

FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION ELECTION TOOLKIT

COUNTDOWN TO ELECTION

The UK General Election is due to be called in the coming months – the latest it could be is 3 June. It is a major opportunity to ensure that as many candidates as possible, from all parties, understand the importance of Fairtrade and trade justice to the lives of people living in poverty. The Fairtrade Foundation is part of a coalition called 'Vote Global', who want a focus on ending poverty at this election, www.voteglobal.org.uk. We want all Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) to know that caring about international development is vital to their election – and you are key to them getting that message!

Fairtrade campaigners have made amazing efforts in the build up to and during Fairtrade Fortnight, and this is an unmissable opportunity to build on all your achievements. Many Fairtrade campaigners have asked us what they can do to support Fairtrade during the election and this toolkit has been developed in response.

This toolkit will help you to get the issues on your candidates' agenda. There are top tips for speaking to candidates, writing letters to local papers and more besides. As you will see below, even if you spend just one minute of your time on the election, it could make a difference in the future. And please, if you do raise Fairtrade or trade justice issues with any of your candidates, tell us about it! We will be collecting information about candidates' views from all around the country so we can hold them to their promises after the election.

Engaging with prospective MPs at election time about an issue we feel passionate about is an immensely valuable activity. It is perhaps the best opportunity we have to be active democrats - and it lifts the lid a little on some important questions. Politicians are generally people who like people and are happy to talk - and even sometimes listen!

Johanna Alberti, Fairtrade campaigner, Cumbria

KEY MESSAGES AND QUESTIONS

Below are the key messages and questions we would like you to focus on if you are trying to raise the issues of Fairtrade and trade justice in the run up to the election.

1. Support for Fairtrade

Fairtrade is all about a better deal for producers in the developing world. We want to know if the candidates are supportive of Fairtrade and would be willing to take actions to encourage the growth of the Fairtrade market in the UK and internationally.

Key question for candidates:

What steps have you taken in the past to support the development of Fairtrade and, if elected, what steps will you be taking to support it in the next four to five years?

2. Support for trade justice

Trade has the potential to lift millions out of poverty. But the evidence shows that developing countries rarely benefit from current trade rules, which largely favour developed countries. We want to know where the candidates stand in relation to trade justice and whether they will promote an international trading system that supports rather than undermines international development objectives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Key question for candidates:

What do you believe that the UK and EU need to do to ensure that future trade negotiations meet the needs of poor people and developing countries?

3. Support for UK regulation

The UK government has the power to shift policies or increase regulation of business in the pursuit of Fairtrade and Fairtrade principles. We want to know if the candidates would be supportive of this increased regulation. One example of a change in regulation that **should** help promote Fairtrade principles in businesses would be the introduction of a 'supermarket ombudsman', a body that would ensure that retailers operated in a fair manner when dealing with suppliers. This has been recommended by the Competition Commission and all three major parties have stated that they are in favour, but the details of **how** it will be implemented have yet to be agreed. Likewise, the UK government could encourage and support all public bodies to make Fairtrade an automatic part of their catering and supply contracts. The public sector spends 13% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on procurement annually – imagine the difference this would make if more of these choices were Fairtrade. (source: DEFRA)

Key questions for candidates (pick one, or ask both)

Your party has expressed its support for the Competition Commission recommendations on creating a supermarket ombudsman. Do you agree that suppliers in developing countries should have access to this ombudsman if they believe a supermarket is applying excessive pressure?

What will your party do to ensure all government departments, public bodies and local authorities are able to make a positive choice to procure Fairtrade and other ethical products?

LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

In some areas across the UK, **local elections are being held on the same day as the national election**. If this is the case in your locality, you can **make sure Fairtrade is on the radar of Council candidates by asking them the following question:**

Q. If elected, would you ensure that your council supports/continues to support Fairtrade by encouraging the procurement of Fairtrade products where possible?

WHO YOUR CANDIDATES ARE

Checking your constituency

As some constituency borders have recently changed, it may be worth double-checking the constituency you are in for the next election. To do this, go to any of the party websites (e.g. www.labour.org.uk) and put your postcode into the box under 'Labour in your area' in the right hand panel (all parties have a similar facility). You need to refer to your new constituency to find your candidates.

Who your candidates are

You can find out who your candidates are by going to <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/guide>. Go to 'seats a-z' and click on your constituency. You will see a description of your constituency, including your current MP and the parliamentary candidates for all parties. (Please note that, as nearly half of current MPs are stepping down at the election, your MP will not necessarily be the parliamentary candidate for that party.) Then Google each candidate's name to find out their contact details. Please contact us if you have any problems doing this.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you have **ONE** minute...

Canvasers

In the run up to the election, it is likely that you will be **door-stepped by canvasers** from the different parties, and possibly even the prospective party candidates themselves. Be prepared! Make sure you use this as an opportunity to get our trade messages across. Have your questions at hand, take note of their answers and maybe even offer them a Fairtrade product! If candidates drop a card through your letter box asking what issues are important to you, make sure you fill it in and send it back to them.

If you have **TEN** minutes...

Letter writing

Another way to get the Fairtrade message across is to write to (or email) the candidates. You can also find out what their views are on Fairtrade by requesting a reply. A template letter to candidates can be found at www.fairtrade.org.uk/election – please also pass it on to your friends and contacts. Why not include a Fairtrade chocolate bar or something similar to grab the candidates' attention!

