

What is Fair Trade?

In the late fifties, non-governmental organizations and sectors of the European left began to press for fair trading conditions for farmers in poor countries. The idea was to create transparent processes of buying and selling, especially food, to generate equity for producers and workers. The price was not the most important factor because European consumers generally do not have economic problems that force them to buy the cheapest on the market. So Fair Trade was born as an initiative of European consumers who just wanted to pay fair prices to the producers of the "third world". In the late eighties, the first Fair Trade labels were born and the first European stores that marketed products whose price reached almost totally to the producers. In 2003, a unique international label brand and certification of Fair Trade was established under the name FLO (Fair Trade Labeling Organization), which is responsible for ensuring that the business process was socially responsible.

"European Fair trade is not the only official one. Each country has to make up its Fair Trade," said Luis Felipe Avella, an expert on the matter and researcher at the Universidad de Los Andes. For the Colombian, the price is a fundamental factor, and Fair Trade shops seek to market products that are both environmentally friendly and affordable for the people who need them. It is not just a matter of selling expensive products to affluent people, but to ensure access to the entire population regarding the benefits of this type of product. "For me, Fair Trade is more important than the goals of the Millennium because behind Fair Trade is the possibility of improving the living conditions of the people," he says.

International organizations that promote fair trade are committed to making Fair Trade the international norm for global trade, a still distant goal. FLO certification involves controls and monitoring of prices, quality of products and the relationships between the actors of the market chain. We must ensure that what the buyer pays for Fair Trade reaches almost in its totality to the small farmer and is not left in the hands of the many points of intermediation, as in conventional trade.