

Fair Trade Certified

Fair trade fashion is made by people who are paid fair wages under safe working conditions. Fair trade supports laborers in achieving a suitable quality of life, where our demand for trade does not deduct from basic human rights or the planet in which we all share. The reality is that most fashion factory workers in developing countries (and some in America, too!) do not receive living wages or fair working conditions. Unethical trade and labor practices make it nearly impossible for people to rise above their circumstances.

UNFAIR TRADE: PUTTING CORPORATE RIGHTS ABOVE HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

Fast fashion is produced by an industry that frequently takes advantage of human beings (most often those already very vulnerable and disadvantaged) by subjecting them to discrimination, physical and sexual abuse, scandalously low wages and prices, unsafe working conditions, and even slave labor for both adults and children. Consumers who value ever-changing fashion trends and low prices perpetuate the market practices that lead to unfair labor practices by purchasing cheap, poor quality fashion.

The fundamental problem with the garment and jewelry industries is that, very little profits from the industry are transferred to humans working to produce these items. Large corporations control the trading system in the fast fashion industry, and they use their power to negotiate extremely low prices for both materials and human labor. Individuals have very little power to change their situations. They continue to work in the fashion industry in the vain hope that things will get better, but under current market conditions, that is unlikely to happen.

PUTTING CORPORATE RIGHTS ABOVE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

This is due in large part because of all of the things big corporations are legally permitted to do within the communities they work. In other words, the rights of big corporations are put above the rights of people and nature. Many of the regulations enacted here at home in America and around the world are put in place to benefit corporations rather than the individuals living in community.

In a very real sense, virtually every city around the world has relinquished control over its destiny by subordinating itself to selfish corporate desires. You see this in a variety of ways:

- The low wages companies are permitted to pay
- The low prices companies are allowed to negotiate with producers
- The lack of safety systems in place for farm workers and factory employees
- The rights to own natural resources that are by right all of humanities to share. This includes but is not limited to: seeds, water, land, air, and even DNA just to name a few

Violating Individual Rights to Earn a Living Income

Perhaps the biggest evidence of corporate rights being valued more than human rights is in how much companies pay producers and employees. Of course, the primary concern of these corporations is the bottom line, so they go to great lengths to ensure costs are low and profits are high.

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You will see these unfair trade practices happening to those working in factories, manufacturing plants, and so forth. Sometimes referred to as sweatshops, these assembly-line style production facilities employ hundreds of workers who do menial tasks repeatedly, working long hours for very little pay. In a very real sense, sweatshops are a form of slavery. Consider these statistics as evidence:

- **Percentage of fashion cost paid to workers:** Today, experts estimate that between 0.5% and 4% of the retail cost of a garment goes to paying workers' wages, even though they bear the primary burden for producing those items.ⁱ
- **Tragically low monthly incomes:** Cheap fashion drives down wages for people working in the clothing industry, like those in Bangladesh where 80% of the industry depends on fashion. There, people made £7.16 a month in 2006 (half of what it was in 1994), while the prices of essentials (like sugar and rice) rose 200%.ⁱⁱ
- **Cheap child labor:** There are more than 284,000 children in the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Ghana who work in hazardous jobs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Workers barely make enough money to supply themselves with basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and decent shelter. Rarely do they earn enough to invest in long-term projects, such as new schools for their children, medical clinics for their families, and systems for producing clean drinking water and energy. Poor wages, long hours, and unsustainable business practices rob these human beings of the ability to lift themselves out of poverty.

The frustration for many consumers is that even when asked, companies that use sweatshop labor refuse to provide information on their practices they support. This lack of transparency makes it extremely difficult for consumers to know whether they are supporting sweatshops or not.

Keep in mind that many products made right here at home with the 'Made in the USA' labels are actually produced under sweatshop conditions. This is further evidence that corporations even in the US have methods for ensuring they obtain big profits. A 2009 Investigation into the 'Made in the USA' label found the following shocking realities in American factories:^{iv}

- **Wage level violations:** Wages were found to be only 65% of what families need in order to provide for basic needs.
- **Poor employee benefits:** Though most companies offered health insurance plans, some cost up to 80% of the workers' wages, leaving them with very little income for other necessities. Other plans failed to cover simple things like prescription drugs. Many companies refused to pay sick days, resulting in employees choosing to work while sick rather than healing at home.
- **Unsafe working conditions:** Workers are subjected to poor conditions at work, including lack of air conditioning resulting in heat exhaustion and fainting. Because of long hours worked, many also faced serious repetitive stress injuries. Others are exposed to safety hazards and receive cuts and exposure to toxic chemicals as a result.
- **Union busting:** Most companies discourage employees from organizing to fight for better worker rights. Employees are frequently fired if they are caught trying to organization a union.

