

## 4) Who are the people behind my food?

### ***Problematic trend n°4: a growing gap between farmers and consumers***

What is the percentage of our food for which we know where it was produced, by whom and in which conditions? If the answer varies from case to case, the general trend is that (unless we produce ourselves) we know little about whom is behind our food. The gap between consumers and farmers is growing. This gap is not only geographic but also reflected by the fact that there are many actors (processors, brands, supermarkets, etc.) that stand between consumers from the farmers.

How then, can we know if farmers or farm employees receive a fair price for their produces? In Europe, many farmers quit farming because they don't earn enough. In developing countries, small scale-farmers face sometimes very difficult situation that can cause them to live with hunger and poverty. For farm workers employed in large-scale production for exports (of banana, tea, cocoa, etc) the work can sometimes be unsafe and miserably paid.

This situation is in total contradiction with the crucial roles farmers and farm workers play as those who feed us and those who must manage humanity's most important resources: soil, water, biodiversity. Farming is also what shapes the countryside's landscapes and stands as an important motor of local economies.

Local initiatives like direct supply of canteens by local small farmers, direct sales at the farm, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture can help to narrow the gap between production and consumption. Without wholesale or retailers, farmers can retrieve a higher share of the sale price. The closer consumers are to the farmers, the more they also have a chance to learn and influence how was their food produced and ask for farming without synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Consumers also have the opportunity to influence the model of farming abroad. The system of labels such as "biological"/"organic" and "fair trade" helps to ensure farmers or farm workers got a decent wage. In the following story, learn more about working conditions in the orange juice industry.

### ***The story –***

#### ***What was squeezed for my orange juice?***

The ladder was sinking deeper into the earth as Eduardo was adding more and more oranges into his bag. He was now standing 2 meters above the ground and all his body was stretched to reach a distant branch full of the shiny fruits. With one hand, Eduardo pushed his black hair away from his forehead. Pearls of sweat rolled down his face.

From the top of his ladder, Eduardo, 18 year old, looked around at the small orange plantation with a smile of satisfaction. Although the work was demanding, he was glad of where he was today. Life got much better for him and his mother since they joined the fair-trade movement two years before. Now, they had enough money to rent a small house, and live decently. This was not the case a few years before.

Eduardo remembered how he felt imprisoned in the big orange plantation where he worked at that time. The memory of the accident was still vivid. It was a day of November 2015. That

day, Eduardo was having a bad headache because of the heat. He could feel the heavy bag full of fruits painfully hanging and lacerating his shoulder. It was 5PM and he had only 2 hour left to harvest 15 bags of oranges. If he would harvest less than the 60 bags/a day required, he could be fired. Each bag was weighting a minimum of 20 kg for which he would receive only 0,15 euro. Sometimes it could even be lower if the price of the orange juice was decreasing.

The mother of Eduardo was also a worker in the same orange plantations, for 10 years already. It was visible that her health had degraded under the hard physical work and intense rythm. She had a frequent backpain and her breathing was not very smooth due to the pesticides that were sprayed on regular basis while workers were around.

That day of November, Eduardo´s mum fell from the ladder. He was not close to her when it happened but he heard Antonio, another worker screaming. He rushed to the next tree alley and saw her on the ground, laying still. At that moment, Eduardo could not hear anything else than his own heartbeat accelerating. He almost could not breath himself, until the moment she moved and gave some signs of life.

After several weeks of absolutly needed rest, his mum recovered. But their deepest fear became reality. Neither of them got hired again the next season. Never in ten years she dared to stay home, even in the case of fever because the feared she could loose her job. But that did not matter to the plantation manager.

Eduardo and his mother had then gone through very difficult time, but Eduardo´s optimistic nature kept him believing that life would get better. And one day, he met Salvatore from the Fair trade premium committee. Salvatore explained him with passion that he worked at producing fair orange juice. Fairtrade meant that workers were receiving a minimal wage that would not change, even if the price of the juice would fall on international market. The plantation where Salvatore worked was also growing orange organically. The harvest was a bit lower, but the quality of the juice was higher and workers were not falling sick. Consumers were paying more but in fact that price was just the true price of dignity.

From the top of his ladder, Eduardo was thinking of people drinking at the same moment a fair orange juice in Europe. Could they guess how much they made a positive difference to him and his mum?



Fair trade label and bio label

**Questions to go further:**

- *Where is the food from the canteen bought? Could local small farmers directly supply the canteen?*
- *What is fair trade? Which guarantees does it give to food producers?*

- Is it possible to find fair trade products in our country?



Worker in orange plantation- Brazil (foto: Christiliche Initiative Romero)

**Did you know that:**

- Only a small percentage of juice consumed by European is fair trade
- Workers in orange plantations earn their salary based on the weight of oranges they harvest, not on a salary per hour. Each day a worker carries about 2 tons of oranges.<sup>1</sup>

**Resources to go further:**

- Study on the orange juice industry  
[http://www.ci-romero.de/fileadmin/media/informieren-themen/studien/CIR\\_Orange\\_juice\\_study\\_low\\_sp.pdf](http://www.ci-romero.de/fileadmin/media/informieren-themen/studien/CIR_Orange_juice_study_low_sp.pdf)
- About fair trade  
<http://www.fairtrade.net/about-fairtrade.html>
- About farmers' markets at schools  
<http://www.soilassociation.org/schoolfood/schoolfarmersmarkets/londonfarmacademy>

**Connecting the dots:**

- Shopping at farmers' market, buying at the farm, or finding a farmer to bring food to my home means I have a chance to ask and learn what methods of production were used and favour organic methods.
- Choosing food from abroad according to labels give me more influence over the impacts of my diet on other people and environment
- Knowing our farmer also means we can reduce the distance between the farm and our fork!



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.festival-alimentterre.org/sites/www.cfsi.asso.fr/files/fiche-pedagogique-jus-d-orange-vf-20141121.pdf>