

## **THE ESSENCE OF FAIR TRADE AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY**

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**Abstract.** The article presents the main issues of Fair Trade. According to the authors Fair Trade is a very important idea, while a programme designed to change the location and raising the standard of living of a large population of poor regions of the world. Empirical data derived from two sources, the world's largest organizations of Fair Trade: the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) and Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), are presented in tabular and graphical form. It should be noted that the volume of production and sales of Fair Trade products over the years have been increasing steadily (double-digit levels of an annual growth rate). The main Fair Trade products are: coffee, cocoa, bananas and cane sugar. The largest importers of Fair Trade production in the years 2004–2011 were the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Majority of all farmers and workers within the Fairtrade<sup>1</sup> system live in Africa. Harmful intervention, unethical money allocation, corruption and overproduction argument are the most negative aspects of Fair Trade considered by the economists.

**Key words:** Fair Trade, Fairtrade products, Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, World Fair Trade Organization, Fair Trade criticism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Fair Trade today is a systematically growing global movement. Fair Trade is a complement to conventional trade, allowing for more equal distribution between undeveloped and developed countries. Over a million small-scale producers and workers are organized in

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<sup>1</sup>Fairtrade (written as an one word with a capital letter) indicates FLO certification and is distinct from Fair Trade (two words written with capital letters) which denotes a general meaning of the movement.

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many organizations in more than 70 countries of the poorest regions of the world. Most Fair Trade organizations are members of, or certified by one of several national or international federations. These federations coordinate, promote, and facilitate the work of Fair Trade organizations. Some economists detect the presence of many negative aspects of Fair Trade.

The purpose of the article is to present the essence of Fair Trade and its importance in the world economy on the example of the two largest organizations of manufacturers, suppliers and sellers of Fair Trade.

## METHODOLOGY

Empirical data derived from two sources, the world's largest organizations of Fair Trade: the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) and Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), were presented in tabular and graphical form. To analyse the data chosen fundamental statistical methods were used. The authors used the most current data dealing with a particular issue. To present Fair Trade criticism international literature (mostly English) was studied.

## ESSENCE OF FAIR TRADE

Fair Trade concept has been developed in response to a growing recognition that benefits accruing from trading and trade growth are not necessarily shared by all countries and their citizens in a comparable manner. Fair Trade is a complement to conventional trade, allowing for more equal distribution between undeveloped and developed countries [Fair Trade... 2005]. Fair Trade has emerged over recent years as a powerful critique of conventional global inequalities and a promising initiative supporting alternative globalization ideas, practices, and institutions grounded in social justice and ecological sustainability. This concept has become a key rallying cry around the world for efforts challenging the negative impacts of conventional international trade. It has simultaneously become a market generating almost 5 billion US dollars per year incorporating numerous commodities and millions of producers, consumers, and distributors globally [Reynolds and Murray 2007].

Not many definitions of Fair Trade in the economic literature can be found. FINE (an acronym) is an informal association of the four main Fair Trade networks: Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), International Fair Trade Association, now the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), Network of European Worldshops (NEWS!) and European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) describes Fair Trade as a "trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, which seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in Africa and South America. Fair Trade organizations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade" [Becchetti and Huybrechts 2007]. The primary goal of Fair Trade is to work for the development of the poorest countries of

the Third World communities and building sustainable, direct relationships between the people in poor countries and consumers in wealthy parts of the world. Fair Trade is also a consumer movement, which includes the activities of non-governmental organizations to promote Fair Trade [Żukrowska 2010].

Fair Trade is both an idea and a programme aimed at changing the position and raise the standard of living of a large part of the population from the poorest regions of the world. In its assumption it goes back to the micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, private persons and citizens [Jagiello 2010]. The goals of Fair Trade that flow from this definition are [Moore 2004]:

- to improve the livelihoods and well-being of producers by improving market access, strengthening producer organizations, paying a better price and providing continuity in the trading relationship;
- to promote development opportunities for disadvantaged producers, especially women and indigenous people, and to protect children from exploitation in the production process;
- to raise awareness among consumers of the negative effects on producers of international trade so that they exercise their purchasing power positively;
- to set an example of partnership in trade through dialogue, transparency and respect;
- to campaign for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade;
- to protect human rights by promoting social justice, sound environmental practices and economic security.

