



your body matters



**Teacher Notes H: The Impact of Food Trade
on Global Health**

Nourishing Body & Mind for a Healthy Life

A Primary Health and Wellbeing Curriculum Pack

Revised Version 2023



Teacher Notes H: The Impact of Food Trade on Global Health

Associated lesson plans		
Primary Stage	Lesson	Title
6	6.4	Global Health; Fairtrade
Useful websites	<p>www.fairtrade.org.uk <i>Fairtrade – Information about campaigns, producers, suppliers in the UK, and news about fair trade. Contains a pack looking at raising the profile of fairtrade within the school.</i></p> <p>www.globalhealth.org <i>Global Health - Alliance of professionals and organisations working together to ensure health for all.</i></p> <p>www.who.int/en <i>World Health Organisation - Information and links to a variety of global and international health issues.</i></p>	

Global Trade

Food import and export around the world provides us with more variety and choice in our shops and supermarkets, enabling us to eat a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables all year round. However, the availability of this produce all year round does not necessarily mean that the people who farm and produce them benefit from increased wealth or wellbeing. As a result of the structure of many global trade agreements and legislations, the farmers and producers in the poorest countries are often unable to afford an adequate or healthy diet for themselves and their dependents.



Import versus Export

There has been a considerable expansion in export crops from countries South of the equator in the last two decades; why then are these countries still experiencing difficulties in developing as healthy nations and economies if they are receiving significant or equal financial gain for their exports in relation to the equivalent for richer, northern countries?

Many of the poorer southern countries have large debts to the Northern countries that they are obliged to pay off. Therefore, these countries must earn foreign currency from the export of goods to pay off these debts and to import necessary provisions they are unable to produce themselves such as fuel and machinery.

To maximise the revenue that they receive from the export of goods, many Governments in the poorer Southern countries have cut the subsidies that they give their farmers and domestic companies to produce staple food crops such as rice. Instead, these Governments have invested in increasing the production of goods and products to be exported. However, this is not always a sound investment because all too often such cash crops do not achieve an adequate price for the growers, as the trade in export foodstuffs is controlled by the wealthier countries of the North. Therefore, making the decision to shift the focus of farming away from domestic produce towards exports can threaten a country's ability to feed its people. For example, in Bangladesh subsistence farmers who used to be able to grow rice and family foods have been turned off their land to make way for shrimp farms; shrimp are exported to other countries for the revenue they achieve in the trade markets.

Is the Global Market a Fair Market?

On the surface, global trade systems and legislation appear to operate in a free global market, allowing each country in the world to participate and trade with all other countries. However, exports from the Southern, developing countries usually face a daunting array of tariff barriers (taxes) and non-tariff barriers (such as quotas) which make their products more expensive or limit the amount they are allowed to sell in the Northern countries. This can limit the ability of farmers and producers in the South to dictate their own terms on the global market and to challenge the power of the Northern-based companies and supermarket chains who buy their products. In this way, the systems and legislation are inherently unfair as the focus of power remains with the wealthy countries and does not consider the development required in the Southern countries before they could actively participate as equals in the global market.

The inequalities in the global market are played out in our own shopping baskets and can be illustrated by comparing the profit that the supermarkets and shops make from selling the produce in Britain, to the price the farmers and growers in the exporting companies are paid for their goods. For example, less than 10 per cent of the price of a jar of coffee will go back to the grower or producer. Most of the profit will be made by the retailer and the middlemen who have processed, transported or packaged the product.

What does Fairtrade mean?

Campaigns led by various charitable and political organisations, as well as those led by dominant public figures (e.g., musicians/pop stars, actors and others) have been raising awareness of the inequities of global trade and the plight of many Southern countries. Awareness-raising in the population within wealthy, Northern countries is a key aspect to the success of these campaigns and has resulted in increasing the demand for fairly traded products, including food products. There has been an increase in the number of people who want to know that the tea, coffee, honey or sugar they buy has been produced without exploitation, and that the farmers who grew or processed the product received a fair price for their work.

Providing farmers and producers in Southern developing countries with a fair price for their produce will allow them a dependable, regular income that provides a better quality of life, a greater influence over the value of their goods and the ability to challenge the inequities of the global trade market. The proliferation of fairly traded produce not only has an impact upon the farmers and the producers, but on the whole community involved in the industry in question. As the farmers are given a fair price, they find it easier to expand their businesses and so can become employers for the local community. This in turn ensures that other families in the area benefit from the regular income that fairly traded produce can provide. Many communities have been able to make a real difference to the local infrastructure, housing and sanitation because of receiving a fair price for their produce.

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