

Introducing Fairtrade Young Plant Material

New sales opportunities for growers of plant cuttings

The challenge...

Nowadays much of the flower and plant production takes place in countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Sri Lanka. It's a labour-intensive process, involving thousands of workers, in activities such as harvesting, cutting and packing.

Significant increases in Fairtrade flower sales have meant great benefits for the farm workers who do this hard work, including safer working conditions, freedom of association and the Fairtrade Premium to be invested in social and community projects. This has seen flowers becoming one of the top seven Fairtrade products. But with Fairtrade plants, it is a different story: compared to 56 Fairtrade certified flower farms, only three plant farms are currently Fairtrade certified. So why have Fairtrade plants only had limited success so far?

One main reason was a restriction in the Fairtrade Flowers and Plants Standard, which only allowed Fairtrade plants to be imported at a finished stage. The market reality however looks different. Most plants imported from for example Kenya arrive as young plants or cuttings in Europe and then need several weeks' further growing time, before being sold in retail outlets.

Fairtrade wanted to find a way to reach many more workers in the plant industry, almost half of whom are women. That's why, following a period of consultation with producers, traders and other stakeholders, we decided to revise our Flowers and Plants Standard.

Fairtrade responds...

Fairtrade has introduced a young plant material category to the Fairtrade Standard for Flowers and Plants, which means that plants imported at an earlier stage - as young plant material - are now eligible for Fairtrade certification.

This change will enable thousands of workers on young plant material farms to start benefitting from Fairtrade.

Changes to the Fairtrade Flowers and Plants Standard at a glance

Key changes: Inclusion of young plant material as a new category.

What is young plant material? Cuttings or small plants which are grown into larger plants to sell in retail outlets.

Who will benefit from the changes? Workers on young plant material farms in eastern Africa and potentially also in Asia and Latin America.



The plant production process

The vast majority of the labour time involved in producing many plants takes place on farms in Kenya, Ethiopia and other countries. The workers are involved in planting, treating, and harvesting the plants as well as preparing them for export.

The producers buy so-called elite plants, which they multiply many times, by taking cuttings from them and replanting until they have enough plants for harvesting; these are the so-called mother plants. In the case of poinsettia (also known as the Christmas plant or star), this process takes up to one year. Then after seven weeks of growing the mother plants, the workers begin the harvesting process, which involves taking small cuttings (around four centimetres long with three leaves each) from the mother plants and putting them into small plastic bags. These are then brought into a cold room and packed into boxes for export. The entire planting and harvesting process takes up to 36 weeks. After arrival in Europe the cuttings are taken to young plant companies or horticultural companies, where the plants continue to grow for around 16 weeks, before landing on shop shelves.



Same Fairtrade Standards for workers on young plant material farms

Fairtrade certified young plant material farms have to follow the usual Fairtrade Standards for workers, including freedom of association, safe working conditions and all environmental requirements. The workers will also benefit from the Fairtrade Premium which they decide democratically how to invest through a workers' premium committee on the farm. The Premium is set at the same level as for cut flowers.

New products/plants with the FAIRTRADE Mark

These changes to the standard mean new types of farms can become Fairtrade certified and more Fairtrade plants will become available on shop shelves. This could be tropical plants like palms, indoor plants like Christmas plants/stars, but also plants for the balcony or garden. Consumers can contribute to improved working and living conditions for workers from young plant material farms by purchasing plants with the FAIRTRADE Mark.

For further information about the standard, please contact Lucy Russell: l.russell@fairtrade.net

About Fairtrade International:

Fairtrade International is a global non-profit organization that works with farmers and workers to improve lives through fairer trade. We lead the Fairtrade system, develop the Fairtrade Standards and support producers. Fairtrade International owns the FAIRTRADE Certification Mark, a registered trademark recognized around the world. Find out more at www.fairtrade.net