

Fairtrade Foundation

Vegetables Q & A



What types of products will be available and where will they come from?

Fresh beans (runner, french, fine and extra fine beans) and fresh peas (mange tout/snow peas, sugar snap and garden peas) grown in Africa are included within the standard. Most Fairtrade vegetables for sale in the UK will initially come from Kenya.

Will the Fairtrade standard for fresh vegetables be extended to more producers and/or products?

Where we find that UK shoppers are demanding more Fairtrade vegetables and producers wish to supply them, the standard could be extended to other vegetables such as baby corn, fresh chilli and broccoli.

I've seen Fairtrade beansprouts in supermarkets – are these a vegetable?

Fairtrade beansprouts are available in the vegetable aisle and are a vegetable. They are sprouted in the UK from dried, Fairtrade certified mung beans, for freshness. The mung beans are grown under the Beans and Pulses Fairtrade standard and are therefore technically certified as Fairtrade Beans and Pulses.

Why do vegetable growers in African countries need Fairtrade?

They face several challenges in getting their produce to market including:

- **Fluctuating prices**

There is a high and low season for produce from developing countries determined by the availability of British vegetables. During the high season higher prices are offered to producers by briefcase brokers who buy from them directly and sell on to traders. Producers who are contracted to exporters receive seeds and pesticides from them and a relatively constant price throughout the year despite prices dropping in the low season. However contract prices are nearly always lower than offered by the briefcase brokers. Many producers sell to the briefcase brokers because they need money quickly to feed their families or take a relative to hospital.

- **Quality and certification**

Vegetable producers must meet a large number of costly certification schemes to be able to sell their goods in the EU. It is only through exporters and plantations that outgrowers are able to pay for these schemes, which focus on the quality of their produce. Rules are strict and up to 20% of produce can be rejected either on site or at the packhouse. When this happens exporters can be fined and/or producers do not receive payment for their produce.

- Water

Availability of water for both personal and farm use is decreasing in many areas. This is particularly the case in the Mount Kenya region, where there have been significant changes in precipitation patterns over the past two years. Technology and improved farming techniques which allow producers to store rain water, recycle and save water through better irrigation are available but expensive and therefore less accessible for outgrowers.

- Infrastructure and training

Lack of basic infrastructure such as roads and communication methods make selling produce challenging. Producers would like training in improving yields, environmental management and using water wisely, but cannot afford it.

- Access to credit

It's hard for producers to access credit to buy seeds, pesticides or equipment they need for growing. This means they have to borrow from loan sharks with high interest rates or are dependent on exporters who decide the price they receive. This is another reason producers are tempted to sell to briefcase brokers.

- Plantation workers

Vegetable plantation workers often endure poor working conditions, long hours and low wages. There are many single females who work in plantations or landless people who are dependent on their employment to survive.

How will vegetable producers benefit from Fairtrade?

Fairtrade will offer marginalised producers access to a fair price and the additional Fairtrade premium to invest in their communities and support the more sustainable farming practices to reduce impact on the environment and water resources. In Kenya alone, an estimated 800 Small Producer Organisations grow vegetables, of which approximately 60% would be able to supply the European market. Fairtrade standards directly address their challenges and provide better trading conditions for producers, through the Fairtrade minimum price and premium.

Why is the Fairtrade Foundation developing standards for products that will be air freighted when most people are trying to reduce their food miles?

Foreign produce mainly supplies the UK outside the British fresh bean and pea season (June-Sept) so air freighted vegetables do not compete with local produce most of the time. Fresh vegetables are easily damaged, go off quickly and must be refrigerated to meet the quality required by the export market. A cool chain (refrigeration of the product at all stages of the supply chain) must be guaranteed and it is for that reason fresh beans and peas are air freighted.

Annual carbon emissions per person are 200kg in Kenya and 172kg in Bangladesh compared to 21,000kg in the US and 9,000kg in the UK. To exclude poorer countries and people from the opportunity to develop when their overall carbon footprint is so low is morally unfair and politically unsustainable. As those making the largest contribution to climate change, rich countries have the responsibility to show leadership and cut their

own emissions before expecting poorer nations to bear the brunt of change by reducing their relatively small emissions.

Increasingly informed debate in the UK on 'food miles' versus 'fair miles' is now allowing a more balanced response to criticism relating to air freight and its contribution to climate change. Food miles are becoming part of wider consideration of the entire 'carbon lifecycle' of a product, from seed to plate. As the UK's International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) points out, we need to consider the realities of air freight along with related socio-economic and environmental issues, for both the importing and exporting countries.

What about food security? Wouldn't producers be better subsistence farming than growing vegetables for export?

Most African producers depend on agriculture for their income, and export agriculture is a major source of foreign exchange and GDP for many African countries. Growing vegetables for export is an important livelihood option. It is an example of agricultural diversification away from a single commodity, and one that brings more value for volume than traditional export crops where little processing or value-addition is done in-country.

There is a risk that growing vegetables and other crops for export may reduce the amount of food available for local consumption, pushing up prices and reducing local food security. This depends on variable local patterns of food production, availability of food, entitlement to resources, and vulnerability of individuals and communities, as well as on global patterns of demand and prices. There is also little research to support a clear understanding of how investment in different types of export agriculture – or in vegetables specifically - is impacting on food security. However in the case of snow peas covered by the new standard there is not local demand for the product.

A crop rotation system reduces soil degradation and enables farmers to grow a variety of produce for home consumption, local markets and for export. Selling to different markets protects producers from market instability and therefore investment in vegetable production is unlikely to undermine personal food supply. Instead, those most affected by food insecurity are likely to be poor producers with few diversification options in areas where crops fail; and the landless poor who are most affected by rising prices.

Growing vegetables needs lots of water. How do the Fairtrade Standards reduce water use and the associated environmental impact?

All cultivated plants which depend on water for production, like vegetables, have a carbon and water footprint. A water footprint is the total volume of fresh water used to produce goods and services consumed by individuals, communities or produced by business. Like flowers, vegetables need irrigation, but the amount of water used varies between producers. Outgrowers generally use less water for vegetable production than larger farms/plantations, because their production is either entirely rain-fed or supplemented with simple technology, and not usually based on large-scale irrigation. The level of water supplies for many producers is their biggest challenge as climate change has caused not only rainfall to decrease but also snow-melt, which producers in for example the Mount Kenya region are dependent on.

For hired labour plantations, the Fairtrade generic environmental standards require careful management of water in order to ensure conservation and non-contamination. As a minimum requirement producers must employ a manager and have an environmental management plan. Many African Fairtrade certified farms are already developing programmes to reduce water use.

What about chemicals and pesticides?

FLO does not permit the use of some chemicals/pesticides, which means some producers will need to change the type of pesticides they currently use. Fairtrade supports reduction in the use of pesticides and promotes Integrated Crop Management such as that adopted by Kenyan producers who plant cabbages for the local market that emit a gas to protect snow peas and contribute to organic practices.

Are Fairtrade vegetables guaranteed GM free?

Fairtrade certified producer organisations cannot use Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), including GM seeds and planting stock. For vegetable producers to be certified they must provide written verification from their supplier that seed or planting stock is not GM. However, harvested crops are not tested for GM traits as it is possible that Fairtrade certified farm could be accidentally contaminated by pollen from GM crops that would be excluded from the Fairtrade market. It would be unfair to punish producers for events like this which they cannot control.