## **FAIR TRADE STRUCTURE**

Most Fair Trade organizations are members of, or certified by one of several national or international federations. These federations coordinate, promote, and facilitate the work of Fair Trade organizations. The following are the largest and the most important:

- the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) – the best known association of producer networks and many national labelling initiatives that develop Fairtrade standards. The Fairtrade international labelling system is the largest and most widely recognized standard setting and certification body for labelled Fair Trade [FLO... 2012];
- the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) – a global association established in 1989 of Fair Trade producer cooperatives and associations, export marketing companies, importers, retailers, national, and regional Fair Trade networks and Fair Trade support organizations [WFTO... 2012];
- the Network of European Worldshops (NEWS!) – created in 1994 a network of national worldshop associations in different countries all over Europe [Fairtrade Foundation... 2012];
- the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) – established in 1990 a network of European alternative trading organizations which import products from disadvantaged producer groups in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its mission is to promote Fair Trade and to make Fair Trade importing more efficient and effective [Sixty Years... 2006].

In 1998, the four listed above federations joined together as FINE. The aim of FINE is to enable these networks and their members to cooperate on [What is... 2003]:

- the development of harmonised core standards and guidelines for Fair Trade;
- harmonisation, and increase in the quality and efficiency of, the monitoring system for Fair Trade;
- advocacy and campaigning work;
- harmonisation of their information and communication systems.

Figure 1 presents current FINE structure. FLO International Association has almost 1000 thousand members located in 66 countries and organized in 3 regional producer networks. By the end of 2010, WFTO had 472 member organizations (registered and provisional) and individuals in 74 countries. NEWS! represents about 2500 shops in 13 European countries. EFTA consociates 11 Fair Trade importers in 9 European countries