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These kinds of human rights violations – on American soil – are tragic, and something Hearts prohibits with our ethical fashion line. Many companies like Hearts provide good paying, stable jobs to American artisans to help fight this problem here at home.

Violating Individual Rights to Work in Safety

Workplace safety is another way big corporations take advantage of humans working with them. Rather than working to provide regulations and standards that ensure workers on farms and in factories are safe, companies fight hard to ensure there are fewer regulations in order to cut costs. There are many negative consequences to this kind of activity:

- **Air pollution from dangerous work:** Silicosis, a chronic, incurable lung disease, affects more than 440,000 people in China as a result of unsafe working conditions. In fact, this disease also occurs in workers who scrape denim jeans to give them the distressed look – the denim dust infects their bodies, resulting in silicosis.
- **Agriculture chemical exposure:** Many agriculture crops used in fast fashion require toxic chemicals. That means millions of farm workers spray chemicals on their crops every year. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 22,000 people die annually from exposure to pesticides.^v About 99% of those who die live in developing countries.^{vi} Up to 1 million people are hospitalized worldwide because of pesticide poisoning.^{vii} In California, the pesticides used on crops rank third highest for total number of pesticide related illnesses.^{viii}
- **Poisonous tanning practices:** The process of tanning leather is incredibly toxic, involving solvents and heavy metals. Studies in Sweden and Italy have found that cancer risks are between 20% and 50% higher in tannery employee populations.^{ix}
- **Children working in unsafe conditions:** Children in particular are vulnerable – they are valued for the low wages they can be paid, and for their ability to do jobs that require small bodies. For instance, they're also often responsible for spraying toxic chemicals on agricultural crops, without gas masks or protective outerwear. They are viewed to have more stamina than older adults and can also be conditioned from a young age to excel in production, working long hours and maximizing production.

These four examples should give you an idea of just some of the ways big corporations cut corners to make a buck without regard to the wellbeing of those working for them. These unfair labor practices are found all over the world and endanger millions of people every single year.

Putting Corporate Rights above Nature Rights

By and large, governments and corporations view nature as property not as a living, breathing system that requires care and proper stewardship. As a result, corporations fight hard to ensure they can use natural resources and work in wild ecosystems without restriction in order to strip the planet of as many valuable resources as possible to make a good profit.

Unfortunately, when nature is seen as a property to be bought and sold, the driving principle used to value nature is profit, not the wellbeing of the environment or the people living in it. This ultimately creates another unfair trade system, especially in communities where individuals are

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afforded little input into the use of their natural resources as is often the case in developing countries.

PUTTING FAIRNESS BACK INTO FASHION: ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTICES FOR FAIR TRADE

When you see a fair trade logo on a piece of clothing, you can rest assured that the garment was produced by humans who receive fair wages, whose working conditions are safe, and whose businesses contribute to sustainable business practices. These producers are required by the certifying body to follow a set of fair trade and sustainability standards, and are usually strictly monitored to ensure they adhere to those standards on an ongoing basis.

WHY FAIR TRADE IS IMPORTANT

Fair trade certification systems are about providing the humans who create products with the tools they need to lift themselves out of poverty. This is accomplished by providing better prices for their time and their products, ensuring they have decent working conditions, and helping them choose sustainable business practices to protect their local ecosystems for generations to come.

The fair trade movement, which started back in the 1950s, developed out of a growing group of concerned citizens. They wanted to help producers of textiles and handicrafts find more equitable markets for their products. Fair trade certified fashion gives consumers a way to tell governments and global market that they support an alternative model for trade and commerce. By demanding fair prices for the people who produce their goods, consumers are able to speak out in favor of justice in the business world.

The following are some of the basic principles of fair trade:

- **Fair and stable prices or wages:** Producers and workers are given a fair and stable price. The price must cover the costs of production, materials, and their time. This includes a premium paid by consumers for the fair trade production of the product.
- **Long term trading relationships:** By working through fair trade organizations, producers and workers can develop long-term trading relationships rather than having to market themselves anew with each season or change in economics.
- **Access to alternative financing:** Many fair trade organizations, in addition to negotiating fair deals, will also offer producers alternative financing opportunities such as microloans. This type of financing may otherwise not be available to small producers and farmers.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Most fair trade labeling organizations require that their trading partners – farmers, artisans, and employees – use environmentally sustainably methods throughout the supply chain. This helps to ensure fair trade products have the smallest possible environmental footprint for local communities, and reduces the eco-impact for the consumer as well.
- **Safety at work:** Workers must be provided with safety equipment and proper training to ensure they are safe, regardless of the kinds of work they do. Better yet, ethical companies are those that minimize the hazards as much as possible by choosing less toxic, low-impact production methods.

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- **No child labor:** Fair trade organizations universally support a zero child labor policy to ensure kids can be kids, and encourage families to value education above income.
- **Zero discrimination:** Whether it's on a farm or in a factory, fair trade principles ensure that women and people from a variety of races and religions are protected from discrimination of any kind.

