

**Fair Flowers, Fair Trade and Informed Consumers:  
Building on European Strategies for Public Engagement**

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**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Canadian consumers support fair trade and ethical shopping. A 1998 CROP national public opinion survey revealed that a majority of Canadians consider conditions of production when buying consumer goods and believed their product choices can influence companies' respect for human rights. However, Canadian efforts to promote fair trade have not equalled the scope or the results of European initiatives. At a time when the alleged virtues of free trade dominate public discussion in Canada, the success of European organizations in promoting fair trade is cause for envy.

For example, one Belgium NGO promoting fair trade, Oxfam Wereldwinkels, commands so much influence that executives from the Chiquita banana company, worried about a Wereldwinkels campaign detailing abusive working conditions on Central American banana plantations, flew from the U.S. to Europe to meet with them. Also, in Belgium, schools sell fairly-traded orange juice from Brazil and Cuba as an alternative to Coca-Cola.

In England, major supermarkets like Safeway and Tesco participate in pilot projects with non-profit groups and unions to ensure that the wine and bananas they stock from Third World countries are produced under ethical conditions. In Switzerland, two of the largest supermarket chains, Migros and Coop, offer mini-roses that meet high standards set out in the International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers. Throughout Europe, at least 2,500 stores sell only fairly-traded products.

This paper will examine several European fair and ethical trade initiatives and discuss how European strategies for public engagement may be applied to Canada. A major focus will be the European cut flowers campaign, which has been highly successful in educating consumers about conditions under which flowers are produced and in helping to improve conditions for African and South American flower workers. Public engagement strategies used by Oxfam Wereldwinkels will also be discussed, as well as the work of the British Ethical Trading Initiative and one of its members, Oxfam Great Britain.

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## What is Fair Trade?

The term fair trade is most often used to describe trade that promotes sustainable development by improving market access for disadvantaged producers. As Oxfam Great Britain explains, fair trade “seeks to overcome poverty and provide decent livelihoods for producers through a partnership between all those involved in the trading process: producers/workers, traders and consumers.” The International Federation for Alternative Trade defines fair trade as:

Trade with concern for the social, economic and environmental well-being of marginalized producers in developing countries. This means equitable commercial terms, fair wages and fair prices. Unfair trade structures, mechanisms, practices and attitudes will be identified and avoided.

When stores or trading organizations deal directly with small producers, cutting out expensive middlemen, producers earn more and are able to reduce their impact on the environment. As fair trade stores do not aim to earn a hefty profit, consumers often can buy fairly-traded products for the same price or slightly more than the price of regular products.

Fair trade works well in industries such as coffee, replete with small and medium-sized producers. It is far more difficult to transfer to capital-intensive industries such as large-scale flower production which is dominated by large companies. Investment in infrastructure, new flower varieties, modern technology, expensive pesticides and the necessary contacts with the international trading community make the flower industry capital-intensive and out of the reach of small producers. In Colombia for instance, the largest flower-growing company, Americaflor Ltda., is owned by the Dole Food Company Inc., which is also the proprietor of Sunburst Farms, the largest importer and marketer of cut flowers in the U.S. At the present time, the concept of fair trade cannot be applied to the South American cut flower business where there is no small-scale production. Given the structure of ownership in the flower industry, the European Flower Campaign aptly refers not to fair trade in flowers but to “fair flowers”, which are defined as flowers produced “under socially and environmentally sustainable conditions”.

In industries where small-scale production is scant or non-existent, ethical trade is the term often used to describe products made under conditions that meet international labour and human rights standards; hence we have the British Ethical Trading Initiative and the Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group. The Ethical Trading Initiative brings together corporations, NGOs and trade unions to improve working conditions for people making products sold in Britain. The Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group is a coalition of unions, church groups and NGOs, - including the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and the Maquila Solidarity Network - that have been negotiating to establish a code of conduct for Canadian retailers like Sears and The Bay. The code would outline basic rights and standards to which retailers pledge to adhere in relations with workers, communities and the environment.

