



Fairtrade and Coffee Plantations

Why doesn't Fairtrade certify coffee plantations?

The objective of the Fairtrade system is to improve the economic position of agricultural communities. Fairtrade is best known for working with associations of small farmers as they are typically the most disadvantaged in world markets and they remain a priority for our work. However, in order not to exclude landless labourers, who are some of the poorest people in the developing world, Fairtrade also works with larger plantations or estates to help improve the position of their workers. Fairtrade standards allow certification of both plantations and co-operatives for certain products. These include tea and bananas, along with some other fresh fruit and fruit juices.

However, in the case of coffee, Fairtrade is exclusively focused on small-scale coffee farmers' organisations, the producers of around 70% of the world's coffee. This is not because of any bias against large farms but in recognition that in certain situations different policies have to be applied in order to achieve the stated objectives.

The global Fairtrade coffee market is still too small to support both small farmers and plantations: currently less than half the total production volume of Fairtrade certified farmers' groups is sold on Fairtrade terms because worldwide demand is too small to absorb it all.

Bringing plantation grown coffee into the Fairtrade market would further dilute the position of the small farmers' organisations. Therefore the Fairtrade policy remains that the potential for estate owners (and farm workers) to enter Fairtrade markets will be postponed until such time that the market grows large enough to absorb them without undermining the position of the small coffee farmers' organisations.

What is the definition of a small-scale farmer?

The structure and composition of small-scale farmers' organisations varies from country to country. While one organisation might comprise 50 farmers from the same village with very small plots of land, another might include twenty member co-operatives representing thousands of individual farmers. The size of land owned by these members may vary considerably according to membership rules, cultural norms and other factors.

The definition of a small producer (small-scale farmer) is currently under review by Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO), the Bonn-based body that sets Fairtrade standards. The current Generic Fairtrade Standards for Small Farmers' Organisations include the following provisions:

Small farmers can join Fairtrade if they have formed organisations (co-operatives, associations or other types of organisation) which are able to contribute to the social and economic development of their members and their communities and are democratically controlled by their members.

1.2 Members are Small Producers

Small producers are defined as those not being structurally dependent on permanent hired labour and who manage their farms mainly with their own and their family's labour.

1.2.1 Minimum Requirement

1.2.1.1 The majority of the members of the organisation are small producers.

1.2.1.2 Of every Fairtrade certified product sold by the organisation, more than 50% of the volume must be produced by small producers.

Fairtrade standards for producers can be examined at <http://www.fairtrade.net/standards.html>.