

# Fairtrade's policy on sustainable agriculture

## What you need to know, in a nutshell

Fairtrade has adopted a policy on sustainable agriculture. This policy defines how we understand sustainability socially, economically, and environmentally. It also enables us to bridge the gap between social justice and the global climate crisis and bring our climate work in line with our [2021-2025 Global Strategy](#).

### What is sustainable agriculture?

According to the [Food and Agriculture Organisation](#) (FAO), sustainable agriculture should meet the present and future generations' needs by efficiently managing resources (e.g., natural resources, technology, and skills). At the same time, it should conserve and improve the quality of the natural environment and farmers' quality of life.

There are many different approaches to sustainable agriculture which were analysed considering the context Fairtrade works in. At Fairtrade, we have chosen agroecology and its principles as best fit to sustainable agriculture.

## Agroecology as Fairtrade's overall approach

### What is agroecology?

Agroecology is a holistic approach that applies both ecological and social principles to farming, and aims at eventually transforming food systems. It is a scientific discipline, a set of farming practices, a social movement, or all three, and is viewed as a pathway to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the FAO, "it seeks to optimise the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system.

### Key reasons why Fairtrade aligns well with agroecology

Of all approaches, agroecology is **most aligned with Fairtrade's mission, vision, and Theory of Change**. It explicitly addresses core Fairtrade topics such as social justice, biodiversity, and empowering vulnerable or marginalised rural producers.

It is a **bottom-up approach** informed by **principles rather than universal solutions**. That means it can be applied to any smallholder farm or plantation and adapted to local needs.

It aims to **not just redesign agriculture, but also entire food systems**.

**Many Fairtrade producers have adopted agroecology principles** as they can be applied to smallholder settings as well as plantations.

Agroecology is **compatible with organic farming** given the synergies, common drivers, and shared principles.



## Policy positions on key topic areas

Our *baseline report – Sustainable agriculture under Fairtrade terms* – contains policy positions for Fairtrade on 25 topics that underpin sustainable agriculture. Here is an overview of the top five issues, selected as being the most relevant and pressing for Fairtrade.



**Climate resilience:** Fairtrade joins efforts to help producers adapt and mitigate climate change, increase resilience, and reduce their contribution to climate change. In this context, Fairtrade promotes the use of agroecological practices.



**Youth unemployment and lack of decent livelihoods:** To raise a new generation of farmers, Fairtrade champions, among others, inclusion and decent employment opportunities for young people, youth participation in decision-making, and the creation of safe workplaces. Simultaneously, Fairtrade works against discrimination, abusive and exploitative conduct towards young people.



**Market barriers and anti-competitive behaviour:** Fairtrade works with farmers and workers to balance power relations in favour of fairer value distribution. Fairtrade advocates for the sharing of information across supply chain actors to build fairer, transparent, and more accountable supply chains.



**Low income and wages:** Fairtrade take a holistic approach to strive for living incomes and living wages, which involves, among others, advocating for paying fair prices and wages based on living income reference prices; improving productivity; and diversifying income sources.



**Land degradation:** Fairtrade protects forests, ecosystems, natural areas, and protected areas; and works against the unsustainable exploitation of the latter

## Putting the policy into practice

The policy has been endorsed by Fairtrade International board and we're now working towards implementing it by:

- **strengthening programmes** to support farmers and workers in further building their climate resilience;
- **advocating for public policies** that support agroecological transition and aligning with existing and future legislation, for example the EU Green Deal and its Farm to Fork Strategy;
- **amending Fairtrade Standards**, compliance criteria, KPIs, and data collection methods to incorporate more agroecology elements and an even wider range of sustainability aspects; and
- **building and strengthening collaboration** with specialised organisations and setting a framework for future partnerships.

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## Learn more

For detailed information on Fairtrade's policy on sustainable agriculture, and a full overview of the 25 sub-positions, read:

[Sustainable agriculture under Fairtrade terms - policy position](#) (15 pages)

[Sustainable agriculture under Fairtrade terms - executive summary](#) (64 pages)

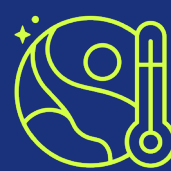
[Sustainable agriculture under Fairtrade terms - baseline report](#) (352 pages)

Further useful external resources:

[IUCN – Approaches to sustainable agriculture \(2020\)](#)

[The 10 elements of agroecology \(2020\)](#)

[CCAFS – Agroecology and climate change \(2021\)](#)



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