These fair trade practices generally don't just spontaneously happen within a company. Instead, fair trade organizations have developed a way to monitor and regulate fair trade producers to ensure consumers know which products are legitimately fair trade, and which are not.

FAIR TRADE LABELS

Until recently, consumers had a very difficult time identifying those fashion products that were verifiably fairly traded, making the conscious shopping experience a challenge for even the most passionate consumer. Fair trade certification systems help consumers by doing the work of testing and verifying the claims of producers so that consumers can buy fair trade fashion with confidence, knowing their dollars are supporting a more sustainable marketplace.

Today, there is a variety of fair trade organizations that promote fair wages, safe working conditions, and fair trade principles throughout the fair trade fashion value chain – from agriculture to the weaving and dyeing industries, to clothing manufactures. In addition to the following fair trade organizations and labels, the United Nations maintains a list of other [fair trade labels](#) from around the world. You can also seek out organizations that follow Fair Trade practices but may not necessarily be certified. Certification can be costly, so some companies who believe in responsible consumerism will keep an open book policy. This allows consumers to peer into the records of a company with a clear line of sight as to the business being done, the compensation being provided, and the areas and people in which they are working with. In cases like this, the more questions you ask the better judgment you can make.

The benefits of fair trade speak for themselves:

- **Number of people employed in fair trade:** The Fairtrade Labelling Organization estimates that 7.5 million people benefit from the production of Fair Trade Certified products, including farmers, workers, and their families in over 59 developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.^x
- **Higher prices for farmers:** Buying agricultural goods certified as fair trade helps farmers improve their working conditions and sell their goods for prices 30% higher than what they would receive in the mainstream market. It insures that safe practices are put into place and the environment is taken into consideration.
- **Higher wages for fashion workers:** Premiums paid by consumers for garments made by fair trade companies can provide up to 10% of the cost of the garment to the workers, which may double what they would otherwise earn.^{xi}

To give you an idea of some of the fair trade organizations out there, here is a breakdown of the most popular.

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FAIR TRADE USA

The [Fair Trade USA](#) (formerly TransFair USA) is a certifying program for a wide variety of products, with a recognizable label found on everything from apparel and linens to coffee and tea to fruit and cocoa. The program, which is active worldwide, promotes sustainable development and community empowerment by working toward a more equitable global trade model. The [Fair Trade Standards](#) are as follows:

- Empowerment through inclusive participation and transparency, premium management, and focus on training and capacity building.
- Economic development through stable business partnerships, pre-determined premiums, and fair pricing and wages.
- Social responsibility by prohibiting practices like child labor and enforcing safety measures.
- Environmental stewardship by avoiding toxic chemicals and GMOs, using responsible waste management, protecting biodiversity, enhancing soil and water quality, and reducing energy consumption and climate impact.

It is interesting to note that Fair Trade USA is the first organization to provide a fair trade certification program for apparel that covers the entire value chain – from farm to mill to factory.

FAIR TRADE FEDERATION (FTF)

The [Fair Trade Federation](#) (FTF) is another sustainable trade initiative working primarily in North America to promote companies that are fully committed to the global fair trade movement. They certify fair trade jewelry, clothing, textiles, and more. The following are the FTF [Nine Principles](#) within their Code of Practice:

1. Create opportunities for economically and socially marginalized producers
2. Develop transparent and accountable relationships
3. Build capacity
4. Promote fair trade
5. Pay promptly and fairly
6. Support safe and empowering working conditions
7. Ensure the rights of children
8. Cultivate environmental stewardship
9. Respect cultural identity

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FAIR TRADE LABELLING ORGANIZATION (FLO)

The [Fairtrade Labelling Organisation](#) (FLO) works primarily in the agricultural industry, using their FAIRTRADE logo to identify products that have been vetted by their system. Though FLO began in the UK, the FAIRTRADE logo can be seen on a variety of products in markets around the world, and signifies that they have been created based on internationally agreed upon Fair Trade standards.

At present, as the FLO pertains to the fair trade clothing industry, the organization only certifies the production of cotton (and not the labor practices used to turn cotton fiber into textiles, nor the process of turning cotton textiles into fair trade fashion apparel). As such, when you see the FLO logo on a piece of cotton fair trade clothing, you can know that the cotton was produced by farmers using sustainable agricultural methods and fair trade labor in the field.

