

Fair Trade and Harvesting Fair Trade Tourism

Millions of farmers around the world are facing poverty and starvation because global crop prices have plummeted to all-time lows in recent years. This worldwide crisis is causing problems such as malnutrition and loss of family farms in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and it has even led to increased drug cultivation in some countries like Colombia and Peru.



In today's world economy, where profits often rule and small-scale producers are left out of the bargaining process, farmers, craft producers, and other workers are often left without resources or hope for their future. Fair Trade helps exploited producers escape from this cycle and gives them a way to maintain their traditional lifestyles with dignity.

Fair Trade is an alternative. Fair Trade guarantees farmers a fair price for their harvest and means community development, education, health, and environmental stewardship for farmers around the world.

Sharing the Story of Fair Trade

Given this reality and the fact that the tourism industry has seen a growth in both “voluntourism” and also in philanthropy based travel, in 2003, inspired Reality Tours to launch our first Fair Harvest tour to share the story of fair trade with travelers, to offer a service learning opportunity, to support local community based tourism initiatives as a promoter of socially responsible travel, to meet with and exchange with fair trade certified cooperatives and their farmers, and lastly to inspire our alumni to return committed to supporting the fair trade movement in their communities around the world and to support our Global Exchange campaigns and Fair Trade craft stores!

In fact, Reality Tours felt compelled to expand the awareness of our tourism offerings that in 2010 we decided to launch a collaborative partnership with Transfair USA as another way of ensuring that travelers hear about fair trade from those planting the seeds and harvesting the benefits for themselves, their communities and they Fair Trade certified cooperatives.

So Why Does Fair Trade Matter?

Why would travelers be interested in the Fair Trade Story? Global Exchange Reality Tours highlight the importance of fair trade on primary commodity crops like textiles, cocoa, coffee, olives, and tea and contextualize the debate between “fair trade” and “free trade” crops in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Ecuador, Palestine, India, Nepal, Rwanda and many other countries.

We provide the opportunity for our participants to learn firsthand how fair trade producers receive a fair price – a living wage; that forced labor and exploitative child labor (and modern day slavery) are not allowed; that buyers and producers trade under direct long-term relationship; producers have access to financial and technical assistance; sustainable production techniques are encouraged and mandated; working conditions are healthy and safe; equal employment opportunities are provided for all; and all aspects of trade and production are open to public accountability.

Reality Tours is honored to highlight how the Fair Trade system benefits over 800,000+ farmers organized into cooperatives and unions in over 48 countries. While the complexities and the beauties of each country are unique, what fair trade means for communities is often very similar.

When one sees how the proceeds of Fair Trade is supporting basic education and health care, funding the infrastructure of the community, and amplifying the dignity of communities who get to stay on their land, Reality Tours knows that our participants return from their journey inspired because of alternative, educational tourism.

We illuminate how Fair Trade has helped farmers provide for their families' basic needs, invest in community development and also provide the opportunity for these farmers to share how there are still selling most of their crop outside of the Fair Trade system because not enough companies are buying at Fair Trade prices. We intend for our Reality Tours alumni to help increase the demand for Fair Trade among companies, retailers, and consumers in their communities.



A Cup of Fair Coffee?

Let's take a commodity or two, as an example. In terms of coffee, the United States consumes one-fifth of all the world's coffee, making it the largest consumer in the world. But few Americans realize that agriculture workers in the coffee industry often toil in what can be described as "sweatshops in the fields."

Many small coffee farmers receive prices for their coffee that are less than the costs of production, forcing them into a cycle of poverty and debt. Fair Trade is a viable solution to this crisis in Nicaragua,

assuring consumers that the coffee we drink was purchased under fair conditions. To become Fair Trade certified, an importer must meet stringent international criteria; paying a minimum price per pound, providing much needed credit to farmers, and providing technical assistance such as help transitioning to organic farming.

Fair Trade for coffee farmers in Matalgapa means community development, health, education, and environmental stewardship. Our Fair Harvest programs to Nicaragua provide the historical context for this social and economic vulnerability and absolutely impact people's purchasing decisions. What if that one-fifth of global coffee drinkers put their purchases where their values were? That would have global repercussions!

