

FAIR TRADE MYTHS

- Myth:** The extra we pay for Fairtrade goods just gets siphoned off by the supermarkets.

Reality: The cost of Fairtrade goods in the supermarket does not affect the price that the producers receive. The Fairtrade mark guarantees that the farmers receive a fair price for their goods, as well as a social premium, which is an extra payment made to the producer group to be spent on projects which will benefit the community such as environmental improvements, crop storage facilities and schools and sports facilities for local children.
- Myth:** Fair trade takes away from local production.

Reality: We can grow some crops successfully in Scotland, such as oats, wheat, and potatoes. However our climate does not support the farming of coffee, tea or bananas; pineapples, cocoa or lemons; grapes for wine or drying for raisins. We depend on trading with other nations for our varied diet. Yes, *do* buy local where you can, but when you buy traded goods from other countries, make sure that the producers are given a fair deal by choosing Fairtrade goods where you can.
- Myth:** Fairtrade products are always more expensive.

Reality: As the popularity of Fairtrade goods has increased, so the range of goods available has increased. Some Fairtrade goods are luxury brands, and some are 'basic' brands, which can be less expensive than non-Fairtrade alternatives. Whatever the price, if the product carries the Fairtrade mark, the producer has been guaranteed a fair price.
- Myth:** Fair trade competes with other campaigns e.g. organic.

Reality: Fairtrade standards have always embodied principles to ensure that environmentally unsustainable practices are avoided and they require producers to ensure that they protect the natural environment and make environmental protection a part of farm management. Some products such as cotton and coffee are both Fairtrade and organic. This means that the producers are receiving the guaranteed Fairtrade price, as well as the social premium *and* an organic premium. So by buying Fairtrade and organic, the producer benefits by receiving extra money to cover the cost of production and protecting the environment.
- Myth:** Fair trade distorts the free market.

Reality: Farmers such as Gerardo Arias Camacho feel frustration with free market economists who tell him to diversify into other crops if the price of coffee falls below the price of production.¹ The reality on the ground is that his land is perfect for growing coffee, but is unsuitable for fruit or vegetable production and too steep for commercial ranching.

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http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/producers/coffee/coocafe_coffee_cooperative_nicaragua/gerardo_arias_camacho.aspx accessed on 09.12.09

The Adam Smith Institute, a think-tank for free market economists, published a report in 2008 to coincide with Fairtrade Fortnight. The report made some incorrect claims in the report that were countered by the Fairtrade Foundation. Find the response at http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/feb_2008/response_to_adam_smith_institute_report.aspx

6. **Myth:** Fair trade distracts from the need for fairer international trade rules.
Reality: Buying Fairtrade products makes a positive difference to producers in the developing world *today*. We should still be working for political change to make trade fair for all the world's people. There is no conflict between campaigning and buying Fairtrade.

7. **Myth:** Buying Fairtrade products contributes to climate change as they are flown in from abroad.
Reality: The vast majority of Fairtrade products are transported into the UK by ship. In 2005, Fairtrade roses were the only certified product to be regularly flown into the UK and they accounted for just 0.8% (by weight) of all Fairtrade products. Of all Africa's export of fruit and vegetables, 90% travels by ship, which has the lowest per tonne impacts of any transport mode.²

8. **Myth:** Fruit and vegetables grown locally have a smaller carbon footprint than Fairtrade products sourced from abroad.
Reality: The distance a product has travelled is often not significant in terms of a product's total life-cycle emissions. A recent analysis of food products in the United States showed that 89% of total emissions were associated with production, and only 11% with transport. Studies have shown that flowers grown in Europe can use far more energy than flowers grown in developing countries with a more suitable climate. One study showed that this could be the case even after taking air freight into account.
Perhaps more relevant than worrying about 'food miles' is calculating the total carbon footprint of a product. This means capturing the full impact of a product, including inputs, production, and transportation. A study commissioned by Swiss supermarkets found that organic Fairtrade cane sugar from Paraguay has a 40% smaller carbon footprint than sugar made from sugar beet in Switzerland itself. Paraguayan sugar is cultivated without artificial fertilizers and pesticide, and without heavily polluting machines. Furthermore, the sugarcane waste can also be re-used to generate energy.³

9. **Myth:** Stopping all airfreighted food imports is required to help the UK move towards a low carbon society.
Reality: Air freight accounts for only 0.3% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions against the 8% associated with meat and dairy production. Of all UK food mile emissions, freight transport on UK roads makes up 85%, and exploring ways to reduce this could be a much more significant contribution to emissions reduction, without harming poor country interests. With regards to Fairtrade alone, the Foundation estimated that in 2005, the international

² from

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2009/c/climate_report_final.pdf
section 5.1 accessed on 09.12.09

³ *ibid.* section 5.1

transportation of all Fairtrade products to the UK was responsible for just 0.03% of UK food mile emissions, and 0.001% of total UK emissions.⁴

10. **Myth:** Fair trade is for the affluent middle classes only.

Reality: Most people buy coffee, chocolate and bananas regularly. Making a small change by swapping one of these items for a Fairtrade brand may cost as little as a few pence a week, which is within most family budgets, not just the affluent middle class!

11. **Myth:** Fair trade encourages our over-consumption.

Reality: Do you see tea and coffee as basic or a luxury? Some of our basic goods such as tea, coffee, fresh and dried fruit are available with the Fairtrade mark. There are also luxury items available such as cookies, chocolate, wine, sugar and honey. It is up to us to buy what we need, it is not the responsibility of the poorest people in the world to police our greed.

⁴ from

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2009/c/climate_report_final.pdf
section 5.1 accessed on 09.12.09