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# Communicating Food Sustainability to Consumers

## Case Study: The Fairtrade Foundation



*This case study is based on an interview with Nilufar Verjee, Director of Public Engagement, and Laura Godsmark, Brand Manager, at the Fairtrade Foundation, along with publicly available information. The information in this case study does not necessarily reflect the views of UNEP, WWF or GlobeScan but aims to highlight and explain the approach of the Fairtrade Foundation in communicating food sustainability to consumers.*

The Fairtrade Mark is a product certification that indicates that social, economic and environmental aspects of production have been certified against the Fairtrade Standards for Producers and Traders. In the UK, the Mark is managed by the Fairtrade Foundation, founded in 1992. The Foundation is the UK member of Fairtrade International which owns the Fairtrade Mark and manages the standards behind the Mark. Fairtrade International is a multi-stakeholder association of 22 member organisations including 19 national labelling initiatives across Europe, Japan, North America, Mexico and Australia/New Zealand and three networks of producer organisations from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The Fairtrade global system is 50% owned by producers representing farmer and worker organisations, meaning producers have a say in decision-making within Fairtrade's General Assembly and on Fairtrade International's Board of Directors. Adherence to the Fairtrade Standards is certified by an independent body, FLOCERT, ensuring consumers and businesses can have full trust in the Mark.

The fair trade movement in the UK started as a citizen-led campaign to create change in how food was produced. Since its launch, the Fairtrade Foundation has worked alongside this grassroots movement to raise awareness and educate consumers and citizens about where their food and agricultural products come from, how they are grown and the living and working conditions of the people who produce them.

## Objectives

The mission of Fairtrade is to connect farmers and workers in low-income countries worldwide with the consumers of the products they make or grow, promote fairer trading conditions and empower producers to combat poverty, strengthen their position and take more control over their lives.

Through the Fairtrade Mark and its wider campaigns, the Fairtrade Foundation aims to connect shoppers with the farmers and workers who produce their food and allow them to take the simple action of buying Fairtrade products to make a positive social and environmental impact.

# Approach

## Scope and Label

The Fairtrade Mark is the likely entry point of communication with consumers. The label indicates that products bearing the Fairtrade Mark meet internationally agreed social, environmental and economic Fairtrade Standards, to drive behavioural change at the point of purchase.

For farmers and workers, Fairtrade means workers' rights, safer working conditions and fairer pay. It means support for farmers to create change, for example investing in climate friendly farming techniques, reforestation or water conservation projects, micro-finance programmes or developing women in leadership.

The Fairtrade Mark can be found on certified agricultural products such as bananas, cocoa, coffee, sugar and wine as well as some non-food products including cotton, flowers and gold.

In recent years, Fairtrade has developed new ways to engage with businesses to achieve scale for farmers and transparency for consumers. An example of a recent initiative is the Fairtrade Sourced Ingredients Mark. This alternative label is used to indicate that single ingredients in a product have been certified, rather than all the ingredients in a final product. The label has a white background instead of a black background to differentiate it from the main Fairtrade Mark and it specifies the commodity that has been certified, for example cocoa, to provide transparency for consumers.

## Channels and Campaigns

Beyond the Fairtrade Mark on products, the Fairtrade Foundation uses a range of channels to communicate with consumers, from shopper marketing, co-marketing with commercial partners, public relations and direct supporter engagement. Increasingly, digital channels, including social media, allow the Fairtrade Foundation to communicate directly with consumers itself more than before and also, most importantly, to connect farmers and producers with the shoppers who purchase their products.

Campaigns are a key part of Fairtrade's consumer communication. One example is 'Fairtrade Fortnight' which occurs every year for two weeks involving retailers, brands, campaigners, consumers and policy makers. The overarching aim of the campaign is to bring together these stakeholders and drive system change by shopping ethically and by spreading Fairtrade's message. Fairtrade engages campaigners and provides marketing collateral to enable campaigning groups to initiate their own events, embracing the grass-roots nature of the movement. There is also a strong focus on engaging the next generation of Fairtrade campaigners with resources and learning materials provided for schools and youth events. The Fairtrade Foundation itself runs a number of showcase events, often with brand or retailer partners, in order to deliver the message of Fairtrade Fortnight in an educational, engaging and fun approach.

