

# VEGETABLES



*Like fresh fruit, vegetables are a global agricultural product. They are bought in bulk for on-campus catering and are often imported from less developed countries even though vegetable production in Europe and the UK is significant.*

*Growing, processing and packing vegetables have a range of poverty-related impacts, both positive and negative. Developed countries continue to protect their agriculture industries by using subsidies and this impacts upon the world's poor. More than half the population of developing countries are rural therefore agriculture has the potential to significantly reduce poverty if trade with the developed world is more equitable.*

## The issues

Vegetable exports are dominated by tomatoes, which account for 22% of all exports. Other top export vegetables are lettuce, chillies and peppers, onions, and mushrooms. A current trend is the sudden growth in string or dwarf beans for export, and though still a very small portion of vegetable exports the actual export growth has been 3577% between 1994 and 2003 (Somo 2006).

World production is largely driven by developing countries, and certain crops can be key to a country's economy even if they are not the major producing and exporting nation, for example, string beans in Kenya or Egypt.

Agricultural markets are key to the lives of poor people in developing countries where between half and three-quarters of the poor live in rural areas and where agriculture provides between 50-90 per cent of income by household.

In recent decades, developed countries have increased their demand for fresh produce from the developing world. This can help dramatically increase incomes for poor farmers but this is not always the case in practice. Increased demands have led to the heavy use of pesticides which are expensive and can harm the health of agricultural workers and communities when water courses are polluted.

Poverty is probably the most important reason for the use of child labour in agriculture where children are used to help increase total family income. Although they may supplement income in the short term, this behaviour tends to reinforce long-term poverty as the lack of education and training that results means that mobility is absent.

It is difficult to quantify the problem because official statistics often do not count seasonal or child workers or their sporadic use. The use of child labour is therefore to a large extent undocumented and under-recorded. However, World Bank figures suggest that possibly 15 million children are producing goods for international markets worldwide and that agriculture/subsistence farming is the largest sector of work, involving perhaps half of all child workers.

Children working in agriculture face a number of risks, often working long hours with minimal or no safety equipment, and in harsh conditions they are regularly injured and exposed to toxic chemicals, dust and the weather.



## Growing and manufacturing process and conditions

The supply route of fresh vegetables is the same as fruit and vegetables destined for the supermarkets and other retailers and therefore has similar poverty implications.

Fresh vegetables are grown either on plantations or by small holders and are then transported either by sea if timescales permit or by air. The need to transport goods in bulk and at constant set temperature for some items such as tomatoes can present a barrier to small scale farmers and small holders as it is either expensive or under the control of larger operators.

SOMO and Action Aid have conducted key research in this area and they both identify common issues around the

production and supply of vegetables (and fruit) to the EU and UK:

- Long hours and low wages for pickers and packers on both large plantations and on small holdings
- Casual working contracts and repression of unions at larger plantations
- Health impacts through exposure to pesticides and fertilisers, particularly on plantations using aerial spraying techniques
- Exclusion of small holders and co-operatives from transportation services and dominance by large multinational producers.

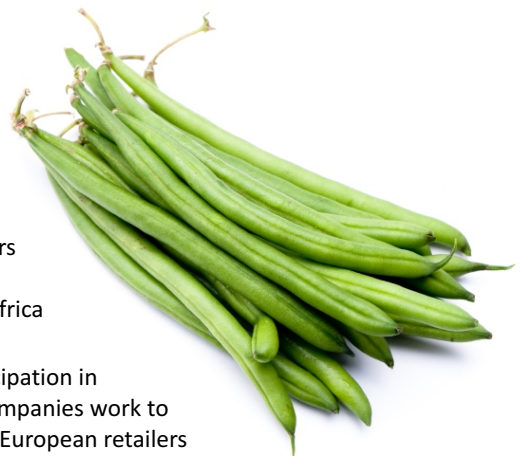
### Green Beans – export success?

87 per cent of UK green bean imports come from five African countries, and 58 per cent comes from Kenya where the UK has imported green beans since the colonial era. The industry has expanded rapidly from an annual export of around 6000 tonnes thirty years ago to 33,000 tonnes in 2004, and the UK now buys the majority of Kenyan output.

It has been calculated that 50-60,000 employees on larger farms grow produce consumed in the UK. Factoring in dependents and service providers produces an estimate that 1-1.5 million people's livelihoods depend upon export to the UK and that c. £200 million is earned by rural economies in Africa through trade with the UK.

However, smallholder (small scale farms and co-operative members) participation in fresh fruit and vegetable export chains has decreased in Kenya as larger companies work to dominate the market. Smallholders can have difficulties selling produce to European retailers and are increasingly excluded from the export chain. The export of cash crops can result in the transfer of productive land from production for local consumption to growing food solely for export. In the 1970s, Kenya was largely self-sufficient in food forty years ago, but is now a net food importer. This makes people more susceptible and vulnerable to fluctuations in global food prices and can make accessing staple foods difficult for the poor as items are either unaffordable or unavailable.

Fresh vegetable imports pose a potential dilemma between environmental and social considerations. The UK imports around 90 per cent of fruit and 40 per cent of the vegetables consumed and it has been recently estimated that the livelihoods of over a million rural Africans (IEED 2006) depend at least partly on fruit and vegetable exports to the UK. Supporting poor farmers in the developing world can help them trade their way out of poverty if the terms of trade are fair. Contrary to this, there is a movement to reduce food miles and buy locally produced produce where possible. There is no simple answer to this dilemma, but lifting people out of poverty also has a range of environmental benefits as the two issues are irretrievably linked.



## Recommendations

- ⊙ *Continued procurement of vegetables from developing countries, including Least Developed Countries, will have positive impacts on reducing poverty. The net carbon footprint is low overall and there are significant poverty-related benefits.*
- ⊙ *Accreditations are scarce, but as with fruit (see separate information sheet) look for 'fair trade' and Organic standards (or equivalent). Monitor the progress of the new Fresh peas and beans from Africa standard from Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO).*
- ⊙ *Support fresh vegetable supply from small holdings and co-operatives where possible.*

## REFERENCES/FURTHER INFORMATION

Action Aid Report: Who Pays? [www.actionaid.org.uk/1486/who\\_pays\\_campaign.html](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/1486/who_pays_campaign.html)

FLO:

[www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/content/2009/standards/documents/Factsheet\\_Fairtrade\\_Vegetables\\_Africa.pdf](http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/2009/standards/documents/Factsheet_Fairtrade_Vegetables_Africa.pdf)

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Kwa, A. (2008) Do agricultural safe guards afford adequate protection?, South Bulletin, Issue 25 October 2008.

Nicolls A: Thriving in a Hostile Environment: Fairtrade's Role as a Positive Market Mechanism for Disadvantaged Producers.

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