## Existing Canadian Fair and Ethical Trade Initiatives

Before discussing European strategies, it is helpful to examine some key Canadian fair and ethical trade initiatives. The Toronto-based Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), the nucleus for Canada's stop sweatshops campaigns and secretariat for the Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group, has already drawn extensively on the European experience to inform Canadians about the conditions under which the products they buy are made. "In some ways, the European experience is more relevant to Canada than the U.S. experience," explains MSN spokesperson Lynda Yantz. "We feel more comfortable with the European combination of lobbying for legislative changes to strengthen the role of government while at the same time campaigning to educate the public and engaging with companies directly."

Like its European counterparts such as the Clean Clothes Campaign in the Netherlands, the MSN employs a variety of strategies to draw public attention to the issue of sweatshops and ethical trade. It has a monthly newsletter and a highly informative, up-to-date website with many resources and an effective search engine. It produces a wide-range of educational kits, leaflets and flyers. One example is *Cut It Out*, promotional material for a campaign encouraging the Canadian public to send the MSN clothing labels. (The labels will then be sent to the federal government as part of a lobby effort to change the federal Textile Labelling Regulations to require apparel companies to publicly disclose the names and addresses of contractors and subcontractors that produce their clothing.) The MSN generates high-profile media coverage, writing radio commentaries for CBC and opinion pieces for large-circulation newspapers such as the Toronto Star. It also uses street theatre, sweatshop fashion shows, sweatshop Christmas carolling and humorous events such as the annual Sweatshop Retailer of the Year Award to engage public attention.

In addition to lobbying the federal government to make corporations more accountable, the MSN draws public attention to the negative aspects of trade agreements such as NAFTA. It holds special workshops for high school and university students, and supports the Canadian branch of the international group Students Against Sweatshops. The MSN works closely with church groups such as Ten Days for Global Justice, (run by four Canadian churches and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace), labour organizations such as the Canadian Labour Congress and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, and human rights groups like Canadian Friends of Burma. In Europe, the MSN is recognized as a Canadian authority on corporate codes of conduct. MSN's code analyses are featured on the websites of the Clean Clothes Campaign and the Amsterdam-based Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations. MSN staff members frequently attend meetings in the South, Europe and the U.S. to plan campaigns and share information and strategies with other organizations.

Fair TradeMark Canada, the Canadian affiliate of the Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International, licenses companies to use a logo certifying that coffee, tea and other products from small farms in Latin America and Africa have been fairly-

traded. Modelled on a similar European initiative, its member organizations include the Steelworkers Humanity Fund and Canadian Autoworkers Social Justice Fund, the United Church of Canada and other church-based organizations, and NGOs. With fewer resources and a smaller volunteer base than the MSN, Fair TradeMark relies largely on member groups to reach the public, although it does have a website and a newsletter. Ten Days for Global Justice has been a major promoter of Fair TradeMark campaigns. In addition to posting information about fair trade on its website, Ten Days has used innovative resources to involve church congregations across the country in fair and ethical trade issues. These resources include *Fashioning Freedom*, a guide to sweatshops and the clothing industry that includes a list of websites to bookmark, information about how to lobby your MP and details about how to organize a fair trade fair and elicit media coverage.

Most of Canada's fair trade shops are Ten Thousand Villages stores, run by a non-profit corporation of the Mennonite Central Committee, an international relief and development agency headquartered in Winnipeg. The 31 Ten Thousand Village stores have formed the bulk of Canada's fair trade shops since Oxfam Canada's trading arm, Bridgehead, closed its stores two years ago. (Victoria's Global Village Store is an example of a rare independent fair trade store.) Ten Thousand Villages stores educate the public about free trade through an informative website offering stories about artisans who make handicrafts sold in the stores, slide shows, and special events such as an evening discussion about fairly-traded coffee with a visiting Colombian coffee farmer or an event devoted to how fairly-traded rugs are made and marketed.

