

Fair For All:

THE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS EMBEDDED IN FAIR TRADE

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The global movement to lift up small-scale farmers and artisans celebrates the second Saturday in May as World Fair Trade Day. Each year, we come together as a movement to celebrate the hard work, resilience and innovation of these producers.

This year, as we see continued evidence that our world's climate is changing, it is ever more clear that the time is now to transition to new ways of feeding ourselves and tending to the land.

Studies by experts, and lists like the one compiled by Project Drawdown (www.drawdown.org) that rank climate change solutions, agree on many points with the fair trade principles enunciated by small-scale farmers (see page 15 in this issue for more information). Here are a few ways that small-scale farmers and their fair trade cooperatives are sequestering carbon, cooling the planet, and leading the way to a new future.

Regenerative organic farming practices:

Small-scale farmers are no strangers to traditional farming practices like rotating annual crops, growing perennials and cover crops, and composting every last scrap to build rich soil without resorting to using synthetic fertilizers.

Diverse, intercropped forests: These are vital ecosystems. Shade-grown coffee has long been appreciated for its superior, slow-ripened flavor and the bird habitat it preserves. Canopy trees sequester nitrogen, hold soil in place on steep hillsides, and provide additional resources for food security and/or other income streams for farmers. Crops like yerba mate

provide sustainable income alternatives to destructive practices like logging or cattle grazing.

Education of girls and empowerment of women:

This is an important climate solution that is deeply embedded in fair trade. Standards include requirements for gender equity in training and leadership roles. Through their cooperatives, many women have been empowered as farmers in their own rights, in turn strengthening communities. Fair trade premium projects often support community clinics, schools or even clean cooking stoves, nurturing families that can thrive, adapt and help slow deforestation.

Traditional land management: Many fair trade producers are members of indigenous communities that have long histories of marginalization and exploitation through colonialism. These same communities are often on the frontlines of resistance to extractive industries and disproportionately impacted by climate change. When climate solutions include indigenous land rights, everyone benefits: traditional agroecological practices work in concert with nature, going beyond conservation to grow livelihoods that are in harmony with nature and cultural traditions.

Land restoration: Around the world, great swaths of formerly productive land have been left barren, whether because of exploitative farming practices, war and strife, lack of markets, or a shortage of capital to invest. Through partnerships with committed fair trade buyers, small-scale farmers are replanting and bringing these lands back to life. They are cultivating heirloom varieties of cacao, fruit trees, and timber for sustainable harvest - and sequestering carbon while they are at it.

Fair prices: Low cacao prices have been leading to calamity in West Africa, as farmers

cut down trees to expand their farmland in a desperate move to boost incomes. One of the most well-known aspects of fair trade is its commitment to fair prices that insulate farmers from the volatility of commodity markets, and that is just one example of why a framework for fair payments is so critical - for the sake of farmers, their children and communities, and our planet as a whole.

Premiums and investment in community projects:

All the vital work described above is essential to the future of our farming systems and our planet, yet it goes beyond the scope afforded by standard commodity pricing. The fair trade system has long acknowledged the additional labor it requires via a premium paid for organic production. An additional "social premium" has provided cooperatives around the globe with resources to invest in community development projects, from schools to clinics to better infrastructure, that make them more resilient.

These are a few of the ways that small-scale farmers are growing a path forward. But they cannot do it alone. Solidarity and collaboration along the supply chain from dedicated fair trade companies support these farmer-led initiatives.

One of the central aspirations of the fair trade movement is to acknowledge and compensate for the role of producers: not merely as creators of raw materials, but for their knowledge, stewardship and skills. Likewise, at the other end of the supply chain, consumers are not just eaters, but valuable allies, educating themselves, choosing wisely and advocating for change in their communities.

Together, we can transform trade!

