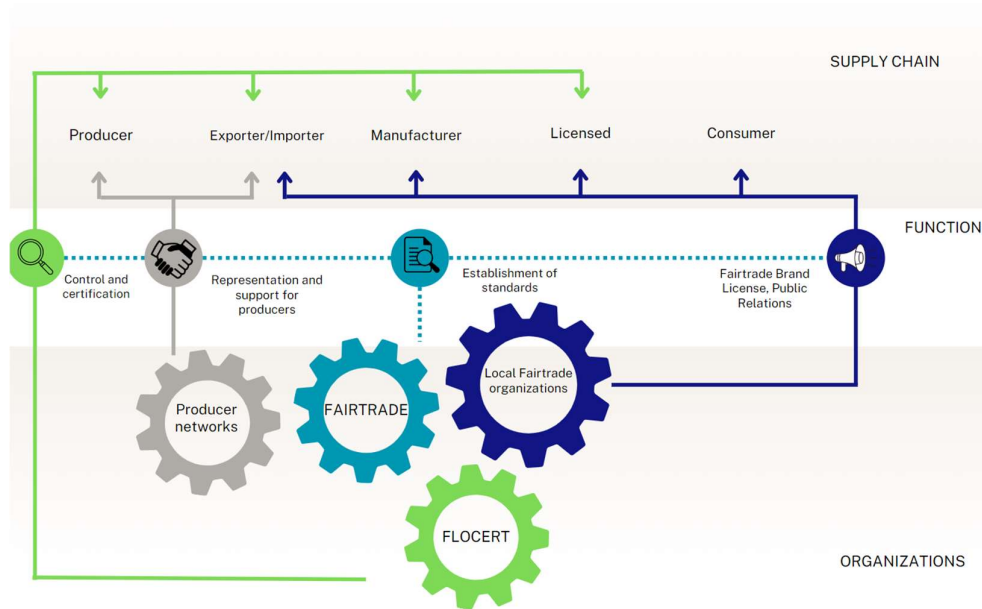
Note: Adapted from Fairtrade International, (2024).

Fairtrade's presence in Ecuador has not gone unnoticed, as the Fairtrade International organization, through its certifications, has helped many producers, especially of cocoa, flowers, bananas, among other agricultural products, to improve their production processes, working conditions, and growth and recognition in the international market. Examples are taken such as the Cocoa of Excellence Program, a training program of Fairtrade International and the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Small Producers and FairTrade Workers (CLAC), aimed at Ecuadorian cocoa producers, which took place in February and March 2024 to promote quality cocoa production and train these producers in innovative and competitive practices. This is one of the many programs that are included for companies and/or organizations that benefit from being part of the Fairtrade community.

2.2.3 Certification Process and Requirements

In order to obtain Fairtrade certification, companies have to go through a rigorous analysis and diagnosis process where the standards that Fairtrade International believes are relevant to make a company worthy of this recognized certification will be taken into account. As mentioned above, Fairtrade works in conjunction with Flocert to provide long-term monitoring of compliance with these standards.

Figure 16
Fairtrade Red



Note: Obtained from Flocert, (2024).

Figure 16 shows how the certification process is and how its actors relate to create a functional network with Fairtrade International, Flocert, producer groups and local fair-trade organizations, as active actors in this network and as those who work in coordination with each other to make Fairtrade certification what it is today.

Among the principles that companies must comply with to obtain Fairtrade certification for organizations with small-scale producers, it is mainly stated that producers have to be small-scale, indicating that they do not depend on contract workers, but maintain their production under their own labor or that of their families. In addition, these producers must have a say in the organization's decision-making process. Within these standards, there are different sections for the requirements that a smallholder organization must meet in order to be Fairtrade certified, starting with the General Requirements that are related to the certification process and the scope of the criterion. Consequently, there are also trade requirements related to the sale of Fairtrade products. There are also production requirements that are related to social and environmental practices to ensure workers greater sustainability of their livelihoods and decent working conditions, and finally the Business and Development requirements that the business must meet on its approach, through which its

producers can empower themselves and lay the foundations for the sustainability of their livelihoods.

- 1. General Requirements.** - The company is required to accept both announced and unannounced audits at its facilities and subcontracted facilities. You must also designate a contact person for certification-related matters and submit documents such as legal registration, marketing documents, and financial statements. In addition, it must demonstrate market potential in Fairtrade, inform members about the collective decision to participate, comply with national legislation, secure land and water rights, and demonstrate integrity in marketing. To be considered a smallholder organization, farms of up to 30 hectares must be operated, where families are directly involved in agricultural activity and do not hire workers on an ongoing basis. In addition, at least 50% of the volume sold as Fairtrade must come from small producers.
- 2. Trade Requirements.** - There must be physical separation of products at all stages, from storage to sale, and detailed documentation of the flow of the product, including purchase, processing, and sales records. Once the company is certified, products can be sold as Fairtrade, but only those produced up to one year before certification or later. Purchase contracts must be binding. In the event of loss of certification, Fairtrade products must be discontinued, even if there are outstanding contracts. In addition, the use of Fairtrade trademark seals requires prior approval from Fairtrade International.
- 3. Production Requirements.** - It is mandatory to inform members about environmental and labor requirements, as well as to establish procedures to monitor and evaluate compliance with these requirements. An Internal Management System (IMS) must be implemented and responsibilities for environmental development must be assigned. In addition, there must be pest control, efficiency in the use of water and energy, and the proper disposal of hazardous waste. Working conditions must comply with non-discrimination, the prohibition of any kind of abuse and violence and forced labour. Children of farmers under the age of 15 are allowed to participate in family work under strict conditions. Finally, employment records and payments must be documented and employment contracts must be guaranteed, in addition to providing safety on the job, including risk training, delivery of protective equipment and first aid.

4. Business and Development Requirements. - Planning and documentation of activities through a Fairtrade Development Plan is required. This plan must be reported annually to the General Assembly. An annual General Assembly should be held to account for this plan and to share the results of the audits with members in an accessible format. Discrimination against members on any grounds is prohibited, and it is urged to develop and implement a gender policy, ensuring that all members are informed about its content.

Ecuaminerales has demonstrated through its diagnosis that it has many of the necessary requirements to join the Fairtrade community and become certified, in addition to having the disposition and willingness to integrate the guidelines required by Fairtrade into its processes, which for the moment have not been achieved. This drives the company to create improvements in the different areas within the same subject of production, trade, business and development. Such improvements benefit the company's members, its strategic partners, customers and suppliers, and its community. All this indicates that adhering to Fairtrade standards and obtaining international certification would be a favorable step for Ecuaminerales.

2.3 Identification of improvements in the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. to obtain Fairtrade and BASC certifications

2.3.1 Traffic lights and problem assessment

In order for the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. to be an eligible candidate to obtain Fairtrade (fair trade) and BASC safety certifications, it must comply with the guidelines and standards instructed by these certification entities. For this purpose, the respective analysis of the standards previously identified through traffic lights has been carried out, based on the diagnosis of the areas, processes, management and policies of the company made in chapter 1. In this way, business compliance will be classified, depending on its nature, which may be: if it is complied with (green), partially complied (yellow), and not complied with (red).

Four phases are established, which are:

1. Identification of standards
2. Traffic lights and level of compliance with standards
3. Assessment of compliance with the standard

4. Standard Compliance Solution




Figure 17
Traffic lights and level of compliance



2.3.2 Compliance with standards for obtaining BASC certification

To obtain Fairtrade certification, the standards that are required of the company are classified, identified and evaluated with a color according to their level of compliance, as shown in the table below:

Table 6
BASC Standards Compliance Analysis

1. Standard	Corporate policy	Personnel management	Physical Security
2. Evaluation			
	Partially compliant	Compliant	Partially compliant

2.3.2.1 Standard: Corporate Policy

After analyzing the data provided by the company itself, it is possible to identify that, with respect to the development of policies, Ecuaminerales does comply with the manual as a guide on the purpose and values of the company for its employees. This is evidenced through their business handbook, where they have detailed information about their mission, vision, values, policies and procedures that they have as a company and that is available to all their employees. However, they are still working on the following required standard:

- 1. Policies and procedures that respond to concerns about the smuggling of goods and narcotics.** - Not compliant. While it is true, the company does have the willingness to work on improving and creating policies that serve as a response to concerns about the smuggling of goods and narcotics. In addition, the applicability of policies that facilitate a totally drug-free business environment is still a possibility. This means that, in order to obtain certification, the company must ensure that anti-narcotics policies are already a guarantee that they are being fully complied with.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

Compliance with the standard required for the corporate policy identifies that it is "partially compliant", this is because greater concern is required on the part of Ecuaminerales if they really want to obtain the certification in question, since, for the moment, one of two points required within this standard is met. This shows that the company can exercise greater control over its commitment to improve its policies.

Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

To fully meet the required standard, the company needs to strengthen its policies through the implementation of more robust anti-narcotics protocols that address the concern of evading smuggling when transporting and producing its goods. This, in addition, must be documented and reflected with evidence to maintain its application in all areas and respect by their employees. In order to achieve this strengthening, the company must provide mandatory training programs to all its personnel, in order to guarantee that all will collaborate with the competent authorities and carry out the respective security monitoring, including advanced detection technologies, administrative training and exhaustive inspections once or twice a week of all those people who are directly or indirectly involved with the cargo.

2.3.2.2 Standard: Personnel Administration

Regarding personnel management, Ecuaminerales is reporting quite well on the hiring of its employees. Well, today they have greater control through inspections and operational controls to protect the health and safety of their workers, contractors, visitors and customers. This is evidenced through the daily records presented to the Human Talent department and

the surveillance cameras that are located at the checkpoint, where the security guard must work 24 hours a day, rotating their shifts.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

Compliance with the standard is considered "Compliant", since the company does have a correct administration about who enters and leaves its facilities, in order to ensure that its company is surrounded by people of integrity, responsibility and efficiency.

Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

Considering that in this section the company does meet the standards required for greater assurance of obtaining the BASC certification, it must be maintained and, as far as possible, continue to improve its operational controls and personnel management policies. This improvement will be evident if monthly evaluations are implemented prepared by the Human Talent department and aimed at all its personnel, which should include specific questions about control protocols and follow-ups, as this will guarantee that Ecuaminerales continues to be recognized for its commitment to integrity, transparency and security in its operations. In the event that a result of no more than 80% is obtained in these evaluations, administrative training programs must be created to reinforce their knowledge and prevent any situation detrimental to the company and/or its employees.

2.3.2.3 Standard: Physical Security

Within this section, the company is implementing new security policies for those who comply with this service and comply with the rules. Their guards work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which ensures greater control over the work areas of Ecuaminerales. Likewise, they have the obligation to control the entry and exit of personnel and people outside the work area. In addition, these responsibilities are added to the supervisors and those responsible for OSH to the follow-up process of those who present suspicion of being under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. However, due to their interest in achieving their BASC certification, there is still a point that must be improved regarding internal security, which is:

- 1. Security procedures for the receipt and delivery of cargo.** - Not compliant. The company is demonstrating its continuous commitment to Ecuaminerales being able

to establish an inspection protocol subject to the safety not only of its cargo but also of its employees and customers.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

Compliance with the level on the latest BASC standard is considered to be "partially compliant ", since it is still estimated that the company will strengthen its standards to ensure that there is no inconvenience or danger when carrying out its operations; however, it is a situation that can be resolved quickly and effectively.





Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

With a firm commitment, documentation and timely execution, Ecuaminerales will be able to overcome any problem regarding operational safety. Given that their compliance is, for the most part, efficient, their security should only be strengthened as a priority in terms of the electrification of their fences to prevent any theft or criminal invasion, increase their security cameras as much as possible and, finally, have advanced technology such as motion sensors within their loading and production areas. It is also important to implement an evaluation and selection system regarding suppliers; so, as a result of its interest in managing its BASC certification process, the company is still beginning to manage this point. In these evaluations, it must be taken into account that there are compliance clauses to avoid any type of crime, and, in case of not complying with the requirements, suppliers will no longer be taken into account for the proportion of raw materials.

2.3.3 Compliance with Fairtrade certification requirements

Likewise, in order to obtain the Fairtrade certificate, the requirements that are demanded of the company are classified, identified and evaluated with a color according to their level of compliance, as shown in the table below:

Table 7
Fairtrade Compliance Analysis

1. Requirement	General Requirements	Trade Requirements	Production Requirements	Business & Development Requirements
2. Evaluation				

Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Compliant	Compliant
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2.3.3.1 General Requirements

Within the Fairtrade General Requirements are qualities of the company such as its transparency, openness to procedures, potential and compliance. These qualities translate into activities such as Ecuaminerales' willingness to accept audits and provide legal, marketing and financial documentation. These guidelines are complied with by the company, since they demonstrate transparency through these documents and attitudes. They also demonstrate potential in the national and international market, marketing in an integral and responsible manner. They are working to meet the needs of smallholder organizations and currently 100% of the Fairtrade certified product is produced by smallholder farmers. The only standard that is not met because it cannot be evidenced with physical documentation is the following:

1. **Definition of Individual Small Producer.** - Small farms are operated and managed by members and their families, indicating that families are directly involved in agricultural activities. Members do not hire workers on an ongoing basis and are self-employed.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

Compliance with the general requirements for Fairtrade is identified as: "Compliant", since the company has established very good policies and, in addition, has a good management of this area.

Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

The guidelines that constitute the General Requirements are identified as very good and it is recommended to maintain a periodic annual control of them to ensure their long-term compliance. They should also continue to work on improvements regarding their relationship with smallholder organizations, seeking to be part of the communities to improve the understanding of their needs, actively involve themselves in such organizations through instructive talks for their members and surveys of farmers and producers who are

involved in the company's production process to ensure that their needs are met, all this so that their mutual needs are met in the best way. They have to work on capturing in physical documentation the working conditions of the farm where the catnip is produced in order to be able to evidence these processes.

2.3.3.2 Trade Requirements

The requirements that Ecuaminerales achieves within the Trade area are those of separation and registration of Fairtrade products, since the product that complies with the Fairtrade guidelines, which is the Catnip, is produced separately from the other products that this company has. In addition, these products also have a complete record of sales and processing evidenced in documentation, such as invoices and delivery notes. The standard that needs corrective actions is as follows:

1. **Binding purchase contracts.** - Signing of binding purchase contracts, in accordance with Fairtrade requirements. This has not yet been achieved in the company, as they continue to work on the terms of purchase with the farmer to improve their working and economic conditions, so there is no current binding contract with the farmer.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

This area of requirements has been identified as "Partially compliant" as the requirements are mostly met. And the process of contracts with the farmer who is the supplier of the product destined for Fairtrade certification is still in process.

Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

In order to fully comply with these requirements, what the company lacks is to establish formal contracts with all farmers and small producers involved in the production processes of Fairtrade products.

2.3.3.3 Production Requirements

Among the production requirements that Ecuaminerales meets to obtain Fairtrade is an internal management system, which correctly manages the production practices that the company has. Within the production processes, efficient practices have been implemented for the use of soil and water and there are rigorous measures for the management of

hazardous waste. The company does not discriminate against its workers and maintains decent employment conditions, in addition to providing its workers with protective equipment and training suitable for its use.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

Within the diagnosis of production requirements, these have been identified as: "Compliant", since the company complies with the necessary measures within these processes to obtain Fairtrade certification. All this is evidenced in the employment contracts that the company has with all its workers and collaborators, the working conditions of the same are clearly stipulated. The company also has safety protocols and protective equipment on the premises. Finally, correct use of soil and water is made, contact with plans for their care and the management of hazardous waste.

Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

These requirements need continuous monitoring every six months to ensure the quality of the production processes and the optimal conditions and safety of the people involved in them. These monitoring can be through surveys of workers to ensure their satisfaction in the work environment. Monitoring of waste management, water and soil use must also continue to be carried out through performance meters, which can demonstrate through quantitative data the good use of these resources.

2.3.3.4 Business and Development Requirements

The company Ecuaminerales complies with the requirements of Business and Development that indicate that an annual general meeting must be held so that the results of audits are shared with the members of the company, where these members have not discriminated and gender policies are applied.

Assessment of compliance with the standard

These requirements have been identified as: "Compliant", since Ecuaminerales demonstrates inclusion and transparency in the area of Business and Development. The company holds an annual general meeting where the company's financial situation is announced, short and long-term work plans are created. The company has workers of

different religions and ethnic groups, among other distinctions that show non-discrimination, in addition to the fact that it does have gender policies within the company.