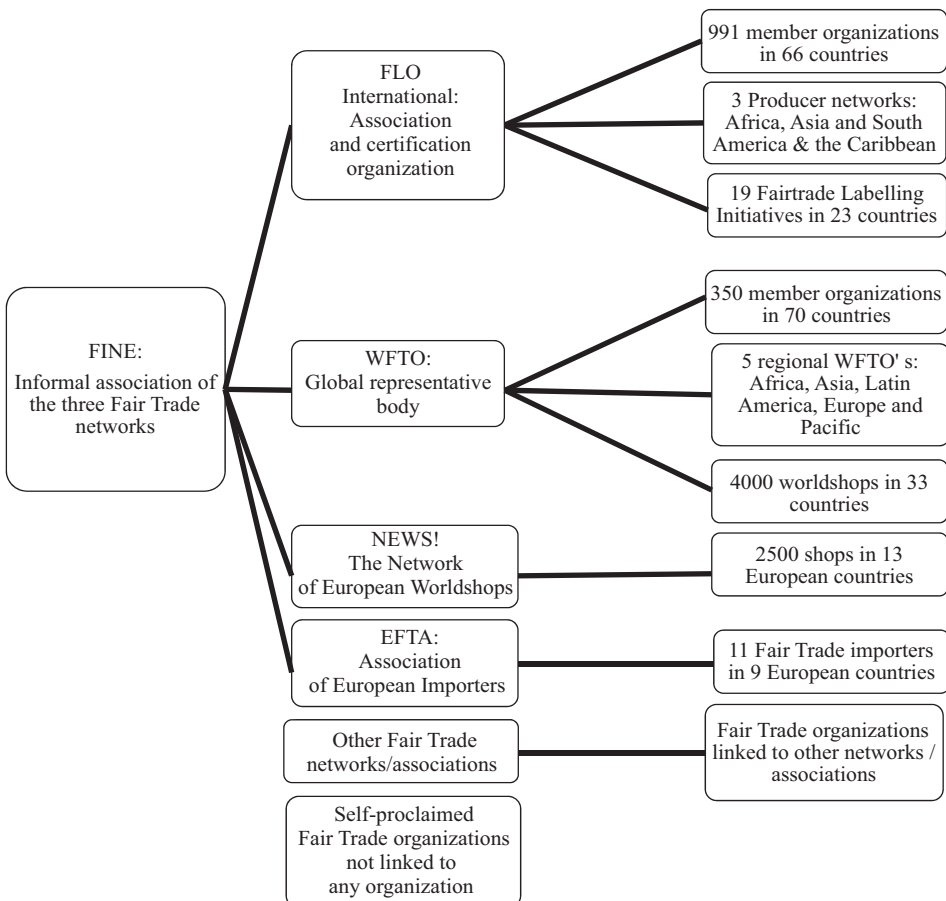


Fig. 1. Schematic overview of the biggest organisations in the Fair Trade movement

Rys. 1. Przegląd największych organizacji Fair Trade

Source: Own elaboration based on A Success... [2011].

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie A Success... [2011].

(Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom [EFTA 2006].

An important issue is the Fair Trade supply chain between producer and customer. Figure 2 shows supply chain of the Gifts and Living products from South to the North. People sometimes wonder why the price they pay for Fair Trade product is much more higher than the price that the producer receives.

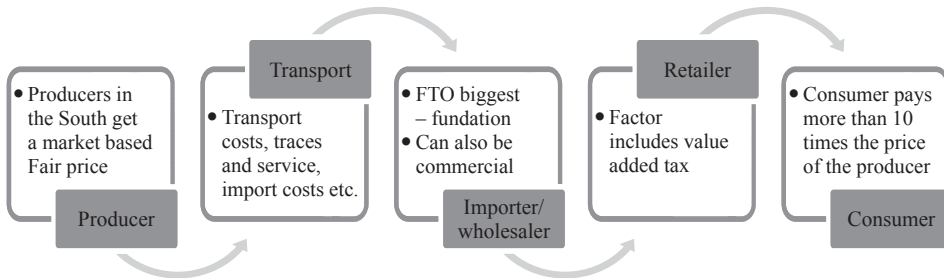


Fig. 2. Fair Trade products supply chain

Rys. 2. Łańcuch dostaw produktów Fair Trade

Source: A Success... [2011].

Źródło: A Success... [2011].

From Figure 2, it becomes clear that whatever price is paid to the producer, the consumer will always have to pay a several times higher price [A Success... 2011]. As in the case of traditional trade in every supply chain some middlemen exist. The difference in Fair Trade is that the producer receives a price that is higher than he would normally receive. Producer gets an extra premium.

## FAIR TRADE IN NUMBERS

Fair Trade producer organizations reported Fair Trade sales values totaling 550 million EUR for the 12-month period preceding their 2010 audit. The four largest products by value, coffee, bananas, cocoa and flowers, generated more than 80% of the reported Fair Trade sales income. Whilst Fair Trade sales values mostly track the changes in sales volumes, there are some exceptions to this. Data for rice, nuts and oilseeds, and wine grapes show a decrease in reported Fair Trade sales income despite increases in reported volumes sold (Table 1).

This is partly due to under-reporting of sales income (for example one major wine grapes producer did not report their Fair Trade sales income), and probably reflects changes in the capturing of volume data. In the analyzed period (2004–2011) the estimated Fair Trade retail sales grew in a dynamic way. The growth rates in subsequent years were 39, 43, 33, 37, 15, 27 and 13% in a row. In 2011, the retail value of Fair Trade production amounted to almost 5 billion EUR and was 5 times higher in comparison to 2004 (Table 2).