The Montreal-based International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, recognizing the value of learning from the European and U.S. experiences, held a seminar in 1999 to examine and compare ethical trade initiatives in Canada, the U.S. and Britain. *Commerce with Conscience: Options for Business in the Global Economy* brought together 92 representatives from business, government and unions in Canada, the U.S. and Europe to discuss various initiatives and how they might be applied to Canada. One of the seminar's key findings suggests that promoting ethical trade in Canada may be more challenging than in Europe and the U.S. because of an entrenched attitude in the Canadian private sector. "Studies and practical experience suggest that, in marked contrast to the United Kingdom and the U.S.A., human rights are not a primary concern of the Canadian private sector," the seminar concluded.

With the MSN spearheading Canadian campaigns for ethical trade in the garment, footwear and toy industry and Fair TradeMark Canada and its member organizations promoting fair trade in coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar and other commodities, European strategies to promote fair and ethical trade in these sectors have been widely drawn upon. As of yet, however, there is no "fair flowers" campaign in Canada. It is in this area that Canadian groups have the most to learn from European public engagement strategies.

It should be noted that no-one has ever advocated a cut flower boycott. A boycott would only hurt flower workers. Instead, a cut flowers campaign would educate Canadian consumers about dismal working conditions in the cut flower industry and rally support for the existing International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers and marketing of fair flowers in Canada. Cactus, a non-profit organization that provides free legal advice to women in Colombia's cut flower industry and a key Southern player in the European cut flower campaigns, is enthusiastic about the idea of a Canadian campaign and is eager to work with the MSN and other groups to carry it out. (Almost one-half of all flowers imported to Canada come from Colombia.) With the possibility of a Canadian campaign in mind, what successful public engagement strategies have been used by the European cut flowers campaign? How might they be applied to Canada?

### **The European “Fair Flowers” Campaign: A look at Switzerland and Germany**

The European cut flowers campaign began in 1990 in Switzerland. It was a joint initiative by a Swiss-Colombian working group on cut flower issues, Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund (The working group eventually became an organization called Flower Coordination Switzerland).

The group's first public outreach campaign, just before Mother's Day when sales of flowers are high throughout Europe, was astonishingly successful. In the small city of Basel (population 200,000), the group set up three flower stalls at different points in the town centre on the Saturday prior to Mother's Day. The stands were decorated with flowers and surrounded with posters depicting poor working conditions and high pesticide use in the Colombian flower industry. Passers-by were given a newspaper-like publication about the cut flower industry, a leaflet summarizing the campaign, and a flower. Two mobile stands on wheels, dispensing the same information, were pushed through the town centre. A week earlier, the working group had organized a discussion and film, *Flowers of Death*, to attract campaigners. Passers-by were asked to write to the Colombian Embassy to express their concern about working conditions in the industry. So many people wrote letters that the Colombian ambassador to Switzerland complained about the campaign to the Swiss media. The Mother's Day action received widespread print and radio media coverage, and some television coverage, galvanizing more members of the public and generating additional letters to the Colombian embassy demanding an end to abuses of flower workers. “Due to the emotional character of flowers the interest of consumers was very high,” explains Hans Z'graggen, a spokesperson for Flower Coordination Switzerland.

In the past decade, Flower Coordination Switzerland has published numerous “newspapers” about flower issues. These include “Glance at Flowers” (1990), information about cut flower production in Africa (1995), “If Flowers Could Speak...” (1995), and an annual Mother's Day “information letter” to NGOs with an update on the campaign.

The working group built up a network with human rights organizations, environmental groups, and aid agencies. Also in 1990, the network began to engage in what Z'graggen calls "very tough" discussions with the heads of the flower purchasing departments for two large Swiss supermarkets, Migros and Coop. Together the two supermarkets account for 65 percent of Swiss flower sales. (Migros alone has 450 flower shops.) Near the start of the campaign, the supermarkets agreed to mark the country of origin on flower bunches and to begin to analyze pesticide residues.

