

## **What makes Equal Exchange different?**

Equal is different because we want to change the banana conversation from one based on corporate power and control to one that is based on people and democracy. The base of our purchasing is our mission which is to connect the small farmer with the consumer. The base of our democracy is being a worker-owned coop trading directly with small farmers organized into coops.

## **What does it mean to connect the farmer and consumer?**

It means there is an open conversation between producer groups, Equal, distributors, stores and consumers about our business. Equal is part of a business web where we can evolve the way we think farmers and consumers should be treated in a food system that has intentionally left them both out of the dialogue and kept them from having a seat at the decision making table.

## **Who are the producers?**

They are farmers, accountants, agricultural technicians, administrators, board members, mothers and fathers. They weather volatile business changes, certification demands, legal issues, and arbitration. They navigate the growing and selling of organic and fair trade bananas to the likes of Chiquita and Dole but also to Equal Exchange. That is what CEPIBO had as their goal when we started working with them 5 years ago--to be able to sell to the big guys but also to find other customers. In short, they wanted to evolve and be less under the control of one major player. They wanted to have better jobs for their kids in their own community. After a century of outside control, they wanted to run a cooperative business with power distributed equally instead of concentrated at the top.

## **How do the producers see Equal?**

As partners. We have traded together with CEPIBO for 5 years and GUABO for 10 years. We share our business challenges and successes. We listen to each other. When we have problems, we work together to find solutions. They are patient with us when our orders are disrupted by shipping issues or customer relations. We are patient with them when they can't pack due to conditions affecting supply on their end. It is a relationship based on common principles and transparency.

## **What about the money?**

There is a fair trade minimum price and we pay above it. We pay above it because we talk with our partners about what they need to survive and grow as a business. We pay because we need consistent quality and supply. We pay because we compete with European buyers who sell to consumers who spend more on food than we do here in the US. But mainly we pay above it because we are here to challenge the current model in bananas and to shed some light on their true cost.

## **Equal vs other Fair Trade?**

Equal is about transforming trade by connecting directly with small farmers, keeping more of the money with them and their communities and proving that an alternative supply chain in bananas is possible.

Many of the other fair trade products in the produce aisle come from large scale farms and plantations. They use the sticker to tell the consumer to trust these products, but the truth is that many of these companies have not changed their main business practices but are merely sanitizing a portion of them to market to a consumer who now demands to know more about their tomatoes from Mexico.

For example, Dole mainly trades in conventional bananas. They own or control the means of production (farmer or plantation), transportation (ships) and distribution. They sell massive volume to stores like Walmart. Their profit is based on their scale and control. It is also based on exploitation of people and the environment.

When a company like Whole Foods decides that they want to support fair trade bananas, they need volume, stability and a good price. In response to this demand, Dole adds in some fair trade purchasing at a miniscule volume. They pay some small producers in Ecuador the minimum fair trade price. The bananas go on a Dole ship to a Dole port. They sell the bananas to Whole Foods and label it Whole Trade with a fair trade sticker in a box from the small producer coop. Because they control the transportation and distribution, these companies can offer fair trade products cheaper because they are using their scale and their non-fair trade purchasing to offset the costs of fair trade.

These bananas don't change the system. Dole's profits do not benefit the countries in which bananas are grown nor the people growing them. According to figures from the French research institute CIRAD, only 12% of the final retail price of bananas stays in the producing countries. An even smaller proportion goes to small farmers (5-7%) or to plantation workers (1-3%).

**We are all under the same fair trade system with radically different perspectives on why and how.**

Companies like Dole are about making some small part of a bad system slightly better without addressing the main problems of inequity of which they are the main cause. Equal is about transforming trade, empowering small farmers and building alternatives to corporate control. Fair trade is more than a brand or a sticker. Challenging the consumer to engage after 100 years of actively not talking about bananas is hard, but Equal wants to talk bananas, that's different.



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