'Fairtrade Friday' is another example of a more regular campaign, occurring on the last Friday of every month, in which companies provide products, donations and support for competitions to promote Fairtrade products.

## Messaging

Fairtrade aims to convey information, reassurance, and passion through its Mark and wider consumer-facing communications and campaigns. Creating an emotional connection with the farmers that produce our food is key to Fairtrade's messaging to consumers.

Over the thirty years since it was founded, the Foundation has increasingly campaigned on issues beyond certification, such as promoting a living wage, climate justice and gender equality.

In 2021, Fairtrade refreshed its global branding with the slogan 'The Future is Fair' which highlights consumer desires to see social justice.

The focus of the Fairtrade Fortnight 2020 campaign "[She Deserves Fairtrade](#)" was on living incomes and the campaign features stories from women talking about how earning a living income enables them to educate their children, improve their family's nutrition, and gain economic independence. The stories of four Ivorian women cocoa farmers were highlighted and these were heard by over 3.5 million people – including via an online video and illustrated 'storybombs'. By showcasing individual stories in this way, Fairtrade is able to talk about the ripple effects that Fairtrade can have and paint a holistic picture of the impact of the certification, rather than just talking about one issue in isolation. The goal is to make issues such as trade justice or environmental justice more meaningful to people.

Fairtrade Fortnight 2021 focused on conveying the fact that farmers in low-income countries are the most affected by climate crisis despite being the least responsible for causing it. Ahead of COP26, it was a key moment to campaign for farmers to receive better incomes and financial support to adapt to events like changing weather patterns, rebuild after storms and adopt eco-friendly farming. The campaign showed how social justice is critically interwoven with climate justice and that Fairtrade sales mean farming communities on the front line of the climate crisis can invest more in sustainability.

Authenticity is key to the Fairtrade brand and the voice of the farmer or producer is central to this. The Foundation aims to ensure authenticity in its messaging by increasingly enabling farmers and producers to lead campaign communication themselves. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Fairtrade used its channels to enable consumers to virtually visit producing communities in other countries through live events. For example, in Kenya films from workers on flower farms showed the impacts of the pandemic on their communities and how they've adapted to making masks instead of growing flowers which plummeted in demand during European lockdowns.

## Partnerships

Globally, Fairtrade partners with nearly 2000 businesses, including 500 brands in the UK. Most of the large national retailers in the UK support Fairtrade in some manner, with many actively promoting Fairtrade Fortnight each year.

One example is the Co-operative (Co-op), the UK's largest convenience seller of Fairtrade products and a partner for 27 years. As the first retailer in the UK with own-brand products carrying the Fairtrade Mark, the Co-op has continued to promote the movement to consumers across multiple channels. For example, the Co-op has its own 'Fairtrade Blog' posting resources on Fairtrade initiatives, recipes utilising Fairtrade products, and information on new projects in producer communities.

While collaboration with business was previously focussed on certification, in recent years, the Fairtrade Foundation has started to work with companies in new and different ways. The Fairtrade Foundation describes its current work with commercial partners as encouraging a "race to the top" among brands and retailers. It does this by working to build on the minimum standards that have been set and going beyond this to proactively create more positive impact, incorporate the Fairtrade model into business strategies and build resilience in the supply chain both socially and environmentally.

For example, Ben & Jerry's is a long-term and high-profile Fairtrade partner committed to working towards a living income for cocoa farmers in West Africa. In October 2020, Ben & Jerry's pledged to pay a higher price to their 5,000 cocoa farmers, an additional \$600,000 over the next year. This amount is on top of both the annual Fairtrade Premium of around \$970,000 (paid on their chocolate ice cream mix) and the Ivorian government's minimum price for cocoa that all companies are required to pay. The extra money that farmers will now receive is an important part of Ben & Jerry's wider efforts towards closing the gap between the living income and the amount that farmers earn.