Corrective actions for compliance with the standard

The requirements in this area are satisfied; however, it is necessary to have an annual periodic control or monitoring by authorities external to the company to ensure continuous compliance with protocol audits. Flocert as an external authority would be in charge of supervising this compliance. On the other hand, good gender policies must be maintained by implementing training for staff regarding good interpersonal relationships in the work environment, non-discrimination and related issues. In addition, implement post-training interviews to assess employee satisfaction with them.

In the event that the company is eligible to obtain both Fairtrade and BASC certifications, a deadline for certification will be available from the date of its affiliation with each organization. In the case of BASC, once the company is formally accepted, it will have (6) months to implement the Control and Safety Management System (SGCS), receive pre-certification audits and prepare its Safety Manual; after receiving pre-certification audits within a period of no more than (3) months of their affiliation, the Certification audit will be carried out within a period of no more than (9) months from their first audit. After this, the company will have a period of one (1) year to be certified when it is already affiliated. Finally, a payment must be made regarding the issuance of the certificate and the right to use the corporate image, which is a value of 225 USD plus VAT for all categories (BASC Azuay Chapter, 2024).

In the same way, the process to obtain Fairtrade certification consists of applying for it through an online application and physical documentation. This application must be accepted for audits by FLOCERT. This process takes between (6) weeks and (3) months. You will then receive a temporary permit to trade if the application is accepted. Accordingly, a FLOCERT auditor will conduct a visit to the company to gather information and verify compliance with Fairtrade standards. Both the facilities, documents and working conditions will be reviewed. This entire process can take between (6) months and a year. If the company is approved by the auditor, the Fairtrade certificate will be provided with a validity of (3) years. During this period, two audits are carried out to ensure continued compliance with the

standards and there could also be unannounced audits. After the three years of validity of the certification, a renewal audit of the certification is necessary (Flocert, 2024).

Regarding the costs of affiliation, for the BASC certification, according to the number of annual sales of the company, the category in which it is located will be taken into account in order to determine the value of the contribution per membership, either annually, quarterly or semi-annually, considering that an initial affiliation value of 400 USD must be paid. In the case of Ecuaminerales and its revenues, it belongs to Category 3, as they receive more than 5,000,001 USD for their sales annually, so their contribution will be 225 USD. Likewise, by its category, the value of the maintenance of the BASC certification will be 200 USD that must be paid per year (BASC Azuay Chapter, 2024). Similarly, Fairtrade has costs within its affiliation process. These are calculated based on the number of Fairtrade products that the company has and the number of additional entities with which the organization collaborates for the production process of these products. Based on the calculation made by FLOCERT's Fairtrade fee calculator, Ecuaminerales must pay 627 USD for the application, in addition to 3425 USD for certification and 1184 USD for processing. These fees cover the estimate that Ecuaminerales must pay for the first year. The second year and subsequent years must pay USD 4609 annually for certification and processing (FLOCERT, 2024).

To conclude with Chapter 2, taking into account the evaluation of compliance with the requirements to obtain both certifications, the costs and the time invested, it is important to cautiously consider the proposed solutions, since, if Ecuaminerales wants to access export markets more easily with its new product, it must consider that these solutions must be aligned with a good export strategy that is correctly related to the business requirements globally. For this reason, in Chapter 3 an export plan for the product in question will be carried out: the Catnip, taking into account its added value, the policies implemented, estimation of resources, compliance with requirements, among other important factors to exercise an optimal opening of this product to the international market.

CHAPTER 3

3. EXPORT PLAN FOR THE "CATNIP" PRODUCT

As mentioned in previous sections, the Company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. is marketing its new line of feline use called "Catnip" nationwide, which due to its potential has been considered an ideal product for export, mainly to the Colombian market, where consumers are characterized by their preference in products aimed at the well-being and care of their pets. Therefore, this chapter will address the export plan for the Catnip product, proposing a solid strategic approach for its introduction internationally, with the aim of achieving a greater positioning of the brand and maximizing its participation in other foreign markets.

3.1 Product Features

Catnip, scientifically known as *Nepeta Cataria*, is a perennial plant belonging to the mint family, native to Europe, Asia and Africa. Its widespread recognition is due to the effects it produces in cats, attributable to a chemical called nepetalactone found in their leaves and stems. Catnip is available in a variety of forms, including dried, sprayed, or integrated into cat toys and scratching posts. This natural product is mostly appreciated for its ability to stimulate and relax cats, making it an essential component in the care and entertainment of these pets. In addition to nepetalactone, catnip includes flavonoids, essential oils, and tannins (Garcia, 2023). The flavonoids present in catnip are antioxidants that can improve the overall health of the plant and potentially that of cats. Essential oils offer additional aromatic and therapeutic properties, while tannins are known for their astringent properties and digestive health benefits.

Thanks to the use and effects of this product, there is a number of benefits for both cats and their owners. Among the most prominent is the mental and physical stimulation it induces in cats, causing them to become more active, run, jump and play. This is especially useful for indoor cats that don't have as many opportunities for physical exercise. In addition, catnip can act as a natural sedative for many cats, helping them reduce stress and anxiety in situations such as vet visits, car trips, or changes in environment. Catnip also encourages independent play, which is beneficial for owners who are not always able to interact with their pets, and helps reduce destructive behaviors due to boredom. Finally, catnip facilitates

training and behavior modification by redirecting cats' attention to scratching posts and toys instead of furniture and electrical cords.

In different countries, Catnip is tailored to diverse local cultural needs and preferences. For example, in Latin America, the United States, and Canada, it is common to find catnip in pet stores and supermarkets, available in forms such as toys, dried leaves, and spray. Cat owners use it to encourage play and reduce stress for their pets. In the United Kingdom and Europe, in addition to the uses mentioned, there has been a increasing interest in growing catnip in home gardens, taking advantage of its insect-repellent properties and aesthetic appeal. In Japan, catnip is especially popular in cat cafes, where it is used to keep felines active and entertained. In addition, it is sold in specialized stores to enrich the environment of cats living in apartments (Munchiecat, n.d.).

3.2 Market research

3.2.1 International Openness

It is important to note that both Ecuador and Colombia are countries with an economy open to international trade, as both are signatories of free trade agreements with various countries and are part of international blocs such as the Andean Community (CAN) and the Pacific Alliance (PA) (National Customs Service of Ecuador, 2024). Because of this, the exchange of products between the two countries is facilitated, thus offering ample opportunities for the export of the Catnip product. However, it is necessary to take into account the advantages and disadvantages that could be involved in carrying out this export process from Ecuador to Colombia, which will be detailed in table 8.

Table 8*Advantages and disadvantages of trade liberalization with Colombia*

Advantages	Disadvantages
Growing demand for pet products in Colombia.	Possible competition with local Catnip producers in Colombia.
Open economy and trade agreements between Ecuador and Colombia that facilitate trade.	Logistics and transportation costs can be high.
Potential to introduce high-quality Catnip to the Colombian market.	Extensive knowledge and research of the Colombian market and its regulations
Possibility of diversifying the offer of products for felines in Colombia.	Risk of Exchange rate fluctuations and economic volatility.

The need to conduct thorough research of the Colombian market and understand import regulations and requirements highlights the importance of planning and due diligence at all stages of the export process. While exporting Catnip from Ecuador to Colombia offers significant opportunities, it also presents challenges that require careful consideration and planning to ensure the long-term success of this process.

3.2.2 Market Analysis

It has been determined that the initial market for the export of "Catnip" will be Colombia. The subheading of this product is 0604 within Trade Map and it represents an income of 165 tons per year as imports to the Colombian market, with Ecuador being the second largest trading partner corresponding to the import of these goods in Colombia (Trade Map, 2024).

In 2022, Ecuadorian exports of goods under subheading 0604, corresponding to foliage, leaves, branches and other parts of plants, without flowers or buds, and herbs, mosses, etc., have been significant, with importing trading partners such as the United States, El Salvador, the Netherlands, Colombia, Qatar, among other countries (Trade Map, 2024). These exports demonstrate the international acceptance of this type of merchandise and

already establish Colombia as an important importer for Ecuador in this area, which makes it a potential destination for Ecuadorian export products such as Catnip.