Candidates will be paying close attention to the letters page of local newspapers, so you may also want to have a go at getting a letter about Fairtrade or trade justice in print. You can find a template letter for this on our website at: www.fairtrade.org.uk/election

If you are an avid blogger or tweeter, then why not get the Fairtrade message out this way? **Post a blog or tweet about Fairtrade** and then sit back and watch the word spread...

If you have **LONGER...**

Private meetings

Face to face contact with your candidates is valuable and **organising a private meeting** gives you (and them) time to focus on one or two issues amongst the many that emerge during an election.

Candidates can usually be contacted through their local office. Your sitting MP usually holds 'surgeries' to meet people in their constituency and discuss issues or concerns – book a slot through their office or if that's not convenient request a separate meeting.

Other people will be interested to hear how it went and what the candidate's views are on Fairtrade and trade justice, so after the meeting you could write a short letter to the local paper, get in touch with your local radio or tell your friends how it went.

Public meetings

Some groups are getting together at a local level to organise hustings or public meetings to which the candidates are invited. These are a great opportunity to get the candidates debating Fairtrade issues and for you to compare the different positions being taken by the candidates.

Why not attend any hustings being organised in your area - to find out if there is one being organised, check your local newspaper, community boards and voluntary groups. You can also go to www.voteglobal.org.uk, which will tell you about hustings being organised by development groups. You could give out Fairtrade chocolate to the candidates, offer them a Fairtrade badge to wear (please take a note of any that accept or refuse the badge – this is useful information!) and ask one or two of the key questions mentioned above during the proceedings.

If you have more time, you could even get involved in **organising a hustings** with others in your area. See www.voteglobal.org.uk for contact details of organisers. Hustings are also being organised in 51 marginal constituencies across the UK by a coalition of organisations focused on climate change, under the name 'Ask the Climate Question'. For detailed information on how to organise a hustings go to www.wdm.org.uk/general-election-toolkit

Stalls

If you already have a **Fairtrade stall** organised in your area, then why not **invite the candidates to visit it?** You could coax them along with an offer to sample the Fairtrade produce and obtain press coverage. All candidates will be very keen to appear in the papers in the run up to the election, and Fairtrade is a popular issue across the parties, so if you mention you will invite the local paper along, they are very likely to say yes. Make sure you take a note of any statements or commitments they make about Fairtrade so you can feed back to us and be ready to hold them to account if they become your MP.

Stunts

If you enjoy dressing up as a Fairtrade banana, or in some other eye-catching attire, why not organise a **Fairtrade press stunt** and invite the candidates along. They may be happy to dress up too, in which case press coverage is more likely! Again, make sure you note down any statements or commitments they make about Fairtrade and let us know about it using the feedback form provided. You can find a **template press release** for a stunt on our website at www.fairtrade.org.uk/election

TOP TIPS FOR MEETING YOUR CANDIDATES



Don't be daunted

- Often candidates won't know much about your issue
- They have an interest in being polite to you and listening to you
- You have a right to talk to them

Prepare

- Google the candidate to find out a bit about them
- Know what you want and what you are going to say – keep it simple and use the background information in this toolkit
- Be prepared for what they might say back – use the information on party policies at www.fairtrade.org.uk/election
- If there's more than one of you attending, make sure you meet in advance to decide roles

Be clear, calm and concise

- Candidates are likely to have limited time, knowledge and attention, so use the time well
- Don't be too pushy – be prepared to listen as well as talk!
- Make sure any background material you give them is short, simple and clear
- Take notes of what is said (and let us know via the feedback form)

Get a result

- Take along a Fairtrade product to give them to break the ice!
- If the candidate tries to change the subject, politely but firmly bring them back to the topic in hand
- Finish the meeting with something concrete – ideally a commitment for action (If the candidate seems reluctant, ask if they would be open to being followed up)
- Write a thank you email or letter and remind them of any actions that were agreed



ELECTION FOLLOW-UP

Soon after the election, if you have time, please write to your newly elected MP. It's a good opportunity to register Fairtrade on their radar, to remind them of any promises they made as a candidate and to capitalise on the good work you have done getting the Fairtrade / trade justice messages across in the run up to the election. You can find a template letter to new candidates on our website at www.fairtrade.org.uk/election

ELECTION LEGALITIES

A full account of rules related to charity campaigning at election time can be found at www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/elect.asp, which we suggest you read if you want to do more than simply ask your candidates a question.

USEFUL LINKS

For more information, useful links, template letters and press releases, please go to www.fairtrade.org.uk/election

YOUR FEEDBACK

We need your help to keep track of the election activity happening on Fairtrade and trade justice in different constituencies, to help us follow up on any commitments made in the future. Whether you have simply spoken to a canvasser or organised a major hustings event – we want to know about it! Please fill in the enclosed feedback form and send it back to us or feedback at: www.fairtrade.org.uk/election



www.fairtrade.org.uk

Fairtrade Foundation, 3rd Floor, Ibex House,
42-47 Minories, London EC3N 1DY

Tel: 020 7405 5942 Fax: 020 7405 5943

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