Sweet, Sweet Chocolate

Next, let's look at our beloved chocolate. The six largest cocoa producing countries are the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, and Cameroon. Cocoa has especially significant effects on the economy and the population in these countries. For example, in Ghana, cocoa accounts for 40% of total export revenues, and two million farmers are employed in cocoa production. The Ivory Coast is the world's largest cocoa producer, providing 43% of the world's cocoa. In 2000, a report by the US State Department concluded that in recent years approximately 15,000 children aged 9 to 12 have been sold into forced labor on cotton, coffee and cocoa plantations in the north of the country. A June 15, 2001 document released by the Geneva, Switzerland-based International Labor Organization (ILO) reported that trafficking in children is widespread in West Africa. (For ILO definitions of these labor violations, see ILO Convention 182 on Child Labor ILO Convention 29 on Forced Labor.)

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) followed up these reports with an extensive study of cocoa farms in the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon, directly involving over 4,500 producers. The results were released in August 2002. An estimated 284,000 children were working on cocoa farms in hazardous tasks such as using machetes and applying pesticides and insecticides without the necessary protective equipment. Many of these children worked on family farms, the children of cocoa farmers who are so trapped in poverty they have to make the hard choice to keep their children out of school to work. The IITA also reported that about 12,500 children working on cocoa farms had no relatives in the area, a warning sign for trafficking. These statics have only grown over the years.

These child laborers face arduous work, as cacao pods must be cut from high branches with long-handled machetes, split open, and their beans scooped out. Children who are involved in the worst labor abuses come from countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo -- nations that are even more destitute than the impoverished Ivory Coast.

Vicious Circle of Poverty

Parents in these countries sell their children to traffickers believing that they will find honest work once

they arrive in Ivory Coast and then send their earnings home. But as soon as they are separated from their families, the young boys are made to work for little or nothing. The children work long and hard -- they head into the fields at 6:00 in the morning and often do not finish until 6:30 at night. These children typically lack the opportunity for education, leaving them with no way out of their cycle of poverty. The IITA noted that 66% of child cocoa workers in the Ivory Coast did not attend school. About 64% of children on cocoa farms are under age 14, meaning that the loss of an education comes at an early age for the majority of children on cocoa farms.

Producer income remains low because major chocolate and cocoa processing companies have refused to take any steps to ensure stable and sufficient prices for cocoa producers. World cocoa prices fluctuate widely and have been well below production costs in the last decade. Though cocoa prices have shown moderate increases in the past few years, cocoa producers remain steeped in debt accumulated when prices were below production costs.



Producers typically also get only half the world price, as they must use exploitative middlemen to sell their crop. The effects of insufficient cocoa income have been exacerbated by deregulation of agriculture in West Africa, which abolished commodity boards across the region, leaving small farmers at the mercy of the market. This economic crisis forced farmers to cut their labor costs. The outcome was a downward spiral for labor in the region, and a surge in reports of labor abuses ranging from farmers pulling children out of school to work on family farms to outright child trafficking and slavery. These small farmers and their children remained trapped in a cycle of poverty, without hope for sufficient income or access to basic education or health care.

Yes, We Can Change It!

For years, US chocolate manufacturers have said they are not responsible for the conditions on cocoa plantations since they don't own them. But the \$13 billion chocolate industry is heavily consolidated, with just two firms -- Hershey's and M&M/Mars -- controlling two-thirds of the US chocolate candy market. Surely, these global corporations have the power and the ability to reform problems in the supply chain. What they lack is the will.

At Global Exchange, we know there is a solution -- supporting Fair Trade cocoa and chocolate. Fair Trade chocolate and cocoa products are marked with the "Fair Trade Certified" and Fair Trade Federation labels. Fair Trade cocoa comes from Belize, Bolivia, Cameroon, Costa Rica, the Dominican

Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Nicaragua, and Peru. Thus Reality Tours set up our Cocoa Fair Harvest program in the Dominican Republic. Last year, Global Exchange encouraged chocolate lovers from around the world to join with our local partners from Grupo CONACADO to explore benefits of Fair Trade cocoa and sustainable harvest, renewable technology in the Dominican Republic.

There is an opportunity for those of us in the tourism industry to make a positive change in the world. Tourism can be a force for good. We can confront industry norms of “capital flight” and leakage. We can ensure tourism receipts stay to benefit the local economies of our hosts. We can highlight the stories, the struggles and aspirations of the communities we visit. We can be a force of fairness.



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