

Global Connections

HIGHLIGHTING THE WORK OF PRAIRIE CO-OPERATORS AROUND THE GLOBE

2012, ISSUE 1

Fair Trade Seeks a Better Deal for Producers

For this issue of *Global Connections* we interviewed co-operators who are championing the cause of Fair Trade. Rose Silzer-Quinn, General Manager of Muenster Credit Union has adopted the Campaign for Fair Trade at her credit union. We also spoke with Cheryl Bergen, Senior Consultant, Marketing and Communications at SaskCentral.

What experiences led you and/or your organization to become interested in Fair Trade?

RSQ: As a co-operative Muenster Credit Union is very interested in social and economic development, both locally and across the globe.

Personally, I have served as a Mentor for the International Women's Mentoring Program through CCA and I have also been part of the CCA's National Credit Union Coaching Program. In addition to hosting women from developing countries and coaching in Ghana, I have visited many other countries where I have witnessed first hand the benefits of Fair Trade and development of co-operatives. We live in an amazing country that strives for social and economic justice. That's something that we can be very proud of.

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About Co-operating for Fair Trade

CCA and Fairtrade Canada have launched a campaign aimed at generating greater awareness of Fair Trade within the co-operative sector.

There is a natural affinity between co-operatives and Fair Trade; in many ways, support for Fair Trade is an extension of the Principles of Co-operation which guide the co-op movement. This campaign is for co-ops and credit unions across Canada who want to either (a) get involved in Fair Trade or (b) deepen their support for, and commitment to, Fair Trade.

If your co-operative would like to get involved and support the Fair Trade movement, download the Action Guide at <http://fairtrade.ca/en/get-involved/co-operating-fair-trade>.

Why Fair Trade?

People across Canada are paying more attention to what they buy and how it is produced. Many of the products we purchase come from some of the world's poorest countries, where farmers, artisans and factory workers live in conditions of extreme poverty and hardship. Currently, two billion of the world's citizens live on less than \$2 per day.

Fair Trade is about making changes to conventional trade, which frequently fails to deliver on promises of sustainable livelihoods for people in the developing world. It seeks to change the terms of trade for the products we buy - to ensure that the people behind those products get a better deal. This includes fair prices, social and economic premiums, fair and safe labour, environmental sustainability, access to credit, and long-term contracts for producers.

Learn more about Fair Trade and Fairtrade Canada at www.fairtrade.ca.

CB: SaskCentral's interest came from a resolution passed at our 2011 annual meeting. It was to recognize the natural affinity between the Fair Trade and co-operative movements, and that SaskCentral strive to promote and support the advancement of Fair Trade in Canada through education, Fair Trade procurement policies, investment, overseas support of Fair Trade co-operatives, and support for Canadian co-operatives involved in Fair Trade.

How are you implementing Fair Trade practices at your workplace?

RSQ: We have begun "small" with our "Fair Trade" practices in the workplace by purchasing only Fair Trade coffee for consumption both within the office and at all Credit Union sponsored events. We have provided Fair Trade education to our members by inviting a number of experts to provide presentations and samples of Fair Trade products and wares. Our first step was to "raise awareness".

We now purchase Fair Trade gifts for donations and giveaways and continue in our efforts to raise awareness of the value of Fair Trade. I believe we were the first Saskatchewan Credit Union to officially adopt Fair Trade practices and our Delegate was instrumental in bringing this initiative to SaskCentral, which has adopted it as well.

CB: On Credit Union Day (October 20, 2011) we organized an event for our staff and tenants of our building to build awareness about Fair Trade. We had speakers from Ten Thousand Villages and a Saskatchewan blueberry co-op attend. Fair Trade products were sold and Fair Trade coffee was served.

We donated \$2,000 to the blueberry co-op.

During Co-op Week, on our provincial credit union website (saskcu.com), we highlighted the fact that Saskatchewan credit unions support Fair Trade and included a link to fairtrade.ca. We suggested that Saskatchewan credit unions do the same.

In 2010, SaskCentral and Saskatchewan credit unions donated \$77,400 to international development through the Co-operative Development Foundation to help co-operatives and credit unions in other countries.

What has been the reaction to your initiatives within your workplace or within the broader community?



Advantage Credit Union CEO Jim Thiessen and Executive Assistant Vicki Meszaros discuss Fair Trade possibilities with their credit union's Governance Committee.

RSQ: The reaction to our Fair Trade initiative both in the workplace and the broader community has been very favorable. Our Credit Union comes from humble roots and is located in the prairie agricultural hub of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan farmers understand both the significance and the value of Fair Trade. Co-operative/ credit union employees, board of directors and members are interested in practicing and promoting the co-operative values and principles. These values and principles so closely mirror the ideology of Fair Trade that they are truly intertwined.

CB: The event built awareness and interest. We heard people say that they are now aware of local businesses which sell Fair Trade products and will seek out others.

How does the co-operative movement and ideology support Fair Trade?

CB: Co-operatives are a fundamental part of the Fair Trade movement and the majority of Fair Trade producers are members of co-operatives. Co-operatives provide a support network

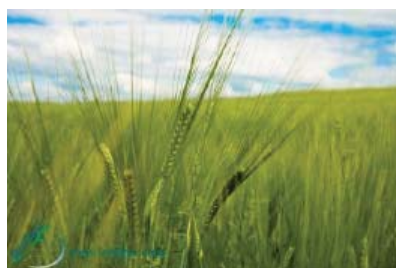
for small farmers who are amongst the poorest farmers in the world. Canadian worker co-operatives are significant leaders in development of Fair Trade in Canada.

What can other organizations or individuals do if they want to become involved with the Fair Trade movement?

RSQ: Others interested in becoming involved in Fair Trade could begin by contacting the CCA or SCA for additional

information and resources. Once people and organizations are more aware, it's a natural progression to begin to look for the Fair Trade labels and to make a conscious effort to support Fair Trade wherever and whenever possible. The idea that it's more expensive is easily countered with the question "Can you really put a price on equity?" When we work to level the social and economic playing field, and strive for caring and co-operation, we all come out winners!

CB: Seek out Fair Trade organizations. Look at labels. We have a choice as consumers.



Did You Know . . . Saskatchewan's Farmer Direct Co-operative is the first organization to be domestic fair trade certified? They have recently launched the Farmer Direct Co-op Brand and will be introducing products, starting with bulk grains in 2011 and 2012. Learn more at www.farmerdirect.coop