

Fairtrade Fortnight

February 2011

February the 28th marks the beginning of Fair Trade Fortnight, two weeks of events, celebrations and awareness raising aimed at highlighting the difference that fairer trade can make in the lives of small-scale producers in the Global South (or 'developing world'). Fairtrade partnerships ensure farmers get a just price for their produce, one that reflects the real cost of production, rather than the volatilities of the global markets. Fairtrade producers also enjoy greater labour rights and the satisfaction of knowing that their work also yields a contribution to local community development initiatives in areas like education and health.

All countries need to trade, but despite a massive surge in the global markets since the mid nineties, the world's 49 poorest countries still account for only a 1% share. Even more damaging are what Oxfam calls the 'rigged rules and double standards' governing the world trade system, which sees Southern producers hit by trading tariffs up to four times higher than their Northern counterparts. These inequalities are estimated to cost Southern economies \$100bn annually, or more than double the amount received in aid.

As many Irish farmers know to their cost, this system continues to favour the interests of large American and European agri-corporations, to the detriment of small-scale producers. Rink Dickinson, of Equal Exchange explains that, "The needs of small farmers [North and South] may be quite similar. Both groups need better access to and more control over the market. That can only happen if consumers use their market power to vote for fair prices to the grower."

The Fairtrade movement, which has been steadily gathering momentum since the 1960s, sets out to offer a better deal to Southern farmers and producers, while at the same time providing consumers here with an opportunity to take practical action towards a more just trading system. For more significant change to occur, global trade will have to be fundamentally overhauled. Meanwhile, Fairtrade represents a step in the right direction for over 7 million producers in nearly 60 countries.

Six years ago Galway became one of Ireland's first Fairtrade cities. Since then awareness of the issue has steadily risen in tandem with an ever increasing availability of fairly traded products in the City. Nationally, Fairtrade sales rose by 27% in 2009, netting over 33 million euro. Here in Galway, as of 2010, 20 retail and a further 22 catering businesses have been supplying their customers with fairly traded products.

Still there is enormous scope for an expansion. The Irish are the biggest tea consumers in the world, yet only 2% of the tea we drink carries the Fairtrade label. Similarly, sales of fairly traded coffee, the second most widely traded commodity in the world after crude oil, accounts for only 1% of the global market share. Clearly, with everyone feeling the impact of cuts and recession, the promotion of Fairtrade is more challenging than ever. A recent survey found that 9 out of 10 Irish people believe that global trade should be made more equitable. The indications are that most of us, even as we struggle to find value in the shops, remain equally concerned with the values behind our choices.

The Galway One World Centre will host two free workshops on 'Trade Justice' (1st March) and 'Fair Food: a Beginners Guide' (9th March).

See www.fairtrade.ie for details of more Fairtrade Fortnight events in Galway, by Amnesty, Oxfam and the City Council.