

KNOW WHO'S GROWING YOUR BANANAS THIS WEEK

Abel Ugarte grew your bananas this week.

Last week it was Milton Enrique

If you regularly buy bananas at the Keweenaw Co-op, you may have noticed the appearance of the Equal Exchange banana tree at the north end of the produce island. With its yellow and green leaves, the tree really complements the bananas suspended from the ceiling on either side. But in addition to its aesthetic merits, this sign is informative. Each week when the bananas come in, we'll mark down the name of the farmer who grew them on one of the leaves of the tree.



Betty Marquez, Jose Villacis and all of the other farmers who grow the fairly traded organic bananas we sell at the Co-op are members of the El Guabo Association of Small Banana Growers in Ecuador. Founded in 1998 by 14 small-scale farmers, the cooperative now includes (and empowers) 450 banana farmers in the region surrounding El Guabo. This small-scale, cooperative approach is a radical departure from the sprawling plantations and social irresponsibility that have characterized the mainstream, big-corporate banana producers.

El Guabo invests its Fair Trade premiums on projects to improve the quality of life for its members and their community. Its members voted to spend 80 percent of their premium on education, health care, environmental projects and other social programs. The other 20 percent is used to fund infrastructure improvements for the cooperative, such as packing stations and warehouses.

By attaching the name of the farmer to every case of bananas, Equal Exchange is seeking to create a more personal connection between farmer and grocery shopper despite the roughly 4,550 miles between El Guabo and our produce department. This is one connection that reminds us we are part of a global community. You'll probably never meet Betty Marquez, but your banana purchase helps her support her family – and her community – in El Guabo, Ecuador.

But if you do chance to meet Betty Marquez some day, be sure to thank her for growing such fine-tasting bananas.

More information about El Guabo and Equal Exchange bananas can be found online at [CLICK HERE](#)