3.2.3 Competition

Within the Colombian market, there are already products similar to Ecuaminerales' "Catnip", these products are the ones that are established as direct competition. This niche market, which has recently boomed, has several competitors that seek to satisfy the offer and be leaders in the Colombian market. There are several products made apart from Catnip that are already positioned within the market. These are of national production and are distributed throughout the country, but their facilities are located in different locations. In the same way, these products can be found in different presentations, from spray to dehydrated leaves, similar to the Ecuaminerales product.

One of the main competitors that Ecuaminerales will find in this market is the company "Utilideas", the same company that with its product "Catnip Colombia" presents a high positioning and recognition at the national level. This company established in Guarne, Antioquia, markets the product of Catnip Colombia that has similarities with Catnip of Ecuaminerales since it is a product processed directly from Catnip and with a similar production process (Utilideas, 2024).

Figure 18

Catnip Product Colombia



Note: Obtained from Utilideas (2024)

In the same way, another of Ecuaminerales' competitors is "PetSpa", a company established in Cota, Cundinamarca. This company has a product derived from catnip similar to that of Ecuaminerales presented in a 20g plastic package that has the price of 17,196 COP that translates into 4.50 USD. This company markets in the Colombian market with

nationwide distribution through online Market Places such as Mercado Libre and Rappi (PetSpa, 2024).

Figure 19
Catnip Product from PetSpa



Note: Obtained from PetSpa (2024)

Another product recognized in the Colombian market is "Freshly Catnip" from Natural Freshly Laboratories, established in Bogotá. These laboratories specialize in the production of natural pharmaceutical products, among which they have this product derived from Catnip, but which is differentiated by its presentation and form of use. The presentation of this product is in the form of a spray, made up of *Nepeta Cataria* essence. The distribution of the same is given by online means and sale through veterinary clinics, this with 120ml containers at a price of 35800 COP that translates into 9.25 USD (Natural Freshly Laboratories, 2024).

Figure 20
Catnip product from Natural Freshly Laboratories



Note: Obtained from Natural Freshly Laboratories (2024)

It is important to rescue the products that are potential competitors for Catnip from Ecuaminerales since, when seeking to enter this new market, Ecuaminerales must demonstrate its potential for success in these products. Competitors are directly related as major players when it comes to exports to a booming market. The aforementioned products derived from Catnip are considered direct competition and indirect competition is constituted by companies that have similar products that could possibly respond to the same demand as "Catnip". Catnip's indirect competition is made up of products such as Feliway or Zylkene, which are products for calming purposes for cats (Anipet, 2024). These products differ from those derived from Catnip, since they are made with chemical or synthetic materials. These have various forms of administration such as orally, spray, and drops. They are considered more pharmaceutical, but prove that people looking to opt for a more natural and organic option for their pets will prefer "Catnip".

3.2.4 Survey

As part of the market research, a survey has been carried out on potential consumers within the Colombian target market. The objective of the same is to obtain a clear perspective of the knowledge of this product in the Colombian environment, in addition to evaluating if the product destined for export is attractive and would be easy to market in this country. The questions posed seek to identify preferences and consumption habits to verify the knowledge of the Colombian consumer about the use and benefits of Catnip. It has been considered

necessary for the survey to consist of eight questions regarding the same product. It has been carried out through Google Forms, making use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The survey model is represented in Figure 21:

Figure 21
Survey for consumers in the Colombian market

CATNIP

<p>DO YOU HAVE CATS?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>DO YOU KNOW WHAT CATNIP IS?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>HAVE YOU EVER USED PRODUCTS CONTAINING CATNIP FOR YOUR FELINE?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ALWAYS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> SOMETIMES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NEVER</p> <p>HOW OFTEN DO YOU OR WOULD YOU PURCHASE PRODUCTS WITH CATNIP FOR YOUR CAT?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> WEEKLY</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> MONTHLY</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> OCCASIONALLY</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NEVER</p>	<p>WHAT TYPE OF PRODUCTS CONTAINING CATNIP WOULD YOU PREFER TO PURCHASE?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pure Organic Catnip</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Spray de Catnip</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____</p> <p>IN WHAT PRESENTATION WOULD YOU LIKE TO FIND PRODUCTS WITH CATNIP?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Individual packaging</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Jumbo Packaging</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____</p> <p>HOW MUCH WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO PAY FOR CATNIP?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than 19200 COP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Between 19200 COP and 38300 COP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Between 28300 COP and 57500 COP</p> <p>WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THE USE OF PRODUCTS WITH CATNIP TO OTHER CAT OWNERS?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> YES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NO</p>
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3.2.5 Survey results

Figure 22

Survey responses aimed at potential customers in the Colombian market

Market research results

PURPOSE

Have a greater understanding of Catnip knowledge and the preferences of the Colombian market

DATA 2

Of those surveyed with knowledge of Catnip, 27% have used Catnip on their cats.

DATA 4

100% of respondents prefer the presentation of Catnip in individual packaging over the "Jumbo" size

ADDITIONAL

100% of respondents would recommend catnip to other feline owners

DATA 1

More than 78% of respondents have a cat as a pet and half have heard of catnip

DATA 3

60% would be interested in buying Catnip occasionally for their felines, with 71% preferring the presentation of pure Organic Catnip

DATA 5

80% would be willing to pay less than 19,200 COP, which is equivalent to 5 USD, while 20% would be willing to pay between 19,200 COP and 38,300 COP, which is equivalent to 5-10 USD.



As a result of the survey carried out, the interest within the Colombian market in Catnip's product can be noted. While feline owners make up a large percentage of respondents, the Catnip product is not one that has been widely known within this market, but it is possible to determine the potential growth that the Catnip product from Ecuaminerales would have, since although some of the respondents have not used Catnip, they would be willing to obtain this product occasionally for their pets. The preference for pure organic Catnip, such as Ecuaminerales and in individual packages, has also been determined. The price range within which consumers would be willing to pay for this product is adjusted to the prices offered by Ecuaminerales. Finally, it has been collected that this product would be recommended in its entirety, which indicates the good reception and acceptance that this product would receive in the Colombian market.

3.2.6 Authorizations, licenses and certifications

Taking into account the well-being of the consumer, it is important to ensure that the necessary requirements for both internal and external circulation of Catnip are obtained, thus providing greater recognition of the product at a national and international level with respect to the verification of its quality and Ecuaminerales' commitment to animal welfare. Exporting Catnip from Ecuador to Colombia requires various procedures to obtain authorizations, certifications and licenses, such as:

- Process in Ecuador:

Requirements to be an exporter before Customs

It is necessary to have the exporter's registration, to obtain it the following steps must be followed:

1. Be registered with the Internal Revenue Service (SRI), and manage the Single Taxpayer Registry (RUC).
2. Acquire the digital certificate for electronic signature and authentication (token) granted by the Central Bank of Ecuador or in Security Data.
3. Register on the ECUAPASS portal where you can:
 - Update the database.
 - Create username and password.
 - Accept the usage policies.
 - Register the electronic signature.

Export Procedure

To proceed with exporting, the Sworn Declaration of Origin (DJO) is necessary, to obtain it the following steps must be followed:

1. Enter the ECUAPASS.
2. In the Ecuadorian Single Window (VUE) < Certificate of Origin (CO) < Affidavit of Origin (DJO).
3. Prepare the DJO, for this it is necessary:
 - Company identification.
 - Product and its characteristics.
 - Use of customs competitiveness instruments.

- Foreign materials imported or acquired in national territory.
- Costs and factory value.
- Technical characteristics of the product.
- Product applications.
- National Value Added (NPV).
- Selection of scheme or agreement for origin.
- Legal representative.

It is important to note that the company Ecuaminerales is already constituted as a limited company and registered as an exporter with the National Customs Service of Ecuador (SENAE), a fundamental step to ensure the export process of Catnip in accordance with the regulations in force in both Ecuador and Colombia. Similarly, taking into account that it is an agricultural product, it is essential that Ecuaminerales obtains a phytosanitary certification issued by the Agency for Phytosanitary and Zoo sanitary Regulation and Control (Agrocalidad). To obtain this certification, the following steps must be followed:

1. Request for inspection: through the Agrocalidad www.agrocalidad.gob.ec online platform or in local offices, a phytosanitary inspection must be requested. In the request, detailed shipment information must be provided, including product type, volume, and destination.