The largest importers of Fair Trade production in the analysed period were the United Kingdom and the United States. The share of these two countries in value retail sales was

Table 1. Changes in reported Fair Trade sales income by product in 2008–2010  
 Tabela 1. Zmiany przychodów ze sprzedaży Fair Trade w zależności od produktu w latach 2008–2010

Product	Sales income 2008 (mln EUR)	Sales income 2009–2010 (mln EUR)	Percentage change reported sales income (%)	Product	Sales income 2008 (mln EUR)	Sales income 2009–2010 (mln EUR)	Percentage change reported sales income (%)
Coffee	209.0	242.8	16	Honey	10.6	5.9	–40
Bananas	83.4	103.8	24	Rice	4.6	5.6	27
Cocoa	23.0	60.5	163	Quinoa	1.3	2.8	122
Flowers and Plants	35.1	41.2	17	Nuts and Oilseeds	4.4	2.7	–40
Cane Sugar	7.3	23.7	222	Fruit Juices	3.5	2.3	–36
Tea	15.3	17.2	13	Dried Fruits	1.1	1.8	75
Cotton	16.5	16.6	1	Herbs and Spices	0.7	0.9	42
Fresh Fruits/ /Vegetables	13.8	14.9	8	Sports Balls	0.5	0.7	35
Wine Grapes	12.4	6.4	–55				

Source: Own elaboration based on Monitoring... [2011].

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie Monitoring... [2011].

Table 2. Total value retail sales by FLO members in years 2004–2011 (mln euro)  
 Tabela 2. Całkowita wartość sprzedaży detalicznej przez członków FLO w latach 2004–2011 FLO (mln euro)

Total value retail sales by FLO members (mln EUR)								
Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
AUS/NZ	–	2.50	6.80	0.01	18.57	28.73	125.94	150.28
Austria	–	25.60	41.70	52.79	65.20	72.00	87.00	100.00
Belgium	13.61	15.00	28.00	35.00	45.78	56.43	72.00	77.00
Canada	17.54	34.80	53.80	79.63	123.80	201.98	194.94	199.77
Czech Republic	–	–	–	–	–	0.56	2.70	2.86
Denmark	13.00	14.00	23.20	39.56	51.22	54.44	62.54	74.91
Estonia	–	–	–	–	–	0.30	0.61	0.50
Finland	7.55	13.00	22.50	34.64	54.45	86.87	93.00	102.67
France	69.67	109.10	166.00	0.21	255.57	287.74	303.31	315.42
Germany	57.50	70.90	110.00	141.69	212.80	267.47	340.00	400.54
Ireland	5.05	6.60	11.60	23.34	94.43	118.57	138.00	158.86
Italy	25.00	28.00	34.50	39.00	41.28	43.38	49.40	57.54
Japan	2.50	3.40	4.10	6.20	9.57	11.28	14.43	19.39
Latvia	–	–	–	–	–	0.15	0.43	0.49
Lithuania	–	–	–	–	–	0.32	0.75	0.62
Luxemburg	2.00	2.30	2.80	3.20	4.25	5.33	6.20	7.49
Netherlands	35.00	36.50	41.00	47.50	60.91	85.82	119.00	147.30

Norway	4.79	6.70	8.60	18.07	30.96	34.69	43.76	53.62
RSA	–	–	–	–	–	0.46	1.90	7.27
Spain	–	0.30	1.90	3.93	5.48	8.03	14.36	20.03
Sweden	5.49	9.30	16.00	42.55	72.83	82.66	108.48	134.34
Switzerland	136.00	133.80	142.30	158.10	168.77	180.16	219.92	264.75
UK	205.56	276.80	409.50	704.31	880.62	897.32	1343.96	1498.21
USA	214.60	344.10	499.00	730.82	757.75	851.40	936.97	1030.67
Rest of the World	–	–	–	–	0.13	18.10	39.44	74.74
Total (World)	814.86	1132.70	1623.30	2160.55	2954.37	3394.19	4319.04	4899.27

Source: Own elaboration based on A Success... [2011] and For Producers... [2012].

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie A Success... [2011] oraz For Producers... [2012].

over 50%. Most important European partners were (except the UK): Germany, France, Switzerland, Ireland and the Netherlands (share of approximately 30%). Fair Trade products are sold in more than 120 countries worldwide.

Most notably Fair Trade products are: coffee, cocoa, sugar, bananas (Table 3). In 2011, estimated sales volume of these products increased more than 10% (growth rate for: coffee – 12%, cocoa – 14%, bananas – 9%, cane sugar – 9%).

