

How is Fair Trade Different?

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The goal of the traditional business model known as "free trade" is to maximize profit for shareholders. In a supply chain, the goal of a business may be at odds with both suppliers and consumers. As a result, in developing nations, farmers who are already living marginally are driven out of work by unfair business practices. In some cases, child laborers are forced to work long hours under harsh or dangerous conditions. In the 1990s both Nike and Wal-Mart faced scandals when it was discovered some of their products were made by children in sweatshops.

Social consumerism (also known as ethical purchasing or ethical consumerism) is not a new phenomenon. In America, in the early 1800s, the Free Produce Society fought slavery through an economic boycott of slave-made goods. At the same time in Britain, the Rochdale Pioneers started the first consumer-based cooperative and opened the first co-op shop. Consumers want to know that their purchases are ethical, and that they make a difference in the world.

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