2. Physical inspection: An Agrocalidad inspector will perform a physical inspection of the catnip to ensure that it complies with the required phytosanitary regulations.

3. Issuance of the certificate: once the inspection is approved, Agrocalidad will issue the Phytosanitary Certificate, which is necessary for export.

Likewise, in order to market Catnip, Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. must register with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), taking into account the following process:

1. Access the National Agriculture Information System (SIPA) of the MAG.

2. Complete the registration form as a producer and exporter of agricultural products.

3. Attach the required documentation (RUC, ID, quality certificates, etc.).

4. Wait for verification and approval of the registration.

Similarly, the Certificate of Origin is necessary to ensure that Catnip is an Ecuadorian product and can benefit from trade agreements between Ecuador and Colombia. To obtain this certificate it is important to carry out the procedures at the Chamber of Commerce of Cuenca, of which Ecuaminerales is a member. First, the company must complete the application for the Certificate of Origin and provide the documents that prove the origin of the product, such as the invoice and production records. In this way, once the documentation has been approved and reviewed, the respective Certificate of Origin will be issued (National Customs Service of Ecuador, 2024).

Additionally, it is noted that Ecuaminerales has the Much Better Ecuador guild, a seal that comes from a private and apolitical organization. With the help of this fingerprint issued by the same corporation Mucho Mejor Ecuador, it is ensured that the production or services are of quality Ecuadorian origin, creating an identity and incentive towards the Ecuadorian entrepreneur (Mucho Mejor Ecuador, 2024). This certificate is valid for one (1) year and its process of obtaining it takes between three and four months.

Permits for internal circulation:

ARCSA

The National Agency for Health Regulation, Control and Surveillance has the mission of "guaranteeing the health of the population through the regulation and control of the quality, safety, efficacy and safety of products for human use and consumption; as well as the hygienic-sanitary conditions of the establishments subject to surveillance and sanitary control" (Ministry of Public Health, 2022).

Procedure:

In order to distribute and market the product, a Health Notification and the certificate of Good Manufacturing Practices are required. The application must be entered at the Ecuadorian Single Window, which consists of the following information: 1) Description of the lot code; 2) Product label or label design; 3) physical and chemical specifications of the packaging material; 4) General description of the product production process (ARCSA, 2018).

INEN

The Ecuadorian Standardization Service indicates that this body "plans, organizes, directs, controls and evaluates the certification and validation services of requirements to support the application of normative documents." In addition, it is mentioned that the INEN Certificate of Conformity can be obtained through 1) Certification by Production Batch, 2) Certification by product sample and 3) "INEN Quality Seal". "My First INEN Certificate" is given to small and medium-sized companies that have a basic system in terms of quality. The INEN Certificate of Conformity with the Quality Seal has been chosen, since it is valid for three years (INEN, 2019).

Procedure according to the Single Citizen Procedure Portal (2022):

1. Fill out the form "Request for Certificate of Conformity with INEN Quality Seal" online.
2. Coordinate the development of the Initial Evaluation, product quality audit, quality management system audit (non-face-to-face).
3. Collaborate in the execution of the initial assessment and audit(s)
4. Receive the utility bill.
5. Deliver the payment of the invoice, sign the agreement and receive the Certificate of Conformity.

Within the international classification of Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) there are different chapters that detail the various regulations and requirements that countries can impose on imported and exported products. These non-tariff measures are designed to protect the health and safety of consumers, the environment and the national economy, which are divided into different categories (UNCTAD, 2019). For this reason, hygiene requirements related to sanitary and phytosanitary conditions have been taken into account to ensure the safety of the product, even if it is a non-food product, as long as there are sanitary and phytosanitary risks. Among the requirements is the following:

A42 - Hygiene Practices in Production Related to Sanitary and Phytosanitary Conditions. - Requirements are established for the cleanliness and maintenance of sanitary conditions in the facilities and equipment used during the manufacture and processing of

products. It also covers good hygiene practices that must be followed by the personnel involved at any stage of production.

Similarly, the design of the packaging and packaging of the product to be exported must be worked on based on the laws and particularities required by the Colombian market, taking into account the following points:

A310 - Labelling requirements. - specify the information directly related to the safety of the products that must be provided to the consumer.

B310 - Labelling Requirements

- Process in Colombia:

In order for Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. to export Catnip to Colombia, it is important that the client/company registers as an importer with the National Tax and Customs Directorate (DIAN), this, in order to carry out a correct import operation in the country and guarantee compliance with tax and customs obligations. To do this, the company must:

- 1. Application for Registration:** the company must submit an application for registration as an exporter to the DIAN, indicating its identification data and other relevant details.
- 2. Required Documentation:** the company must attach the necessary documentation, which may include copies of the company's certificate of existence and legal representation, Single Tax Registry (RUT), and other identification documents.
- 3. Review and approval:** The DIAN will review the application and accompanying documentation to verify the company's eligibility as an exporter. Once approved, the corresponding registration will be issued.

In addition, to export agricultural products such as Catnip to Colombia, Ecuaminerales requires obtaining a Phytosanitary Export permit issued by the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA). This permit guarantees that the product complies with Colombian phytosanitary regulations and is safe to enter the country (ICA, 2024). For this reason, it is essential that the company submits an application for a phytosanitary export permit to the ICA, indicating the details of the product and its origin. Based on this, the ICA will carry out an exhaustive inspection of the product to verify its compliance with Colombian phytosanitary regulations. Once compliance has been verified, the ICA will issue the respective phytosanitary export permit, in this case, of the Catnip to Colombia.

Once these permits and certifications are obtained, Ecuaminerales must complete the Export Declaration before the DIAN of Colombia. To do this, you will need to prepare the necessary documents that include invoices, packing lists, transport documents, phytosanitary certificate of origin issued by Ecuador, among others, required by the Colombian authorities. When indicating the details of the operation to the DIAN, it will review and verify the accuracy and completeness of the documentation to proceed with the clearance of the merchandise (DIAN, 2024).

Table 9

Fees payable for authorizations, licenses and permits in the origin country

Processing and/or certification	Value in USD
Registration as an exporter with SENA	\$250
Phytosanitary certification of Agrocalidad	\$245
Registration with the MAG	\$350
Much Better Ecuador	\$500
INEN and ARCSA	\$250 - \$904
TOTAL	\$2499

Table 10

Fees to be paid for authorizations, licenses and permits in the destination country

Processing and/or certification	Value in USD
Registration with the DIAN	\$47.000
ICA Phytosanitary Export Permit	\$400
Export declaration to the DIAN	\$325
TOTAL	\$47725

Based on the information provided in Table 10, it is necessary to take into account the amounts to be paid for each license, authorization, permit and/or certification, in order to generate effective financial management, evaluation of the economic viability of the export, negotiation of prices and identification of the most favorable conditions for the product and the company itself.

Regarding Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs), it is mentioned that information directly related to the safety and quality of the product for the final consumer must be specified. This includes the product name, ingredients, instructions for use and warnings, as well as the origin of the product. In the case of Catnip, it must be ensured that the label includes:

- The common and scientific name of the plant (Nepeta Cataria).
- Clear indications on its exclusive use for cats.
- Instructions on the recommended amount for use.
- Warnings about the possible stimulant effect on cats.
- Expiration date and storage conditions.
- Manufacturer and country of origin information.

A330 - Packaging and packaging requirements. - Measures that establish the correct or incorrect way of packing and packaging goods or that specify the use of packaging and packaging materials.

B330 - Packaging and Packaging Requirements

The packaging must ensure the integrity and safety of the product, avoiding any deception about the contents. Therefore:

- The packaging must be transparent or have a window that allows the contents to be seen, or it must include a real image of the product.
- Excess empty space within the container that could mislead the actual amount of Catnip contained is not permitted. This empty space is only acceptable if it is justified for reasons of product protection, packaging machinery requirements, product settling during transport or a specific function of the packaging.
- The packaging material must be safe and suitable to maintain the freshness and quality of the Catnip.

B320 - Marking requirements. - measures specifying the information required for transport and customs to be included on the packaging or packaging for the transport or distribution of goods.