The following are the FLO-CERT Fair Trade Standards against which the organization uses to regularly test and certify its producers:

- Ensure a guaranteed Fair Trade minimum price which is agreed with producers
- Provide an additional Fair Trade premium which can be invested in projects that enhance social, economic, and environmental development
- Enable pre-financing for producers who require it
- Emphasize the idea of partnership between trade partners
- Facilitate mutually beneficial long-term trading relationships
- Set clear minimum and progressive criteria to ensure that the conditions for the production and trade of a product are socially and economically fair and environmentally responsible

THE WORLD FAIR TRADE ORGANIZATION (WFTO)

The [World Fair Trade Organisation](#) (WFTO) is actually a network of fair trade organizations that work together to uphold common criteria for more sustainable working conditions, sustainable development, wages, and child labor practices. The organization currently has over 350 organizations from 70 different countries worldwide that deal with the individual facets of the fair trade fashion value chain, including textile production, fashion manufacturing, jewelry creation, and accessories.

The organization uses a combination of verification methods to reassure profits from the sale of fair trade fashion goods go to the people making them, including external verifications, mutual reviews, and self-assessments. The following are the WFTO's [10 Principles of Fair Trade](#):

1. Creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers
2. Transparency and accountability
3. Fair trading practices

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4. Payment of a fair price
5. Ensuring no child labor or forced labor
6. Commitment to non-discrimination, gender equity, and freedom of association
7. Ensuring good working conditions
8. Providing capacity building
9. Promoting fair trade
10. Respect for the environment

FAIR FOR LIFE

[Fair for Life](#) is a brand-neutral third party certification system developed by the [Institute for Marketecology](#) which focuses on fair trade in the manufacturing, trading, and agricultural sectors. They have several types of certification programmes, including the Social Responsibility Certification, the Social & Fair Trade Certification, and the FairWild Certification, which can cover jewelry, cotton, and textiles as well as food, flowers, and toys.

ETHICAL LIVING TIPS FOR CHOOSING FAIR TRADE EVERY DAY

1. **Turn over labels:** Whenever you're shopping for fashion, always turn over the label to see if the piece has been made using a fair trade standard. Give preference to those that are, and where you can't find a fair trade labels, either choose not to buy, or talk to the makers to find out if they have policies to prevent sweatshop labor and unfair trade practices.
2. **Tell your elected officials you want sweat free procurement:** Governments wield significant power in the international trade market. Let your political representatives know that you want them to support sweat free procurement practices for their government operations and for their districts as a whole. The [SweatFree Communities Principles for International Sweatfree Federal Government Procurement](#) is a useful guide for making that happen – send it to your elected officials!
3. **Investigate 'Made in the USA' products before buying:** Choosing 'Made in the USA' labeled products is good in that it supports local jobs, but if the company applying the label violates labor standards, it's not really fair trade. So ask the producers of your 'Made in the USA' fashion what their labor practices are before buying their products. We guarantee that all Hearts' American made products are fairly traded!
4. **Shop for fair trade food and flowers, too:** Fair trade labels apply to many things including bananas, cocoa, coffee, beauty products and even to roses. Look for fair trade labels on your products when you're out shopping. This small change in consumerism mentality will support these kinds of businesses and increase awareness that these standards do exist.
5. **Buy from local artisans:** You often will be able to support fair trade practices simply by buying from local makers and producers for everything from soaps to pet toys to baked goods. Doing your eco shopping at farmer's markets is another great way to buy fair trade.

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- ⁱ *Rio 2012: what can the fashion industry do to become more sustainable?* (2012, Januar 16). Retrieved April 2, 2012, from The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sustainable-business/fashion-industry-sustainability-strategy>
- ⁱⁱ *Rio 2012: what can the fashion industry do to become more sustainable?* (2012, Januar 16). Retrieved April 2, 2012, from The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sustainable-business/fashion-industry-sustainability-strategy>
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Facts and Figures*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 3, 2012, from Fair Trade Federation: <http://www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/d/sp/i/197/pid/197>
- ^{iv} *Toxic Uniforms: Behind the 'Made in the USA' Label*. (2009, December). Retrieved August 15, 2012, from SweatFree Communities: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BwH0nSyYMDxtMmMyNDNkZTYtOGMzYi00Y2I3LWI3NDtEtNzBmZmViOTY0MTVh/edit?hl=en>
- ^v (Environment Bulletin: What is organic cotton and why is it better for the environment?)
- ^{vi} (Pesticides and Cotton)
- ^{vii} (Pesticides and Cotton)
- ^{viii} The Green Guide (2007, June 18). *Pick Your Cotton*. Retrieved July 30, 2012, from Health Child Healthy World: http://www.healthychild.org/blog/comments/pick_your_cotton/
- ^{ix} France Labrèche, OCCUPATIONS AND BREAST CANCER: EVALUATION OF ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN BREAST CANCER AND WORKPLACE EXPOSURES (Montréal: McGill University, 1997).
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- ^{xi} *Fair Trade USA Launches First Ethical Fashion Certification Label*. (2010, December 1). Retrieved April 4, 2012, from Fair Trade USA: http://www.fairtradeusa.org/press-room/press_release/fair-trade-usa-launches-first-ethical-fashion-certification-label-0