

Meet the Farmers

Narmaben - a Fairtrade cotton farmer from India



www.traidcraft.co.uk

Narmaben Manji, who works as a cotton farmer in India, hopes that selling Fairtrade cotton will help to provide her grandsons with a better future.

Narmaben knows what it's like to struggle to bring up a child. Her husband, Harilel, died 28 years ago, leaving her with their six-month-old son, Mahendra, to bring up alone.

"My son was six months old when my husband died," she said. "It was a very difficult time."

"I am doing some work in the field, like picking and weeding. I get a good price for my cotton. By supplying Fairtrade we also get good advice and there is interest-free credit."

"I want to give my grandsons a good education."

Fairtrade aims to increase the earnings of farmers and assist them to develop environmentally friendly farming practices. The Fairtrade premium enables co-operatives to fund projects that benefit the community, this includes drilling bore holes for clean water and building schools and medical clinics.

The farmers work as a cooperative, called Agrocel selling their cotton to Traidcraft, a UK fair trade organisation.

Narmaben in the cotton fields. Photo: Traidcraft/ Shailan Parker

Chakuben- a Fairtrade cotton farmer from India



www.peopletree.co.uk

Chakuben works with her husband in India. They have two children. With the wages they earn working in the fields they can afford to send them to the local primary school. They work for a Fairtrade Cooperative called Agrocel, where women are paid the same as men - a rarity - and given paid maternity leave. Farmers are paid a 30% premium above the price of conventional cotton, and they receive a pension, health insurance and good medical facilities.

Agrocel provides Indian cotton farmers with an alternative way of farming cotton; it helps them go organic and Fairtrade. Agrocel have developed natural farming methods and natural pesticides to control the pests. Farmers use chilli, garlic and soap instead of expensive and harmful chemicals, saving the farmers up to 3000 rupees per acre.

Organic farming protects the planet by holding 1 ton of CO₂ in the soil each year per acre. Farmers have used organic and Fairtrade cotton as a way of escaping money lenders, who previously sold high cost pesticides and cotton seeds, often ripping farmers off. Through Fairtrade cotton, farmers have been able to rebuild their lives as well as strengthen their communities. Profits are reinvested and support a cancer hospital in South India.

People Tree buys its cotton from Agrocel. The Fairtrade cotton that People Tree buys is then made up into stylish garments.

Bakary Diarra - a cotton farmer from Mali (not Fairtrade)



www.christianaid.org.uk

Bakary Diarra is a cotton farmer in Mali, one of the world's poorest countries. Despite working long hours in the fields, each year he and his family earn less and less from their cotton. Like millions of small-scale farmers in poor countries, Bakary is being forced to compete directly with powerful businesses from the rich world. Despite the fact that Bakary produces cotton efficiently, foreign cotton is often cheaper because of large government subsidies paid to western farmers. So it is not surprising that he is losing out. Subsidies are when governments pay farmers extra money for their crops. Governments might do this to ensure that the crop sells well and to make jobs for people in their country. The result is devastating for other countries, for Bakary and thousands of farmers like him. They struggle to pay for the basics of life, like healthcare and education for their children.

Bakary told Christian Aid that he fears not being able to buy clothes for his family, and expects to have to sell some cattle to survive. That would be the start of a serious downward spiral.

"If we don't earn money from cotton we won't be able to buy food," he said. "If any of our family members fall ill we won't be able to take care of them. If any of our vehicles need repairing we won't be able to do this."

If that wasn't bad enough, the farmers will not get a fair price for what they do produce. Globally, cotton is in trouble: the world price has fallen by a staggering 66% since 1995. To add to the injustice, Malian cotton farmers actually produce cotton more efficiently and more cheaply than their US counterparts. If the subsidies were removed, the US farmers would be the ones who couldn't compete.