In addition, all information necessary for transport and customs must be clearly indicated on the packaging or distribution container. This includes:

- Legible labels with the name of the product and the quantity.
- Information about the origin and destination of the shipment.
- Special operating instructions if necessary.
- Relevant warnings on the contents to ensure that it is not altered or handled illegally during transport.

3.3 Packaging, Boxing, and Labeling

Packaging, boxing, and labeling are three key factors within the export process, where a series of requirements must be taken into account to guarantee the good condition, use, and handling of the product to be marketed (Gioffre, 2024). On the one hand, packaging must be vital, providing the safety and protection of the product; the packaging must fulfill the function of unifying, protecting and distributing the product throughout the logistics chain, while the marking indicates that the packaging carried by the product corresponds to an essential and successful type of operation that complies with the regulatory requirements of the destination country, in this case, Colombia; this being legible, sufficient and discreet on the contents of the package.

The International Trade Centre (ITC), together with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Bank, is responsible for compiling national legislation, such as laws, decrees or regulations. Therefore, in the case of Catnip for felines, the non-tariff measures (NTMs) include technical regulations aimed at guaranteeing the safety and quality of the product itself. However, NTMs increase the costs of trade and force companies to comply with regulations and remain competitive.

Table 11
Product code on Ecuador's tariff list

<i>Code</i>	<i>Description</i>
1211.90.90.00	Plants, parts of plants, seeds, and fruits of species; used mainly in perfumery, medicine, or for uses of insecticides parasiticides or similar, fresh, chilled, frozen or dried, whether or not cut, broken or powdered. 0001, every other.

Note: Obtained from Pudeleco Editores S.A. (2024).

Within the tariff classification of the Republic of Ecuador, the product "Catnip" is found within subheading 1211.90.90.00 which refers to Plants, parts of plants, seeds and fruits of species used mainly in perfumery, medicine or for insecticidal, parasiticide or similar uses, fresh, chilled, frozen or dried, whether or not cut, broken or powdered. This one is under the supplementary code 0001, referencing all the others, distinguishing itself from cannabis, which has another supplementary code. (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 2021).

3.3.1 Labeling

In accordance with the provisions of Colombian regulation, the label must include clear and attractive information that allows consumers to quickly identify the product and its main characteristics.

- **Front labeling:**

1. Product Name
2. Scientific name of the plant
3. Net weight
4. Product Image
5. Product Use: "Cat Only."
6. Origin: "product of Ecuador"
7. Brand logo

- **Subsequent labeling:**

The back label must contain detailed information that meets legal requirements and provides the consumer with important information about the product, such as:

1. Product description, benefits.
2. Ingredients: "100% Nepeta Cataria"
3. Directions for use
4. Warnings: "Keep out of reach of children. Exclusive use for animals. Not intended for human consumption."
5. Expiration Date
6. Storage conditions: "store in a cool, dry place."
7. Manufacturer information: name, address and contact of the manufacturer in Ecuador.

8. Barcode
9. Sanitary Registration Number: Issued by the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA).

In Figure 23, you can see the prototype of the ideal model on the front and back labeling for its proper export to the Colombian market. Although this product is not the one that belongs to Ecuaminerales, it serves as an example for the company to prepare its labeling presentation in a similar way with its own brand and image, based on the terms and requirements within the Colombian market.

Figure 23
Catnip Front and Back Labeling Model



Note: Obtained from Fancy Pets (2024)

3.3.2 Packaging Quality

Quality is consolidated as a competitive tool par excellence, every day the market is moving towards quality, interposing the concept of price. Therefore, in order to have greater protection and preservation of Catnip, Ecuaminerales has chosen to make use of a type of bag known as "doypack". This type of packaging is very popular for food products and other consumer goods due to its ability to stand upright on shelves, offering good visibility of the product. In addition, it offers advantages such as being resealable (with ziplock closure), durable and providing a good protective barrier for sensitive products such as Catnip.

3.3.3 Boxing

When choosing the appropriate packaging for a given product, the boxing system and the review of the types of products and export packaging must be taken into account. For this reason, the classification of "Catnip" as a **self-supporting** product has been recognized, as it can withstand stacking as it is a product of good resistance.

- Palletizing helps ensure that the goods are kept stored in the warehouse, and in turn, ensures their arrival at the final delivery destination. As a result, the product will be palletized in a way that it cannot be damaged.
- Maximum storage of 60 packages.
- It must be palletized in such a way that the boxes must be tied together.
- It must contain the corresponding stamps.

Although the use of pallets is not absolutely necessary due to the nature of land transport, including them in the packaging is a viable option that is included in this export plan, given the improvement in ease of handling and mobility of goods that this addition can provide. The quality of the pallets to be used must be under the ISPM-15 Standard, which helps to avoid any phytosanitary problems. The pallet to be used will be the light wooden pallet, with a load capacity of up to 400 kilograms. The dimensions of the pallet are 1200x800 (110 to approximately 125 mm in height). Therefore, its load capacity makes it the most appropriate for this type of light goods. In addition, the pallet to be used will be the one with 4 entrances, because in them, the windows allow the penetration of the forklift's nails on the 4 sides of the pallet, which makes it possible to load them on vehicles of all types, as they can be placed both front and side.

Figure 24
Wooden pallet 1200x800



Note: Obtained from Rotomshop (2024)

In terms of boxing, the use of corrugated cardboard boxes has been considered ideal, which adapt easily to all modes of transport. In addition, they are ideal for transporting light and fragile loads. It is also environmentally friendly, as it is a recyclable and organic material. To do this, the thickness of the cardboard has been taken into account so that the goods can be transported and handled in the best way.

Figure 25
Corrugated box



Note: Obtained from Cartopel (2024).

3.3.4 Labeling

The company Ecuaminerales has the clear knowledge that every product must be carefully marked, otherwise it runs the risk of not reaching its destination. Therefore, according to the demands of the Colombian market, the marking will have the following characteristics:

- Dispatcher's Brand
- Brand Name
- Country of origin
- Driving pictograms, in this case:

Figure 26
Icon 1



Note: Obtained from ISO (2024).

This side up: Indicating the correct vertical position of the transport package. (ISO 7000 - 0623, price: \$30.00)

Figure 27
Icon 2



Note: Obtained from ISO (2024).

Protect yourself from rain. Indicating that the packaging being transported must be kept away from rain or dry. (ISO 7000 - 0626, price: \$170.00)

- Recipient, destination and order number.
- Port of entry.
- Number of packages and box size.
- Weight indication.

Figure 28
Marking prototype



Note: Adapted from Cartopel (2024).

3.3.5 Packaging and Packaging Costs

To better understand and exercise correct control over the amount of Catnip packaging, pallets and boxes that will be exported to the Colombian market and will fit inside a shared 20-foot container, volume, palletization and containerization calculations have been made, respectively.

Table 12
Calculating Packaging and Packaging Costs

Packaging and Packaging Costs				
Description	Quantity	/ Unit	of Unit Cost	Total monthly cost
	monthly	measure		
Plastic packaging with label	4000	(20g)	\$0,13	\$520
Total primary Packaging				\$2880
Packing				
Corrugated cardboard boxes	16		\$0,35 wholesale	\$6
Pallets	1		\$8,99 wholesale	\$9
Marking	2 icons		\$155	\$155
Total packaging				\$170
Total packing + packing, monthly				\$3050

3.4 FCA International Logistics

3.4.1 Pre-transport stages

The Export Customs Declaration (DAE) is made to the National Customs Service of Ecuador (SENAE) in the ECUAPASS System, specifying the information of the product to be exported. This information must be submitted by the exporter or declarant. The DAE must include the data of the exporter or declarant, the importer, the description of the goods by invoice item, the destination of the cargo, the quantities, the weight and other relative data

of the goods. In this process, the exporter together with the customs agent must submit some digital documents which are the original commercial invoice, the prior authorizations (when necessary) and the packing list. As soon as the DAE is accepted, the merchandise can enter the Primary Zone (SENAE, 2016).

3.4.2 Post-transport stage

This phase has to be carried out within 30 days after the shipment and consists of the regularization of the DAE. Here the exporter confirms to the customs authority that the data entered is definitive and the status of the declaration is changed to "Regularized". The documents required for this process are the copy of the commercial invoice, the copy of the packing list, the copy of the certificate of origin and non-negotiable copies of the multimodal transport documents (SENAE, 2016).

