

Fairtrade: a World of Difference

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Green Net, Rice, Thailand



Green Net

Green Net Co-operative was established in 1993 in Bangkok by a group of rice producers and consumers at a time when farmers were suffering from an increase in the costs of rice production as well as a decrease in the prices they could charge for their crop. At the same time people in Thailand were becoming worried about the impact of chemical pesticides on their health and the environment. Green Net was founded in response to this demand for organic produce and now works to promote sustainable agriculture through providing fair trade market access to producers. The co-operative is comprised of eight farmers' organisation in the northern, north eastern and central regions of Thailand, totalling around 1,100 members.

Three of the five farmer's associations own rice mills and therefore all Green Net members from eight provinces in Thailand take their rice to these mills. However paddy farming is not a profitable business and there is a lack of alternatives for farmers in the rice growing regions of Thailand therefore there is a high level of migration. Like with so many other commodities, problems of rice farmers across the world have been compounded by countries like the USA subsidising its farmers and then selling their surplus crops in developing countries at low cost. This means that local farmers are then unable to sell their own crops, leading to poverty and debt, and sometimes putting them out of business. Family members are often forced to work outside the area and send money home to supplement the farming income.

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In 2002 Green Net became certified by the Fairtrade Labelling Organisations (FLO) meaning they could officially export fair trade rice. It now sells rice to European countries such as Germany, France and Italy, as well as to the UK. Green Net not only exports rice. It is one of the largest organic producers and wholesalers in Thailand, selling over 20 products include pineapple, coconut, peanuts, teas and cosmetics. Farmers also produce many goods to sell in local markets like fruit and vegetables.



Initially the Fairtrade premium was spent on investments at the rice mills and computers and other equipment for the offices. In 2005 the mills made large losses after they were unable to sell the rice at a profit. The Fairtrade premium was vital to keep the mills going.

For Green Net the environment, fair trade and organic produce are all closely linked and equally important: "Live Fair, Live Organic". It has been an important mover and shaker in organic agriculture in Thailand, founding a national organic certification body. In 2000 Green Net also founded Earth Net Foundation to undertake research and development of organic products and community organisations. Earth Net Foundation provides many opportunities for farmers, including training and technology as well as promoting consumer awareness. Green Net itself is continuing to focus on bringing the values of fair trade into farming groups.



For more information:
www.greennet.or.th