



Q & A: FAIRTRADE STANDARDS AND GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GM)

WHO SETS FAIRTRADE STANDARDS?

Fairtrade standards are set by Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) on behalf of its member organisations. The purpose of the standards is to promote and safeguard the interests of Fairtrade certified producer organisations. Fairtrade standards can be examined at <http://www.fairtrade.net/standards.html>.

ARE GM PRODUCTS BANNED BY FLO?

Yes. Fairtrade standards prohibit Fairtrade certified producer organisations from using genetically modified organisms, including GM seeds and planting stock. This is checked as part of the annual inspection process. The GM standard forms part of the Generic Environmental standards and applies to both Hired Labour situations (plantations, estates etc) and Small Farmer Organisations (co-ops etc). The Generic standards can be examined at http://www.fairtrade.net/producer_standards.html.

The questions around growing GM crops don't arise for most products in the Fairtrade range (tea, coffee, cocoa, bananas, other fruit etc) because GM varieties are not yet available. But with cotton and rice, where GM varieties are available, producers must be able to provide written verification from their supplier that seed or planting stock is not GM.

ARE FAIRTRADE PRODUCTS GUARANTEED TO BE GM FREE?

No. Fairtrade does not test harvested crops for GM traits for two reasons. Firstly, the costs would be prohibitive in relation to the potential risk. Secondly, if a Fairtrade certified farm is accidentally contaminated by pollen from GM crops that crop would then have to be excluded from the Fairtrade market. We believe it would be unfair to punish farmers for events like this that are beyond their control.

WHAT ABOUT COMPOSITE PRODUCTS?

Fairtrade composite products like chocolate bars and biscuits are eligible to carry the FAIRTRADE Mark because they comply with the composite product policy requirement that at least 50% of the total ingredients must be sourced from Fairtrade certified producers. In the case of chocolate this includes cocoa, sugar and any other ingredient such as vanilla for which there are Fairtrade standards.

Composite products may also contain ingredients such as milk and eggs that are produced and sourced in the North. These ingredients are not covered by Fairtrade standards or certification and we do not specify or check that they are GM free.

The only way consumers can be fully assured that products are GM free is through organic certification and many Fairtrade certified products are also certified as organic. These products carry an organic seal such as the Soil Association's label as well as the FAIRTRADE Mark.

More information on the Soil Association's organic standards and key concerns about GM foods is available at www.soilassociation.org.

WHY ARE GM PRODUCTS BANNED BY FLO?

The biotech industry claim higher yields and reduced use of chemicals resulting from growing GM crops will benefit farmers. But there is widespread public concern about the long-term effects of GM crops: contamination of conventional crops and wild plants, potential damage to wildlife, and the uncertain effects on human health of eating these foods. Dependence by producers on GM seeds and the companies that market them can also be seen as a negative that outweighs any benefits the crops may bring.

On the balance of available evidence, FLO has concluded that GM crops are incompatible with Fairtrade and has adopted strict environmental standards and guidelines expressly forbidding their use.

The GM standard is based on recommendations resulting from a FLO policy discussion paper from June 2003. The process included the study of scientific data available at the time and feedback from a workshop of stakeholders at the FLO Fairtrade Forum, September 2001. The paper stated that too many uncertainties remain regarding claims that GM technology enhances crop yields, brings economic benefits, and improves farmers' health by reducing pesticide use.

It also noted that scientific arguments are not the sole factors in determining the policy on the use of GM technology by Fairtrade producers: two key parameters of Fairtrade standards are:

- to improve the trading position of producers in the South and promote access to the market, and
- to reduce dependency on other organisations (intermediaries, multinational companies, etc).

At the time of the consultations, a survey of European consumers showed that only 22% supported GM foods, indicating that the use of GM technology in Fairtrade products is most likely to be a barrier to increased market penetration.

Similarly, as GM patented technology is largely owned by multinational companies, the use of GM crops is likely to increase dependence on these companies with regard to the purchase of seedlings and their matched agrochemicals.

The paper concluded that insufficient proof is currently available that GM technology can benefit disadvantaged producers in the South and that the weight of evidence is such that the interests of the producers are best safeguarded by a prohibition on the use of GM crops.

This policy is in force for the foreseeable future until such time as FLO's members and stakeholders request a review or until FLO has received evidence that indicates the need to reconsider its position regarding GMOs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GMO AND A CLONE? (Source: Wikipedia)

A **Genetically modified organism** (GMO) or **genetically engineered organism** (GEO) is an organism whose genetic material has been altered using genetic engineering techniques. These techniques are generally known as recombinant DNA technology. With recombinant DNA technology, DNA molecules from different sources are combined *in vitro* into one molecule to create a new gene. This DNA is then transferred into an organism and causes the expression of modified or novel traits.

In horticulture, the term **clone** is used to mean all descendants of a single plant, produced by vegetative reproduction or apomixis. Many horticultural plant cultivars are clones, having been derived from a single individual, multiplied by some process other than sexual reproduction. As an example, some European cultivars of grapes represent clones that have been propagated for over two millennia. Grafting can be regarded as cloning, since all the shoots and branches coming from the graft are genetically a clone of a single individual, but this particular kind of cloning has not come under ethical scrutiny and is generally treated as an entirely different kind of operation.

Fairtrade Foundation January 2008

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