

ASSESSING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR REGULATION FOR FAIRER TRADING PRACTICES

AUGUST 2016

UK consumers place a high value on the ethical qualities of the food they buy.¹ Although consumers are price sensitive, 60 percent of the UK public say they are willing to pay more for ethically sourced groceries or products from developing countries. In this context, Fairtrade successfully offers consumers a way to make a positive impact on the livelihoods of farmers and workers in developing countries.²

However, with retailer price competition the order of the day in an increasingly challenging economic environment, rock-bottom prices for farmers pose a real and urgent threat to the UK's supply of some important foods, as well as undermining poverty reduction goals. The adoption of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development in September 2015, with their emphasis on policy coherence for sustainable consumption and production, provides a clear impetus for government, business and consumers to ensure a viable future for those who grow our food both in the UK and overseas.

In May 2016, the Fairtrade Foundation commissioned GlobeScan to carry out consumer research. It assessed whether strengthening the UK's regulatory framework would be welcomed by the majority of UK consumers who want fairly traded, sustainable food and are at risk from the long-term impacts of unfair and unsustainable trade.³

The research specifically aimed to understand and test UK consumer opinion on the following:

- Awareness among consumers about the risks to the sustainability of food, which is linked to low prices.
- Consumer desire for farmers to receive fair prices and consumer willingness to pay more for their goods to ensure the sustainability and availability of their food in the future.
- Levels of concern about the conditions faced by those who produce food and how this would affect buying behaviour.
- Desire for government and business to do more to protect farmers and ensure sustainability in food supply chains.
- It is important to note that the findings represent consumer beliefs and perceptions only.

Key findings

The study revealed three key insights:

- The British public strongly believes that both government and business can and should be doing more to ensure future food sustainability. The Government in particular is perceived as falling short of consumer expectations.
- The public considers protection for farmers a priority for the Government to focus on when looking at food production.
- The public feels that farmers are currently underpaid and over half say they are willing to pay more for ethically produced products. However, the link between these low prices and future food security is unclear to many.

The full report can be found here.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/322624/Public-views-on-ethical-retail.pdf

² Eurobarometer for BOND, see QB5, http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/EU_/Bond_Eurobarometer_UK.pdf

³ This work is part of a three-year project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, on regulatory analysis and advocacy in support of sustainable and ethical food production and consumption in the UK.