3.4.3 Calculation of the FCA value:

The merchandise starts from the farm located in Déleg, this part with an Ex-works price of USD \$24,197.00; result of the sum of the costs of authorizations, licenses and certificates, price that has been divided for twelve, production costs, packaging and the profit corresponding to 50.09% of the cost of production (USD \$9,050.00). It is transported by land with the transport company subcontracted by Ecuaminerales to the dry port of Tulcán. The cost of transportation is USD \$100.00, added to the border crossing cost of (\$50). This journey takes approximately 12 to 14 hours. Other costs that have to be considered are clearance expenses and customs duties (USD \$30.00). Finally, the cost of transportation from the dry port of Tulcán to the agreed delivery point of the merchandise in Ipiales, Colombia; this has the cost of USD \$40.00. All this indicates an FCA USD value of \$24,417.00. These costs of the processes required for Catnip to be exported with the FCA incoterm have been corroborated by a registered customs broker.

Table 13
Calculation of the FCA value

INCOTERM	DESCRIPTION OF EXPENSES	MONTHLY INCOTERM VALUE IN USD
	PRODUCTION COSTS	6.000,00
	PACKING, BOXING AND LABELING	3.050,00
	PRODUCTION COST	9.050,00
	AUTHORIZATIONS, LICENSES AND CERTIFICATES	4.187,00
	UTILITY 54.8%	10.960,00
EXW=	EX-WORKS	24,197,00
	GROUND TRANSPORTATION	100,00
	BORDER CROSSING	50,00
	CUSTOMS DUTIES	30,00
	TRANSPORT TO THE DELIVERY POINT	40,00
FCA=	FREE CARRIER	24.417,00

Considering that the unit production cost is USD \$2.26, it has been established that the selling price of the product per unit will be USD \$5.00. This would determine that they will obtain a profit of 54.8%.

Table 14
Catnip Gain

PRODUCTION COST	SALE PRICE	WIN PERCENTAGE
2,26	5,00	54,8%

Once the costs and prices are clear, the invoice can be generated for the buyer and distributor in Colombia. This trade document specifies the unit and total cost of the product along with any additional transportation charges. From this, the values of the merchandise can be verified as they were marketed and the verification and specification of the purchase-sale is issued, which is the Packing List, which is a descriptive list of the merchandise.

3.5 Negotiation

Within the negotiation section, the distribution that Catnip will have in Colombia and the contract that Ecuaminerales will have with a company from this country to be in charge of storage and local sales are considered. For this reason, the supermarket chain "Éxito" has been selected as a commercial partner in Colombia. This chain already has great recognition

at the national level and a large number of points of sale. It stands out for its high degree of competition and also for the wide range of imported products they have. Another notable area of this corporation is that they support sustainable trade and in the textile area they have chosen to work with thousands of peasants, producers and textile producers to generate decent jobs and better conditions for these people (Grupo Éxito, 2024). Values such as these are those it shares with Ecuaminerales and for this reason, it is considered that "Catnip" would position itself in the market that we seek to satisfy through this negotiation.

Figure 29

Sample Export Contract

<p style="text-align: center;">INTERNATIONAL SALES CONTRACT</p> <p>This PURCHASE-SALE contract is entered into, on the one hand, by the company "ECUAMINERALES CIA. LTDA." represented in this act by xxxxxxx and by the other company "ÉXITO" represented by xxxxxxx, who hereinafter will be referred to as "The Seller" and "The Buyer" respectively, in accordance with the following declarations and clauses.</p> <p>DECLARATIONS</p> <p>DECLARES "THE SELLER"</p> <p>I. That it is a legally constituted company under the laws of the Republic of Ecuador, as stated in deed 12,663.</p> <p>II. That within the social objective are, among other activities, the manufacture, production and marketing of CATNIP.</p> <p>III. That it has the capacity, knowledge, experience and qualified personnel to carry out these activities referred to in the foregoing declaration.</p> <p>IV. That Mr . xxxxxxx is its legitimate representative and, consequently, is duly authorized to sign this instrument and bind its representative under the terms thereof.</p> <p>V. That he has his domicile in the city of CUENCA, AZUAY, ECUADOR, which he indicates for all legal purposes that may be applicable.</p> <p>DECLARES "THE BUYER"</p> <p>I. That it is a company incorporated in accordance with the laws of ECUADOR and that it is dedicated to, among other activities, the manufacture, production and marketing of the products referred to in declaration II of "The SELLER".</p> <p>II. That he knows the characteristics and specifications of the products subject to this contract.</p> <p>III. That Mr. xxxxxx is its legitimate representative and is authorized to sign the contract.</p>

IV. That it has its domicile in **COLOMBIA, BOGOTÁ**, which it indicates for all legal purposes that may be applicable.

BOTH PARTIES DECLARE:

That they have an interest in carrying out the commercial operations referred to in this contract, in accordance with the above declarations and thus in accordance with the following:

CLAUSES:

FIRST: OBJECT OF THE CONTRACT. – By means of this instrument, "The SELLER" is obliged to sell and "The BUYER" to acquire 4000 UNITS OF 20G PER MONTH, from CATNIP.

SECOND: PRICE. – The price of the products subject to this contract that "The BUYER" agrees to pay will be the amount of 20,000 U.S. DOLLARS, INCOTERMS "FCA" dry port of TULCÁN. Both parties undertake to renegotiate the previously agreed price, when it is affected by variations in the international market or by extreme economic, political and social conditions in the country of origin or destination, to the detriment of the parties.

THIRD: FORM OF PAYMENT. - "The BUYER" undertakes to pay to "THE SELLER" the price agreed in the previous clause, by **BANK CONSIGNMENT TO ACCOUNT NUMBER 2304046332 OF BANCO DEL ECUADOR**, UPON DELIVERY OF THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS: Invoice, B/L, etc. In accordance with the provisions of the previous paragraph, "The buyer" undertakes to carry out the corresponding procedures, so that the necessary procedures are carried out for its cancellation under the conditions indicated. The expenses arising from the opening and handling of the letter of credit or agreed payment system shall be borne by "The Buyer".

FOURTH: PACKAGING AND PACKAGING OF GOODS. - The seller" undertakes to deliver the goods subject to this contract, in the place indicated in the second clause, complying with the following specifications: **PACKED IN CORRUGATED CARDBOARD BOXES.**

FIFTH: DELIVERY DATE. - "The seller" undertakes to deliver the goods referred to in this contract within 90 days, counted from the date of written confirmation of the order and agreeing on the payment method provided for in the third clause.

SIXTH: PATENTS AND TRADEMARKS. - "The seller" declares and "The buyer" acknowledges that the products subject to this contract are duly registered under the patent or property registration No XXXX or the XXXX

Trademark before the COLOMBIAN INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY or INVIMA or ICA as the case may be. Likewise, "The Buyer" undertakes to notify the "Seller", as soon as it becomes aware, of any violation or improper use of said patent or trademark, so that "The Seller" can exercise the rights that legally correspond to it.

SEVENTH: VALIDITY OF THE CONTRACT. - Both parties agree that once "The seller" has delivered all the merchandise agreed upon in the first clause, and "The buyer" has complied with each of the obligations stipulated in this instrument, it is terminated.

EIGHTH: TERMINATION FOR NON-COMPLIANCE. - Both parties may terminate this contract in the event that one of them fails to comply with its obligations and refrains from taking necessary measures to remedy the breach within 10 days following the notice, notification or requirement that the other party proceed to repair the breach in question. The party exercising its right to rescission must give notice to the other party after the term referred to in the previous paragraph has expired.

NINTH: INSOLVENCY. - Both parties may terminate this contract, in advance and without the need for a prior judicial declaration in the event that one of them is declared bankrupt, suspension of payments, bankruptcy or any other type of insolvency.

TENTH: SUBSISTENCE OF THE OBLIGATIONS. - The rescission or termination of this contract does not affect in any way the validity and enforceability of the obligations previously contracted, or of those already formed that, by their nature or provision of the law, or by the will of the parties, must be deferred to a later date, consequently, the parties may demand even after the rescission or termination of the contract the fulfillment of these obligations.

ELEVENTH: ASSIGNMENT OF RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS. - Neither of the parties may assign or transfer all or part of the rights or obligations arising from this contract, unless previously agreed in writing.

Note: Adapted from Studocu (n.d.).

