Fair Trade and the Environment

Land Conservation: Soil, Water, and Forests

The Fair Trade Certified™ label ensures strict land conservation regulations that promote water conservation, reforestation, species diversity, and environmental education. The following guidelines have been established by the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) and its domestic body, TransFair USA, for use by producers. All farmer cooperatives that produce Fair Trade Certified™ products have designed and implemented an internal cooperative plan for the monitoring of these standards.

Fair Trade Certified™ environmental standards include:

Land and Soil

- A plan should be developed to ensure that the current and projected use of land is sustainable from an ecological, social, and economic perspective.
- Records are maintained that include land usage, agricultural diversity, crop rotation, and water usage.
- Set up an education and control system to prevent soil erosion caused by wind, water, and human or animal impact.
- Producers' adoption of basic principles to enhance fertility and soil structure, such as tillage, irrigation, and crop rotation, with a system for monitoring and evaluating compliance.
- Intercropping, the practice of planting a variety of crops in one area, is encouraged. Cultivation and harvesting should be done in a manner to maintain diversity of species.
- Fire is only used to clear or prepare land when it is the preferred ecological option.

Water

- Maintenance of buffer zones to protect water bodies, watershed recharge areas, virgin forests, and/or other legally protected areas and to protect agricultural plots from potentially polluting sources such as roads.
- Producers must use irrigation to minimize water consumption—e.g., drip irrigation or water application direct to the root zone.

Forests

- New planting in virgin forests is prohibited.
- Cultivated areas within the farm should be regenerated with natural flora and fauna to promote agricultural diversification.
- Producers cannot gather material from protected areas. Material from wild, uncultivated areas must be gathered in a sustainable manner to ensure long-term viability of native species.

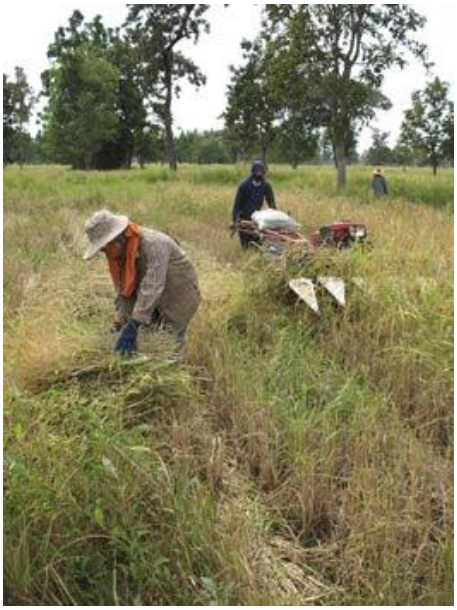
What does this mean on the ground?

Let's take a look at the Rice Fund, a Fair Trade project in Surin, Thailand.

Profile and photograph provided by FLO.

This 45-member rice cooperative is located in the northeastern part of Thailand. Fair Trade has not only benefited the co-op members but also the surrounding environment.

Extra income provided by the Fair Trade certification is used to support educational, cultural, and environmental projects in the area, such as planting trees in the community forest. During weekends, children plant trees and learn how to care for their environment. The forest in turn benefits the community by providing wood, fruit, and other crops.



Kanya Osori describes the impact that diversification of crops has had on farmers' lives. As a result of environmental education through Fair Trade, Kanya is now not only growing rice, but also organic peanuts and various fruit and vegetables which she sells on the local market. The extra earnings have drastically benefited Kanya's financial situation. "With this extra money I am able to send my two daughters to high school and plan for unforeseen circumstances, something impossible before" says Kanya.

Diversification does not only have a financial impact on the lives of members' families, it also allows them to stay together in the village. In the past, since the rice farmers depended on only one crop a year, most of the families had to go to the city during the dry season to earn extra money. This meant that entire families would be separated for half of the year. "Crop diversification and organic farming now allow us to work in our villages the whole year round and give us the chance to feed ourselves and keep our families together" adds Kanya.

Through Fair Trade, the Rice Fund Surin members are not dependent on fluctuating rice prices any longer; they are now exporting directly and have a certain degree of stability and independence. Being in charge of their own lives and destiny, they are not obliged to live for the moment any longer but can consciously plan for their own and the following generations' future.

Fair Trade and the Environment

Chemical Use: Organic Conversion, Agrochemicals, and GMOs

The Fair Trade Certified™ label ensures strict environmental regulations that promote organic conversion by prohibiting genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and most agrochemicals. The following guidelines have been established by the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) and its domestic body, TransFair USA, for use by producers. All farmer cooperatives that produce Fair Trade Certified™ products have designed and implemented an internal cooperative plan for the monitoring of these standards.

