

Fairtrade Roses Q & A

What are the latest developments in Fairtrade flowers?

Fairtrade certified roses first went on sale in the UK at the end of February 2004. They can now be purchased from Asda, John Lewis online, Sainsbury's, Somerfield and Tesco as well as some independent flower shops. We estimate that in 2005, over 18 million stems were sold in the UK with a retail value of over £4m.

What are Fairtrade Roses?

Roses carrying the FAIRTRADE Mark have met the internationally agreed Fairtrade standards covering social, environmental and economic development. The Mark is an independent product certification label which guarantees that workers on flower farms are getting a better deal. Flower farms must meet basic labour and environmental standards, including payment of a fair wage, the right to join trade unions or worker committees to represent their interests, and must commit to ongoing improvements which are regularly monitored by the independent Fairtrade certification body. Workers also receive a Fairtrade premium which can be used for community and/or economic development projects. Currently the Fairtrade premium is set at 8% of the export value for bouquet flowers.

Where do Fairtrade Roses come from and who will benefit?

Fairtrade roses currently come from seven flower farms in Kenya – Finlay Flowers, Oserian Development Company, Liki River Farm, Longonot Horticulture, Shalimar Flowers, Eldama Ravine and Panda Flowers - which have been certified to comply with Fairtrade social, economic and environmental standards. Four of the flower farms are based in the Naivasha area, the main hub of the Kenyan flower industry. The remaining three are in Eldama Ravine, Kericho and Nanyuki.

There are over 10,000 workers currently employed on these flower farms who will benefit from Fairtrade certification. They are able to participate in Fairtrade because they are organized (generally into unions) and because the company that they work for is committed to an improvement process which results in higher working standards and to developing a partnership which promotes the economic and social development of the workers.

A Joint Body, comprising management and democratically elected representatives of workers, has been established on each of the farms with the purpose of deciding how the Fairtrade premium is used. All groups of workers, including temporary and seasonal workers are able to participate in the election process and composition of the Joint Body.

How has the Fairtrade premium been used?

A variety of projects have already been implemented using the Fairtrade premium received as a result of sales of Fairtrade roses. Community development projects include: creation of adult education facilities; drilling of boreholes in local villages to supply water, purchase of equipment for farm crèches; purchase of books, desks and chairs and repair of windows at local schools; donation of books, pens and bed linen to a local children's home; increase of stock for the community hire shop which enables workers to hire items at reduced cost; and purchase of equipment for disabled community members. Future projects include the purchase of swings and slides for the children of farm workers; contribution to the building of community bridges; and donation of bed linen to local hospitals. These examples demonstrate that the Fairtrade premium is already helping to improve the lives of workers, both on and off farms, as well as the amenities for the benefit of the wider community.

Why is the FAIRTRADE Mark on products grown on plantations? Isn't Fairtrade about supporting small farmers?

Fairtrade is about getting a better deal for producers and workers at the bottom of supply chains who are marginalised by international trading rules. While primarily known for supporting small farmers, Fairtrade has for many years worked with employees on plantations, for example with hired labour on tea estates. Workers on plantations are amongst the most powerless people in global supply chains and they also need the benefits that Fairtrade can bring.

What are the conditions like for workers on flower farms?

There have been a number of campaigns focusing on the social and environmental conditions on farms in the Kenyan flower industry. All of the farms supplying Fairtrade certified roses are required, as a minimum, to meet International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions which cover forced and child labour, non-discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, occupational health and safety and employment conditions.

One of the most challenging issues has been the housing provided to workers. The rapid growth of the flower industry has meant that many companies have found it difficult to keep pace with the needs of the growing numbers of workers and their families. In particular there have been housing shortages around Lake Naivasha where because of the location of the farms, companies are obligated to provide workers with housing or a housing allowance. Fairtrade certified farms are committed to resolving these problems and have initiated building and refurbishment programmes to increase and improve the quality of the housing stock.

Another issue of concern is the problem of excessive working hours. This is largely driven by the commercial pressure on supermarkets to supply the correct quantity and quality stems, particularly during periods of high consumer demand, such as Valentine's Day. Fairtrade standards require that workers are not required to work in excess of 48 per week on a regular basis. Further any overtime must be voluntary, not exceed 12 hours per week, not demanded on a regular basis and compensated at a premium rate. Simple solutions are being looked at which work for both employees and the company such as the posting of voluntary overtime rotas well in advance of high demand periods. Work is also being done with retailers to improve ordering processes so that overtime can be appropriately planned. Shoppers can be reassured that workers on certified farms are reporting improvements as a result of Fairtrade certification.

Why import Fairtrade flowers from Kenya?

Unfortunately roses don't bloom naturally all the year round in the UK and demand for them is often highest during the colder months, for example on Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. British consumers spend an estimated £28 per person on flowers each year and 85% of these flowers are imported, 20% from countries outside the EU.

The last 20 years have seen an increase in supply from Africa and South America, offering developing countries an opportunity to diversify away from traditional agricultural commodities into production for a growing export market. The flower industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Kenyan economy and is the country's second most important export crop, after tea. Indeed the flower industry has provided desperately needed employment opportunities for people who were previously living at subsistence level.

Approximately 95% of Kenya's cut flower production is exported, 15% of which already comes into the UK. The difference is that now shoppers have a choice to ensure that if they want to purchase flowers they can be guaranteed that workers on the flower farms in developing countries are getting a better deal.

Isn't it damaging the environment to fly flowers to the UK?

Flowers importers are seeking to maximise the use of return cargo planes which supply food aid and freight to Africa. It is possible to grow flowers in glasshouses in Europe but this requires the burning of fossil fuels to provide the appropriate levels of heat and light. More carbon dioxide is

emitted growing a glasshouse crop than given off during the air freight of the same quantity of flowers.

How do the flower farms in Kenya affect the local environment?

There have been concerns about the impact that both the flower industry and booming tourist trade have had on the local environment at Lake Naivasha, where four of the Fairtrade certified farms are located. The favourable conditions there – fertile land, dry climate, access to fresh water and ecological importance of the area - have resulted in an influx of workers into the region who live on the flower farms or in and around Naivasha Town. This growth is not without problems including growth of shantytowns, water abstraction and risk of water pollution from pesticide run-off.

The flower farms are developing programmes to address these issues. The Oserian flower farm for example has reduced its extraction of water from the lake by 30-40% as a result of drilling its own boreholes and reducing water needs through expanded indoor production and hydroponic cultivation. Hydroponics minimises pesticide and fertiliser usage and seepage into soil and other farms are also increasingly looking to convert to this method of production or are trialling other measure to reduce the need for agricultural inputs.

Three of the Fairtrade certified farms are located outside the Naivasha area and this has been very important in providing alternative local employment opportunities and helping to reduce the influx of people, particularly from Western Kenya, into Naivasha to seek work. The Fairtrade premium also enables the workers in these regions to implement projects that will improve the situation in the local area further. For example, workers at the Finlay Flower farm in Kericho, Western Kenya are establishing a tree nursery to grow fruit for local markets that will provide affordable food for local people and also alternative employment opportunities.

Supporters of Fairtrade can be assured that certified flowers are subject to the same stringent standards as all other products which carry the FAIRTRADE Mark, and that every purchase of Fairtrade flowers is giving workers an opportunity to improve their lives.

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