Commercial Invoice:

Table 15

Commercial Invoice Example

ECUAMINERALES CIA. LTDA				
Wednesday. Machangara River, Cuenca				
Cuenca, Ecuador				
(+593) (07) 290-1195				
Purchase Order	Invoice No.		Invoice to:	Grupo Éxito
5824-6358	82146			
Import License	Invoice Date			Bogota, Colombia
5638	25-July-2024			
Terms of Payment		Ship to:	Forwarding Agent	
Bank Transaction			ICONTAINERS	
International Markings		VIA:	Ground Freight	
			FCA Ipiales	
Country of Origin: ECUADOR				
QUANTITY	PART NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL PRICE
			\$ USD	\$ USD
4.000	1211.90.90.00	Catnip	5,00	20.000,00
Additional Charges:				
		PRICE EXW	24,197.00	
		TOTAL FCA	24.417,00	
Total: 4.000 bags				
		TOTAL USD \$		24.417,00
Export License	N° 23658			
Expires:	25-July-2025			
Signature:	X			
	Export Manager			

In order to proceed with the negotiation, Ecuaminerales and Grupo Éxito must have a legal contract that stipulates the conditions of sale, logistics, distribution, and the nature of the different areas of the negotiation. In the same way, after making the contract, an invoice

must be issued detailing the description of the merchandise, prices and quantities. These documents should be similar to those presented in Figure 29 and Table 15.

CHAPTER 4

4. CONCLUSIONS

The objectives set for this study have been satisfactorily met, since it has been possible to identify the preparation of the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. for its possible application to BASC and Fairtrade certifications. Therefore, it is concluded that Ecuaminerales is suitable to start its process of obtaining Fairtrade and BASC certifications. The company has demonstrated through documentation and legal evidence that it meets some of the standards for obtaining such certifications. Despite this, through the use of the traffic light evaluation, it has been specifically determined that in order to obtain the Business Alliance for Secure Commerce (BASC) certification, Ecuaminerales meets one of three necessary requirements, the one it meets corresponding to the Personnel Administration area. Regarding Fairtrade certification, the company meets two of four requirements, corresponding to the Production Requirements and Business and Development Requirements.

As for the BASC standards, Ecuaminerales does comply with the manual as a guide on the company's purpose and values for its employees. However, there are certain shortcomings with respect to the follow-up of anti-smuggling policies and procedures of goods and narcotics. Likewise, the company has a correct administration about who enters and leaves its facilities, in order to ensure that your company is surrounded by people of integrity, responsibility and efficiency. In this way, they have also managed to implement new safety policies for those who comply with this service and comply with the rules, thus demonstrating their commitment to Ecuaminerales being able to establish a correct security procedure for the receipt and delivery of cargo that is not yet in force, as well as the inspection of its employees and customers.

On the other hand, taking into account the General Requirements for Fairtrade, the company must still maintain a good relationship with smallholder organizations, and thus be part of the communities to improve the understanding of their needs, taking into account that it is a factor that is not currently met. Regarding the Trade Requirements, the company complies with the complete record of sales evidenced in documentation for the sale of its products; However, it is essential that binding purchase contracts are signed, this because the company is still working on the possibility of signing a purchase contract with the farmer.

Regarding the Production Requirements, it is evidenced by documentation that Ecuaminerales complies with the safety measures and protocols in its facilities. Finally, in the Business and Development Requirements, the company has demonstrated its inclusiveness and transparency in the area.

Ecuaminerales' current compliance with these requirements indicates the level of commitment that the company has with the values that these certifications ensure and guarantees a go-ahead for the path towards obtaining these certifications. However, at the moment the company is not suitable to make the respective certification application, since there are still some standards that partially comply and present points in which the company itself must work to comply in its entirety internally and externally. Likewise, the product "Catnip" has shown great potential in the Colombian market. This product is easy to carry out customs procedures, since it has minimal restrictions and thanks to the trade facilitation offered by the Andean Community of Nations to its members, Colombia has established itself as the best destination for the export of "Catnip". In turn, Ecuaminerales, which already has experience in exports to this country, has a reference and starting point to proceed with this plan.

In the same way, the company has the necessary productive capacity to carry out these exports. Despite the fact that Catnip is produced by a small farmer, it has been possible to analyze its production, demonstrating that the processes are suitable for export. The finished product falls within both Ecuadorian and Colombian quality standards, with the ability to be certified by the Ecuadorian Standardization Service (INEN), the National Agency for Sanitary Regulation, Control and Surveillance (ARCSA) and the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA). After the realization of the export plan of the same, the preparation of interviews and survey towards Colombia, as well as market research, it has been concluded that Ecuaminerales could apply this export plan as one that can be carried out and materialized successfully within the company's processes.

The growing demand by Colombian consumers for this product has shown that Ecuaminerales has a great opportunity to capitalize through it. With a solid marketing strategy, efficient distribution channels and a team always ready for good practices, Ecuaminerales could successfully carry out the export plan and enter the lucrative Colombian market. The successful implementation of this project would not only generate additional revenue for the company, but also strengthen its international presence and

positioning as a leader in high-quality natural products. While it is true, Colombia represents an attractive market to market the Catnip product, this is due to its growing middle class and the trend towards the care and well-being of pets. However, Ecuaminerales faces strong competition, as there are established local and international brands that offer products similar to this one.

For its part, the supermarket chain "Éxito" has a solid position in the Colombian market, it is dedicated to strengthening savings opportunities with campaigns, special promotions and, with it, competitive prices; therefore, access to quality products at an affordable price gives Catnip a greater opportunity to be recognized and generate greater sales within the Colombian market. In a globalized and highly competitive world, exporting products to new international markets represents both significant opportunities and challenges; despite this, Colombia is emerging as an attractive destination for this type of product. In addition, the presence of a supermarket chain recognized and positioned as Éxito, could facilitate access to a wide segment of consumers interested in acquiring Catnip for the benefit of their pets.

To conclude, Ecuaminerales' decision to assume the risk of exporting Catnip from Ecuador to Colombia depends on the company's ability to mitigate any challenge, take advantage of opportunities and apply the corrective actions provided. From what has been analyzed in this research work, Ecuaminerales has these response capabilities and is able to proceed. In addition, by having access to a large supermarket, different alliances can be created that facilitate local distribution, thus taking advantage of the existing distribution networks and marketing channels in the destination country. All this taking advantage of existing advantages such as the current participation in the Andean Community of both countries, among other factors, which make this export something favorable for the company and that it would be worth it for them to have the opportunity to explore. Likewise, the opportunity for the company to become certified in Fairtrade and BASC would favor it in a way that improves its competitive position in the market, providing confidence and support to its products and operations. The application to its certification could be made if Ecuaminerales takes this titling work and its recommendations as support, benefiting considerably by complementing these international certifications with the export of products such as Catnip. Finally, it can be said that this work has aimed at exhaustive research, with the expectation that its findings will materialize and can be applied in practice.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendation established for the company is to implement more rigorous security and anti-narcotics protocols to protect the cargo during transportation. These protocols must be documented and reflected with evidence to ensure that they are fully complied with and that they are respected by the same personnel.

While the security guard exercises control over people entering and leaving the institution, inspections of all personnel should also be carried out. This in order to have greater control not only over the cargo to be transported, but also over possible infractions or inappropriate conduct that could put internal security at risk.

In order to carry out a successful export plan, it is important that the relationship between the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda. and the Catnip farmer is strengthened. Therefore, the agreement between both parties must be established through the validity of an employment contract, which allows the work of the producer to be visible and recognized in a more notorious way in the exported product.

In order to exercise a correct export plan to Colombia, it is recommended that Ecuaminerales fully comply with the requirements established by Colombian legislation and by the institutions that certify the company itself.

It is recommended that the company carefully examine each stage of the logistics process within the organization, since all phases are interconnected. If one of them fails, it could trigger a series of inconveniences in the subsequent processes that take place sequentially, leading to delays in the delivery of the product to the end customer.

It is crucial that the company works on establishing strategic alliances with distributors that help it optimize its production and distribution processes, as well as reduce costs and improve its competitiveness.

Finally, it is recommended that the company Ecuaminerales Cia. Ltda., examine and carry out all the corrective actions assigned in the traffic light, since they have been described based on their shortcomings.

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