

Fair trade certification explored



By Jim Mosher

GIMLI — Plumbing fair trade was top of mind Tuesday, as a small group of students and interested adults gathered to hear one person's take on the global movement to ensure primary producers get a fair shake in their trade with the rest of the world.

One component of establishing which products are 'fair trade' is certification, according to Michael Zelmer, community relations manager with Transfair Canada.

Zelmer offered his insights about fair trade. About seven years ago, Zelmer travelled to Nicaragua with Oxfam. He would later obtain his Masters degree with a dissertation about the significance of fair trade in the Central American country.

Oxfam and other non-profits pioneered what we now know as fair trade. At its inception the move to ensure primary producers were fairly compensated was called alternative trade.

Transfair Canada has a logo that can be affixed to products that meet its criteria for fair trade products. In order for a coffee wholesaler to get the designation, there has to be assurance that the primary producer receives, at a minimum, US\$1.25 a pound and a 10¢ fair trade premium, for instance. Zelmer said every single stage in the supply chain is audited from the producer to the exporter to the importer to the roaster. "They all have to report, and they're all audited," he said.

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This group is working to have Gimli designated a fair trade town. Seated from left: Gimli High School teacher-liaison to the school's Social Justice Committee Rob Jantz, Brittany Cuthbert (Youth Community Partnership), Emily Lair (YCP), Jeannine Kebernik, constituency assistant to Gimli MLA Peter Bjornson, Alicia Sylvester (YCP) and Bradley Johnson (YCP); and standing, from left, Gimli deputy mayor Ross Bailey, Laura Power (Manitoba Council on International Cooperation), Zack Gross (MCIC), Transfair Canada community relations officer Michael Zelmer and Riverton Collegiate Institute teacher Karen Gallagher.

ETHICAL PURCHASING, FAIRLY TRADED PART AND PARCEL OF THE LARGER TRADE CONCEPT

While Transfair has its certification criteria, it does not have any control over the landed price of a fair trade product. “We don’t regulate how much wholesalers charge,” Zelmer said. “It’s left to the market.”

“One of the things I’m really looking to do over the next while is to separate fair trade certification from fair trade broadly,” Zelmer explained. “Fair trade is really a sort of magic; it’s a thing that brings a lot of people to it in the first place. When you first saw this symbol it didn’t mean anything to you, I’m sure. It’s about you wanting to do good things. You want to make sure that producers — the people who make the things that we consume — that they aren’t harmed in the process of producing those things. Coffee producers can be paid very low prices even though coffee prices may be very high internationally. Fair trade is really an attempt to make sure producers are paid a living wage or a proper price for their product; and that, in fact, they can be strengthened in their positions in their own markets.”

“These principles have existed for decades, and long before the certification process, long before that mark was ever created.”

“The certification system, which Transfair has a piece of, is just an

attempt to take all these principles, and to create standards,” Zelmer continued. “What is fair? Let’s explicitly say what these things are, and then create a system by which we can make sure that everybody, from the producer all the way to the person who wrapped that piece of chocolate, is observ-

**“Vancouver actually saved money when it moved to its ethical purchasing policy.”
— Michael Zelmer**

ing the standards, making sure they treated people fairly; and that this mark is being used appropriately.”

Fair trade can be complemented by so-called ethical purchasing policies. Zelmer wrote such a policy for Vancouver.

“Vancouver actually saved money when it moved to its ethical purchasing policy,” Zelmer said.

Some products have yet to get to the point of getting the fair trade certification. Clothes, for instance, have not broken the ground established by cocoa, chocolate, bananas, mangoes, coffee and tea.

“It’s very hard to find fair trade-certified apparel,” said Zack Gross, a director with the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation and an adult resource to Gimli Youth Community Partnership.

“Just because something’s not certified doesn’t mean it’s not fairly traded,” said Zelmer. “Ultimately what it comes to is an issue of trust. Ultimately, as a consumer, you have to ask yourself, okay, this company is claiming that it’s fair, how am I going to know? Some people will say I trust the marketing, that they’re telling me the truth. Great. If you believe, go ahead and buy it. If someone says they’re fairly traded and they’re doing fair stuff and you believe it, whatever your criteria, that’s good; go ahead and buy it.”

Gimli is moving toward becoming a fair trade community. It will have to achieve the six-point criteria set out by Transfair. Only two communities have achieved the designation — Wolfville, Nova Scotia and La Peche, Que. Eleven communities, including Gimli, are working toward achieving the designation from the Ottawa-based Transfair Canada.

Gross says the Gimli bid requires some finetuning, but is expected to be in Transfair’s hands in May.

A FAIR TRADE COMMUNITY

To become a Fair Trade Town, a community must achieve the following six goals:

❑ The local council uses Fair Trade Certified products and supports the Fair Trade Towns campaign.

❑ Stores and restaurants serve Fair Trade Certified products.

❑ Workplaces, faith groups and schools use and promote Fair Trade Certified products.

❑ Public awareness events and media coverage held on Fair Trade and the campaign.

❑ A steering group created for continued commitment

❑ Other ethical and sustainable initiatives promoted within the community.

HOW FAIR TRADE WORKS

Fair Trade is similar to a normal supply chain model of business. There are producers, importers, processors, retailers and consumers. The difference is the monitoring and certification at the core of the system which guarantees that the sup-

ply chain is built on and functions according to standards of fairness, transparency and accountability.

Producers and their organizations are monitored and certified by the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO). In Canada, the “Licensees” (processors) are licensed and audited by TransFair Canada to ensure that they are doing business with certified producers and that they are adhering to the standards set out by FLO. TransFair also works to promote Fair Trade Certified products at the retail and consumer level.

FLO and TransFair Canada are structured and positioned to support the needs of producers, consumers and licensees, guarantee integrity of the process and promote the principles of Fair Trade Certification. The two organizations also work in tandem to verify and audit the sales from importers to the licensees.

Source: <transfair.ca>