Table 3. Estimated sales in volume per Fair Trade product in 2010–2011

Tabela 3. Szacowana wielkość produkcji Fair Trade w latach 2010–2011 (z podziałem na produkty)

Estimated sales volume									
Product	Unit	2010	2011	Growth rate (%)	Product	Unit	2010	2011	Growth rate (%)
Bananas	MT <sup>a</sup>	294,447	320,923	9	Honey	MT	2,072	2,070	0
Cocoa (cocoa beans)	MT	35,285	40,198	14	Oilseeds and Oleaginous Fruits	MT	854	1,219	43
Coffee (roasted, instant)	MT	87,780	98,073	12	Quinoa	MT	1,288	691	–46
Cotton (lint)	MT	–	8,223	–	Rice	MT	5,048	5,718	13
Dried Fruits	MT	673	955	42	Sports balls	1000 items	286	160	–44
Flowers and Plants	1000 stems	327,053	362,067	11	Cane sugar	MT	127,149	138,308	9
Fresh Fruits	MT	18,398	16,165	–12	Tea	MT	12,370	13,398	8
Fresh Vegetables	MT	–	474	–	Timber	Cubic metres	–	324	–
Fruit juices	1000 litres	25,468	38,775	52	Wine	1000 litres	13,155	11,786	–10
Herbs and Spices	MT	408	255	–38					

<sup>a</sup> MT – metric tonne (equal to 1,000 kg in International System of Units).

Source: Own elaboration based on For Producers... [2012].

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie For Producers... [2012].

Changes in sales were not positive for every Fair Trade product. The sales volume of products, such as fresh fruits, herbs and spices and wine, decreased in 2011.

Table 4 gives a breakdown of the numbers of farmers and workers within Fairtrade certified producer organizations, according to product, for 2010. More than 1.1 million people were involved in production of Fair Trade products. Coffee, tea and cocoa were the most significant products in terms of farmer and worker numbers.

Table 4. Breakdown of farmers' and workers' numbers by Fair Trade product in 2010  
Tabela 4. Rozkład liczby rolników i pracowników zaangażowanych przy produkcji Fair Trade w 2010 roku (w zależności od produktu)

Product	Farmers by product	Workers by products	Farmers and workers by products	Percentage of total (%)	Product	Farmers by product	Workers by products	Farmers and workers by products	Percentage of total (%)
Coffee	532,000	0	532,000	48.31	Bananas	9,900	5,500	15,400	1.40
Tea	14,200	81,500	95,700	8.69	Herbs and Spices	10,000	0	10,000	0.91
Cocoa	125,900	0	125,900	11.43	Dried Fruits	6,700	0	6,700	0.61
Cotton	58,500	0	58,500	5.31	Rice	5,400	0	5,400	0.49
Flowers and Plants	0	34,000	34,000	3.09	Wine Grapes	400	3,800	4,200	0.38
Fresh Fruits/ /Vegetables	3400	21,500	24,900	2.26	Honey	3,600	0	3,600	0.33
Cane Sugar	17,600	0	17,600	1.60	Quinoa	2,900	0	2,900	0.26
Nuts and Oilseeds	16,900	0	16,900	1.53	Fruit Juices	2,300	0	2,300	0.21
Sports Balls	0	16,400	16,400	1.49	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>938,400</b>	<b>162,800</b>	<b>1,101,200</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Own elaboration based on Monitoring... [2011].

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie Monitoring... [2011].

In 2010, 58% of all farmers and workers within the Fairtrade system lived in Africa. Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for 25% of all farmers and workers within the Fairtrade system, and Asia and Oceania for 17%. Of the 63 countries where Fairtrade International is present, Tanzania had the most farmer members of Fairtrade organizations, while India was the largest country in terms of workers in Fairtrade hired labour organisations. The size of Fairtrade producer organizations varies widely. The smallest producer organization has only 9 members, and the largest more than 70 000 [Monitoring... 2011].



