

Confused About Ethical Labels on Your Food? New Consumer Resource From the DFTA

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If you are anything like me, you can feel overwhelmed when you walk into a grocery store. You try to be a responsible consumer, seeking out ethical products when you can, but there are so many claims to navigate, it's difficult to know where to start. I want to support small-scale farms producing organic food but I am also concerned about the wages and working conditions of farmworkers. The international Fair Trade movement has long united consumers around a message of fairness, equity, and environmental stewardship with marginalized producers in the global south, but what about marginalized farmers and farmworkers here at home? Shouldn't there be a way for consumers' purchases to support them too?

Lucky for us, there are a growing number of resources to help shoppers navigate this tricky landscape and find products that reflect their values from seed to table. One such tool is the recently released evaluations of fair trade and social justice market claims conducted by the Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA). The DFTA is a national coalition of farmers, farmworkers, retailers, manufacturers, and NGOs united by a common vision: justice, health, and sustainability in our food and farming system. Domestic fair trade principles not only support family-scale farming, farmer cooperatives, just conditions for workers, and organic agriculture, they also honor the deep dependence those movements have on one another for success. Because the principles of domestic fair trade address issues throughout the full supply chain, they are an excellent benchmark for evaluating a



wide variety of fair trade and social justice market claims.

"I am regularly asked by our customers and community members to make sense of all the labels on our products," shares Meg Kennedy, Sustainable Product Advocate at Central Co-op in Seattle, Washington. "Even with all the research in my 20+ years in this industry, I find it difficult to clearly and thoroughly convey to our customers what each of these label claims mean. The DFTA Evaluations of Fair Trade and Social Justice Market Claims have given me tools to educate our community on specific labels. And since the work comes from the DFTA, of which my co-op is a member, we are confident that these evaluations were compiled with integrity and the highest standards possible. **The DFTA evaluations make my job a little easier, and help our co-op educate community members seeking truth and justice in our food system.**"

In the DFTA's first round of evaluations, six prominent fair trade and social justice certification programs were examined: Food Justice Certified, Fair for Life, Rainforest Alliance, Food Alliance, Fairtrade International, and Fairtrade USA. All six where

measured against domestic fair trade principles, and the common vision shared by members of the Domestic Fair Trade Association wherein:

- Contributions of all workers and farmers are valued
- Human rights and human dignity are affirmed and promoted
- Fair trade is synonymous with fair wages, fair prices, and fair practices
- Risks and rewards are equitable and shared, and this information is open and available to all stakeholders
- Information is readily available on the origin, processing, and distribution of every product
- All practices are environmentally, economically, and socially just, sustainable, and humane
- Direct trade and long-term relationships dominate the economy
- Strong local communities are the foundation of society
- Power is shared; development is community-driven and cooperative
- Cultural and indigenous rights and diversity are recognized, honored, and protected.

What makes DFTA's evaluations unique are that the people most directly impacted by our broken agricultural system - small-scale farmers and farmworkers - reviewed the evaluations together and used consensus decision-making to approve the results. Consensus is a process by which a group seeks the consent of *all* participants. It is often used as way to address dynamics of power and privilege within a diverse group. Because of a commitment to consensus, the DFTA evaluations are not only a consumer education tool, but also a model of the kind of cross-sector collaboration needed to strengthen the sustainable agriculture movement.

"Fairness in the food system begins with those who work the fields," states Nelson Carrasquillo of CATA (El Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas), a founding member of the DFTA. "We are aware that there are a lot of claims of fairness that exclude farmworkers and we aim to educate the larger community that, if we want healthy and safe food, this must change. Not only should claims of fairness include the wages and living conditions of farmworkers but farmworkers themselves should be at the table when evaluating the legitimacy of those claims. The DFTA Evaluations of Fair Trade and Social Justice Market claims do just that."

To view the evaluations and learn more about the Domestic Fair Trade Association, please visit www.thedfta.org