

rubbernews

on tap – angezapft

Thai Farmers Share Fair Trade Premium with Workers

Green Net, our supplier partner in Thailand (the biggest rubber producing country in the world) is a small co-operative, producing certified organic coconuts – and Fairly Traded rubber.

Last year, finally, two members of the Fair Rubber Association sourced rubber from the co-operative. It was used to produce flip flops with the brands feelgoodz (USA) and hippobloo (France).

When making sure that the Fair Trade premium of EUR 0.50/kg DRC (Dry Rubber Content) has not only been paid, but spent in line with the regulations of the Fair Rubber Association, we got the following, surprising answer:

The farmers themselves keep only 30% of the Fair Trade premium, 20% are retained to strengthen the co-operative – and a full 50% are given as a bonus to the workers, who actually tap the rubber trees and process the raw latex milk into so called ‘ribbed smoked sheets’.

This is not a requirement by the Fair Rubber Association – this is the decision of our supplier partners. For us – this is truly a co-operative model.



Fair Rubber Association Moves Towards Own Third Party Audit System

Fair Rubber Association moves towards full Third Party Audit System

The Fair Rubber Association was founded six years ago this summer, but its history goes back twice as far. The initial idea was driven by the attempt to apply the concept of Fair Trade to products made from natural rubber – without unnecessarily adding to the costs and audit burdens of supplier partners: Many of them are not only audited against ‘social standards’, but also against environmental criteria.

As no other Fair Trade label was taking on rubber, we helped our supplier partners become Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified: FSC criteria ensure sustainable forest and plantation management, and (on the plantation level) audit against all the important labour standards as established by the International Labour Organization (ILO, Geneva).

We took this as the baseline and added the (self-monitored) payment of a Fair Trade premium in conjunction with regulations on the decision making and usage of this ‘extra income’.

By choosing this path, the Fair Rubber Association had found a way that avoided an additional audit for its partners (i.e. one for Fair Trade and one for the environment). Unlike the ‘big’ Fair-trade labels it even helped pay for the FSC audit, rather than



requiring its partners to pay – without any guarantee regarding future sales of rubber under Fair Trade conditions.

Unfortunately, this approach has not been met with much understanding: For years FSC more or less ignored our work on this ‘non timber forest product’ – and when the potential was finally recognised FSC pushed for certification of ‘big players’; the pioneer members of the Fair Rubber Association are seemingly overlooked. Consumers, too, seem to have trouble understanding the link between ‘rubber’ and FSC, and between FSC and ‘social standards’: More often than not, we have not been recognized as a ‘genuine Fair Trade organization’.

With over a dozen companies now selling products with the Fair Rubber Association logo, the Annual General Meeting decided that we had grown to a point where we needed to try and change this perception: We are now working on ‘stand alone’ Fair Trade criteria, to be audited by independent auditing agents, but without creating extra costs for our partners. The new criteria will include some environmental standards, too, but FSC will no longer be required. We hope to implement this new approach by the end of this year.

Solidarity With Hurricane Victims

Hurricane Okhi struck on 29.11.2017. Our supplier partner New Ambadi in India lost ca. 12,000 rubber trees (out of a total of 180,000). This is problematic, as individual 'bald' patches on a plantation are impossible to fill in, i.e. it can take as long as 25 years before production losses can be addressed as part of the general replanting cycle.

A similar number of trees was half uprooted by the cyclone – young plantings were particularly hard hit. The semi uprooted trees, old and young, are painstakingly pulled upright and tied down. One can only hope that no new hurricane will strike – because the ropes won't be strong enough.

More important (from a Fair Trade perspective) was the decision by the joint body (already taken prior to the hurricane) to spend 15% of the Fair Trade premiums on requests from the surrounding community.

From day one after the hurricane struck (it lasted 'only' some 30 minutes) New Ambadi was able to provide new roofing sheets to some 100 families in the neighbourhood who had lost the roofs over their heads. On

average five sheets at a cost of Rs. 500 per sheet (ca. EUR 35/home) were provided – which earned New Ambadi a lot of good will and admiration for providing help so speedily.

E.g. from Darma Chitan, who lives ca. 30 meters from the border of the estate.



Innovation in Natural Rubber: From Seeds to Periods

The Biofach Fair in Nuremberg/Germany in February is known as the biggest and most important fair for all things organic. One of the members of the Fair Rubber Association has been exhibiting for some years now at the parallel Vivanness Fair, which focuses on health and beauty. And like rubber products, cosmetics are still struggling with 100% 'certified organic' parameters.

Leaving such criteria quibbles aside, our member Fair Squared scored a double hit: Two product innovations that are neither

cosmetic nor food – but definitely great for the environment, the producers – and the consumers drew a lot of attention:

1) Most women would agree that until now most feminine hygiene products have been a financial burden and have come at a cost to the environment, too. Using pads and other fibre derived disposable products costs money and produces waste. 'Menstrual cups' have therefore become increasingly popular – but so far these have mostly been made from silicone – not the ideal choice from a sustainability point of view. FairSquared's 'Period Cup' is the menstrual cup made from Fairly Traded, FSC certified rubber – interest and demand were huge.

2) Most gardeners following organic gardening rules still end up using a lot of plastic, particularly when it comes to raising seedlings. Whether they are seed savers, or sow purchased open

pollinated seeds:

Most available seed trays are made from plastic, and the material is so thin that the trays fall apart after a year or two and need to be binned. Again, Fair Squared had the vision to bring the first seed tray made from Fairly Traded FSC certified rubber to market. The seed tray that should last for years even attracted the attention of a visitor from India who is running an organic veg box scheme for Mumbai. The company is already trialing the new product.



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