

Fair Trade USA and Chobani's launch of "Fair Trade Dairy" is Opposed by Labor & Human Rights Groups

We strongly oppose the launch of Fair Trade USA and Chobani's new "Fair Trade Dairy" program. This new label is being launched in direct contradiction to the demands of the very people it is supposed to be benefiting - farmworkers. Further, there is now "certified" product on grocery store shelves, but a final standard still has not been issued to define just what the label claims to certify as true. Without transparency, community-led solutions, or mechanisms for meaningful enforcement of workers' rights, this program's claims are no more substantial than a sticker on a package.

Fair Trade USA's standards development process is so flawed that it has been denounced by labor organizations on multiple occasions. Over the past decade, labor and human rights groups have decried the lax standards and corporate-friendly approaches to enforcement put forth in both [apparel](#) and [produce](#) standard development. Last year, as Fair Trade USA announced their draft standard and pilot process for dairy, 30+ labor, human rights, and food justice organizations signed onto [a statement opposing the pilot of the standard](#), calling it a "sham process."

Fair Trade USA's Standards Fail to Protect Workers

Fair Trade USA's heavily criticized process has yielded standards that are structurally unfit for their purported purpose. Over the last decade, Fair World Project has repeatedly highlighted the substantial failings of Fair Trade USA's standards on paper, including a 2016 report, *Justice in the Fields*, that [strongly cautioned against relying on their label](#) to protect workers' rights and safety.

Unfortunately, those standards-based critiques proved all too real when Fair Trade USA certified a Fyffes melon plantation in Honduras where workers had [documented over a decade of ongoing and unremediated abuses](#). The certification had no impact on working conditions on the plantation. Instead, it highlighted Fair Trade USA's inability to find problems and ensure that standards are met - the "fair trade" certification was only revoked after the launch of an international public campaign supporting the workers' demands for decertification. Just one month before the public campaign that caused Fair Trade USA to decertify the Fyffes' plantation in Honduras, [Paul Rice wrote confidently that their last audit](#), "did not yield any evidence of ongoing anti-union activities or human rights abuses."

While Fair Trade USA rolls out their dairy program with [claims](#) that it is backed by "a rigorous 200-point checklist of social, labor, and environmental criteria," it is worth noting that the standard piloted (and presumably currently being used for products on the shelf) specifically eliminates environmental criteria included in other standards. Further, their "checklist" is based on the same Agricultural Production Standard that has failed to ensure workers safe conditions in the past.

Product Marketing but No Public Standards

Yet no one can actually comment on the final dairy-related additions to their agricultural standard as it has yet to be released to the public, despite the fact that yogurt bearing a fair trade label has been on store shelves for weeks. This fact underscores the ongoing critique that this fair trade label is more of a marketing exercise than a program intended to protect workers' rights or transparency, as [their statements have suggested](#).

In conversations with organizers speaking with New York dairy workers as recently as last week, they confirmed that workers on farms that were supposedly participating in Fair Trade USA and Chobani's pilot program were unaware of the program or what it meant for their work. If workers are neither involved nor aware of the program, it is clear that any claims to "empower" them are no more than feel-good marketing copy.

Furthermore, [calls from the Workers Center of Central New York for Chobani to resume conversations with their members](#) remain unanswered by Chobani. Fair Trade USA has chosen to apply their label to yet another situation with [an ongoing labor dispute](#).

Organized Workers are the Best Defenders of their Rights

Fair Trade USA's release of a "Fair Trade Dairy" program goes against [a growing body of research](#) confirming that annual audits and corporate social responsibility programming alone are inadequate to protect workers' rights. Instead, models developed *and* led by workers are gaining respect for making demonstrable progress towards improving workers' conditions through organizing, training, and participation and leadership at every step of the program. If Chobani is truly interested in improving conditions for workers, they should look to the leadership of programs such as Migrant Justice's [Milk with Dignity program](#) that are already doing just that in Ben & Jerry's supply chains and engage with organizations like Workers Center of Central New York who is organizing with workers in their supply chains already.

Lastly, Fair World Project has long decried the ways that Fair Trade USA has co-opted the language and goodwill of a movement and a message developed by small-scale farmers and their coffee cooperatives. It is particularly egregious in the case of Fair Trade dairy. Fair Trade USA's messaging borrows the feel-good cooperative messaging to market a program driven by the corporate players at the top of the U.S. dairy industry with no democratic involvement from the most impacted people. That's highly relevant here as one of the root causes for the declining prices for farmers and conditions for workers is ultimately the crushing corporate consolidation in the dairy industry. To provide cover for massive players in the industry while co-opting the messaging of small-scale farmers is to add insult to the injuries piled up by weak, unenforceable standards.

Fair Trade USA's dairy standard is nothing but a hollow veneer of marketing. Despite claims of transparency and "empowerment" for workers, there is no public standard to evaluate. Further, if a claim is being made to "empower" workers, we're left with a final question: Why are the very organizations with which dairy workers are building their own power condemning this standard?