## **FAIR TRADE CRITICISM**

According to Henderson Fair Trade means “paying a price premium for commodities based not on quality but on employment and other conditions which is counter-productive and unfair”. As a result consumers get lower-quality products. Secondly, much of extra money from the price premium goes to the fair-trade bureaucracy rather than to the producers. A better solution for Third World producers is to abolish all remaining trade barriers instead of building new ones [Henderson 2008]. The same standpoint present Maseland and de Vaal who claim that the practice of Fair Trade organizations might lead to market distortions that cause adverse effects [Maseland and de Vaal 2002].

Some economists say trade cannot be fair anytime [Żukrowska 2010]. They perceive many negative aspects of Fair Trade. Among the raised objections are:

- excessive, harmful intervention (According to liberal economists the free market development is a better guarantee of the expansion of poor countries than subsidizing their production. (The authors claim that free market is not a ideal market structure and has some downsides, that is why subsidizing can be a good solution to encourage farmers from the Third World.);
- unethical money allocation and selling techniques (Consumers have been shown to be content paying higher prices for Fairtrade products, in the belief that this helps the very poor [Arnot et al. 2006]. There is no evidence how much of the extra money paid to the exporting cooperatives reaches the Fair Trade producers from the Third World. Nobody monitors how much extra retailers charge for Fair Trade goods. The authors totally agree with this statement.);
- overproduction argument (Some critics argue that Fair Trade harms non-Fair Trade producers. Fair trade organizations explain that their farmers are paid higher prices and are given special advice on increasing yields and quality. Such a situation encourage them to increase the production. In the authors’ opinion joining the Fair Trade association is a full free option and every farmer or producer can do it.);
- corruption (According to authors, subsidising of certain manufacturers can lead to a lot of abuse.).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the data presented, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- the crucial Fair Trade products include coffee, cocoa, bananas and cane sugar;
- the value of retail sales of Fair Trade production has increased five times over the past eight years (2004–2011);
- the main two importers of Fair Trade production in the years 2004–2011 were the United Kingdom and the United States. The share of these countries in the sold production exceeded 50% in the analysed period;
- majority of all farmers and workers within the Fairtrade system lived in Africa;
- some economists perceive many negative aspects of Fair Trade: harmful intervention, unethical money allocation, corruption and overproduction argument are the

most negative aspects of Fair Trade considered by them. The authors agree with the majority of noted negative aspects of Fair Trade but cannot share opinion about harmful intervention caused by Fair Trade rules;

- according to the authors the idea of Fair Trade movement is a valuable one and is worth popularising.

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## **ISTOTA SPRAWIEDLIWEGO HANDLU (FAIR TRADE) I JEGO ZNACZENIE W GOSPODARCE ŚWIATOWEJ**

**Streszczenie.** W artykule przedstawiono najważniejsze zagadnienia dotyczące sprawiedliwego handlu (Fair Trade). Według autorów artykułu ruch Fair Trade jest bardzo ważną ideą, której celem jest zmiana lokalizacji i podniesienie poziomu życia dużej części populacji z biednych regionów świata. Dane empiryczne pochodzące z dwóch największych organizacji Fair Trade na świecie, tj. Światowej Organizacji Sprawiedliwego Handlu (WFTO) oraz Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), zaprezentowane zostały w formie tabelarycznej i graficznej. Należy zauważyć, że wielkość produkcji i sprzedaży produktów Fair Trade rośnie na przestrzeni lat (dwucyfrowy poziom rocznej stopy wzrostu). Do głównych produktów Fair Trade należy zaliczyć: kawę, kakao, banany oraz cukier trzcinowy. Największymi importerami produktów Fair Trade w latach 2004–2011 były Wielka Brytania oraz Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki Północnej. Większość rolników i pracowników w ramach systemu produkcji Fair Trade zamieszkuje obszar Afryki. Do najbardziej negatywnych aspektów sprawiedliwego handlu (Fair Trade) uwzględnianych przez ekonomistów należy zaliczyć: szkodliwy interwencjonizm, nieetyczny (niesprawiedliwy) przydział pieniędzy, korupcję oraz nadprodukcję.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sprawiedliwy handel (Fair Trade), produkty Fair Trade, Światowa Organizacja Sprawiedliwego Handlu (WFTO), Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), krytyka sprawiedliwego handlu

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