Fair Trade Certified™ environmental standards include:

Organic Conversion

- Producers must present a plan for converting farming practices to follow more organic standards.
- The recycling of resources, such as composting and mulching, must be practiced whenever possible and in the most sustainable ways.
- Organic waste that is contaminated with chemicals must be disposed of safely and away from other crops, water, and livestock.

Agrochemicals

- Agrochemicals on the FLO Prohibited List may not be used, sold, handled, or distributed by the producer organization.
- Agrochemicals are used only when absolutely necessary; producer organizations must continuously work to reduce their use and toxicity level.
- The use of permitted herbicides must be accompanied by written evidence showing that there is no available alternative treatment, as well as by a plan to reduce or eliminate the need to use permitted herbicides in the future as much as possible.
- Producers must safely store and dispose of all agrochemicals and their containers and cannot air-spray agrochemicals over buffer zones, residential areas, or rivers and other significant water sources.
- Agrochemicals are only applied by persons who take part in an education and control system where producers are educated on health effects and proper application.
- A written record is kept of all agrochemicals purchased, used and the method of disposal.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

- Producers cannot grow GMOs or use products derived from GMOs in primary production or processing.
- Producers must monitor possible GMO usage by neighbors and take additional precautions to protect their crops or seeds from contamination.

What does this mean on the ground?

Let's take a look at the Oromia Coffee Cooperative in Ethiopia.

Profile and photograph provided by FLO.

Oromia's members are indigenous farmers from the rainforest of south-west Ethiopia, growing coffee at altitudes of 1,500 to 2,000 metres. Eleven of Oromia's 74 cooperatives have been Fair Trade certified since May 2000. The 8,963-member cooperative produces 3,000 tons of coffee a year in a country where coffee accounts for 65% of the total exports and fifteen million people depend on coffee for their livelihoods.

The coffee produced at Oromia is cultivated through organic and chemical-free farming. As Tadesse, Oromia's general manager explains, the coffee bushes are interspersed with plants such as cardamom and ginger, fruits such as papaya, mangoes and avocadoes, and root crops such as sweet potatoes. Trees form a canopy over the land and provide shade to the low-growing coffee plants.

Cooperatives that are Fair Trade Certified™ receive a social premium, money provided in addition to the fair price, to invest in community development projects. Four elementary schools, two health clinics and several coffee processing stations were built with the social premium funds. Future plans include quality improvement programs, more coffee washing stations, and the construction of a processing plant and warehouse. Tadesse sums it up – "Fair Trade is not just a selling and buying process. It is creating a global family."

Fair Trade and the Environment

Non-Food Commodities: Sustainable Materials, Production, and Distribution

Non-food commodities, like textiles, ceramics, and other crafts, can bear the Fair Trade name. The following guidelines are set by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) as environmental standards for Fair Trade artisans.

WFTO's Fair Trade environmental standards include:

Sustainable Materials

- The producer should maximize the use of raw materials from sustainable sources.
- Materials should be sourced locally when possible.
- Use of recycled or easily biodegradable materials is encouraged.

Production

- Production should be done in a manner which does not harm the environment.
- The organization should promote the use of technology that respects the environment, reduces energy consumption, and creates awareness of environmental hazards.

Distribution

- Recycled or easily biodegradable materials are used for packing.
- Goods are dispatched by sea wherever possible.

What does this mean on the ground? Let's take a look at Mapepa in Zimbabwe.

Profile and photograph provided by Hand Made Papers of Africa.

Hand Made Papers of Africa, or Mapepa in the native language, was started in 1991 to support community development and environmental awareness through small-scale paper production in Zimbabwe. Villagers in communities across the country are trained in the ancient art of papermaking and use simple tools for their craft.

The paper is made from indigenous plant fibers that grow wild in the area. Mapepa teaches the workers to collect plant residues that are local, renewable, and plentiful. Minimizing the effect on the natural habitat is a main principle of production. In addition, each sheet is made from 100% cellulosic plant fiber, which is lignin and acid-free. No chemicals or other inputs such as glues and colorings are necessary in the production. This not only protects the environment from harmful chemicals but also the individual workers and communities as a whole.

The resulting paper is suitable for writing and printing and is of archival quality. In addition to standard paper, Mapepa also produces wallpaper, lamp shades, picture frames, candles, place mats, and herbal and botanical soaps.