Fairtrade also works with businesses in other ways, such as programme partnerships. The Fairtrade-Mondelēz International Partnership involves Fairtrade collaborating with Cocoa Life, Mondelēz International's global cocoa sustainability programme. Volumes of cocoa covered by the partnership have more than doubled since 2016, supporting a large number of cocoa farming unions.

## Measuring Success

Fairtrade has partnered with GlobeScan to conduct consumer research since 2008. The latest research conducted in 2021 was designed to help Fairtrade understand the concerns of shoppers and to measure key performance indicators including awareness and trust in the Fairtrade Mark. Researching consumer behaviour and perceptions of Fairtrade enables the Foundation to adapt its communications and continue to support consumers to make more sustainable choices in the most effective way possible. The research found:

- 93% of consumers recognise the Fairtrade Mark in the UK (when prompted with an image of the label)
- 91% of consumers in the UK trust the Fairtrade label
- 78% of consumers said that if a brand began using the Fairtrade label, it would make them view the brand more positively
- Consumers value fair treatment and pay for workers when making purchasing decisions
- 7/10 shoppers feel they are part of a community standing up for fairness and justice when they buy Fairtrade certified products

In its [Annual Report 2020](#), the Foundation reports numerous successes from its Fairtrade Fortnight 2020 campaign, including:

- Almost 2,000 pieces of media coverage with a reach of 2,713,793 and an Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) of £25,102,130
- Video reach of 2 million, up from 1.7 million in 2019
- An increase online of 14,000 social followers to a total of 381,264 over the course of 2020
- Website visits increased by 40,000 over the year to 907,000 visits

## Challenges

An ongoing challenge for the Foundation is how to effectively communicate the complexities of unfair trade and the social, ethical and environmental ripple effects of this. To overcome this, the Fairtrade Foundation uses integrated campaigns to engage with consumers through consistent, authentic messaging at multiple points of interaction with the consumer. For example, themes are linked and presented simultaneously across policy work, B2B, brand and retailer partnerships and broader stakeholder communication as well as within consumer campaigns.

As a result of the growing number of certification labels, the Fairtrade Foundation also faces the challenge of ensuring the Fairtrade Mark stands out and that consumers recognise the breadth and depth of Fairtrade's work. The Foundation believes that by highlighting the real human stories of individual farmers and producers in their own voices, sharing the impact that Fairtrade has on their lives, messages cut through more effectively to consumers.

## Guidelines

To ensure communications are credible and ethical, the Fairtrade Foundation has its own initiatives based on current and emerging ethical story gathering processes in the sector. As well as engaging directly with farmers to promote ethical storytelling, the Foundation also follows [guidelines](#) provided by 'Bond' – a UK network for over 400 organisations working in international development which aims to eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice. The body provides a set of ethical communication guidelines for the collection and use of content covering filming, photography, interviewing, use of images and stories. These principles are as follows:

- 1) Putting people in the picture first
- 2) Communications must not do harm
- 3) Informed consent
- 4) Guidance for the informed consent process
- 5) Informed consent with groups and crowds in public space
- 6) Responsible portrayal – ensuring accuracy and context, avoiding stereotypes, use of third-party content

## Looking Ahead

Fairtrade plans to continue working with commercial partners in new ways, to help encourage the "race to the top" and higher social, ethical and environmental standards in agricultural supply chains. As some companies decide to continue or start using their own forms of standards and labels, it will be important for Fairtrade to demonstrate the value of the Mark that is both understood and trusted by consumers. Fairtrade is the only certification 50% owned by farmers and workers, which is in contrast to many businesses which are not yet involving farmers and workers in decision making. The Fairtrade Foundation model of farmer representation is therefore very important to upholding its high standard of trusted authenticity and transparency.