

Organic trade fair puts focus on Fairtrade



Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: 2,500 exhibitors were on hand in Nuremberg to display their wares

Coffee from South America, cotton from Africa and tea from India - all these can and are grown organically but they don't always find their way to Western markets. European groups are working hard to change that.

More than 45,000 people visited the World Organic Trade Fair in the southern German city of Nuremberg this year to stroll past booths displaying everything from organic wine to hammocks and t-shirts made from organic cotton.

Organic products have become big business and organic products are more popular than ever. However, many people believe we still have many steps ahead of us, especially when it comes to organic products from developing countries.

Lars Bech, Executive Director of the Danish clothing company Neutral.com told Deutsche Welle that while he is glad that organic products are doing better than ever, people need to educate themselves more about the entire process of making clothes.



Bildunterschrift: Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Organic isn't just about food anymore

"We are trying to make sure that they're made under the best possible conditions" said Bech. He said it is particularly important to treat the wastewater created by dyeing instead of just dumping it in rivers.

The quagmire of certification

A big part of getting organic products from the developing world into markets in Europe and North America is getting certified. AfriCert, a company based in Kenya, is heavily involved in certifying producers and farmers so that their goods can be sold in the EU.

But getting certified is no easy process and, according to Susan Wambugu from AfriCert, it varies greatly according to what standard of certification the producer is applying for.

"An audit is requested and performed according to whether the standard applies to social or environmental conditions or good agricultural practices or a combination", said Wambugu. "The market often determines which standard the producer prioritizes."



Bildunterschrift: Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: The certification process can be long and arduous

The certification process can be a passport to greater profits for small farmers, but first certain obstacles must be overcome, including dealing with the sheer number of different standards that exist.

There's Fair Trade, organic, Starbucks and Sustainable Harvest, explained Jordan Gama from the Tanzania Organic Agricultural Movement. And, to make matters worse, different countries use different standards.

"They haven't been harmonized yet," said Gama, "so in order to access the markets served by all the standards, the farmer has to pay for all the different certificates. That can become very expensive."

Cutting costs and fair earnings for farmers

Money can be another hurdle farmers have to overcome. FloCert, a European certification company, tries to help them with the costs involved in the process.

"We don't make any profits out of the system", Said Vicky Pauschert from FloCert. "It's just to cover our costs. We also have a producer certification fund to help farmers who can't afford to pay."

Part of getting more money for farmers involves establishing fair prices for sustainable goods, which was theme of this year's show. The term Fair Trade refers to a just system governing the exchange of goods and services between wealthy industrialized countries like the European Union and the United States and the world's less-developed countries.



Bildunterschrift: Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Fair Trade products are gaining popularity in Germany

Basically it comes down to simple math, said Lars Bech from Neutral.com.

"Farmers are paid decent prices so they have an income they can live on and are able to send their children to school," he said.

Positive impact on domestic practices

The certification process has done a lot to improve life for people in developing countries because once a farmer is certified there are certain social standards that have to be upheld.

"The benefits spill over into domestic production," said Wambugu. "The practices that farmers are compelled to use when producing for export markets get transferred to production for the domestic market and for the farmers' families. The result is increased awareness and increased food safety for local consumers in Africa."



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Sampling goodies was a popular activity at the fair

Most experts at the fair seemed to agree on one thing. For sustainability, certification and Fair Trade to work and benefit the developing world, consumers around the world must start buying more Fair Trade products. That means shopping with more integrity and paying closer attention to labeling.

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