Z'graggen estimates the working group met with supermarket representatives three or four times a year until 1995, when Migros agreed to create a label for flowers produced under "socially and environmentally sustainable conditions." By this time, the flowers campaign had broadened from Colombia and other South American companies to include Africa. For the next two years, Flower Coordination Switzerland was in contact with supermarket representatives once a month, including working group meetings. During the initial five years in which discussions took place, Flower Coordination Switzerland continued with Mother's Day campaigns and organized conferences on Fair Flowers that brought together Swiss florists, supermarkets, importers, the chemical industry (pesticide producers), NGOs and aid agencies. They also held many meetings and discussions about flower production with young people (age 14-25) in schools and universities. Most Swiss flower buyers are between the ages of 40-70, followed by people aged 25-40.<sup>2</sup>

From 1996 to 1998 a working group that included Migros, importers and florists debated criteria for "fair flower" production. By this time, different organizations, unions and NGOs from other parts of Europe were involved in discussions about the flower industry. At one point the group considered a "quality seal for cut flowers". European fair trade labelling organizations argued that the structure of cut flower sales in Germany, where more than 15,000 small outlets sell flowers, would make a seal difficult to control. Accordingly, in August 1998, the flower campaign proposed an international code of conduct for cut flower production. This led to the creation of the International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers (ICC), devised with the participation of many European NGOs and the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers. It is based on international human rights standards, basic environmental standards, and International Labour Conventions. Among other provisions, the ICC calls for equality of treatment for flower workers, living wages, working hours limited to 48 hours a week or less, detailed health and safety measures, security of employment, protection of the environment, and a ban on child and forced labour. There are also a number of regulations pertaining to the use of pesticides and chemicals. (A copy of the ICC is included as Appendix 1.)

The supermarket chain Migros adopted the code first, followed shortly after by the supermarket chain Coop. The first pilot project to implement the code, with Migros, involved four flower farms in Zimbabwe. The farms were monitored by Flower Coordination Switzerland, the Food First International Action Network (FIAN) which is

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<sup>2</sup> In Canada, people aged 25 to 45 years old are the biggest purchaser of flowers. Canadian women are more likely to buy flowers five times a year or more compared to Canadian men.

a German human rights NGO, and the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers. Six months later, following code-induced improvements, the farms were found to meet the code's rigid standards.

Since signers to the ICC pledge to respect basic international labour rights, including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, it is not surprising that so far only two Colombian flower farms have embraced the code. Basic international labour rights are not accepted in Colombia, where more trade unionists are killed each year than in the rest of the world put together. The Colombian flower growers and exporters association, ASOCOLFLORES, has rejected the code. However, in a promising development, the association's new executive director has agreed to meet with Cactus, possibly to re-consider the issue. In response to the European cut flowers campaign, ASOCOLFLORES has devised its own code of conduct "Flor Verde", or "Green Flower", which focuses largely on environmental issues.

Z'graggen says that all of the flower campaign's public engagement strategies were successful, with one exception - the campaign was not as successful in getting television coverage during the first five years as it could have been. While newspaper and radio coverage was abundant, Z'graggen believes that more time should have been spent working with television journalists. The only other shortcoming of the campaign that Z'graggen could point to was that Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Federation, which had supplied much of the initial funding, withdrew from the campaign after six months to concentrate on other issues.

The German Flower Campaign was officially launched in 1991, after Swiss groups contacted NGOs in Germany and Austria in an effort to broaden the campaign. Five German NGOs are involved— a Protestant development agency called Bread for the World, the Food First International Action Network, the Pesticide Action Network (PAN), Terres des Femmes (a women's rights organization), and Terres des Hommes (a children's aid organization). As in Switzerland, the campaign's original focus was Colombia but the campaign soon broadened to include countries such as Ecuador, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Tanzania.

In January 1999, the Flower Campaign and the Agricultural Union in Germany (IGBAU) signed an agreement with importers and florists known as the Flower Label Programme. "We always tried a dialogue with importers," explains Frank Brassel, the German coordinator for the flower label programme. "We said to them, 'You're buying these flowers. You usually give certain criteria. You want the stems to be at least 70 centimetres high. You want big blossoms. Why can't you apply other criteria as well? Flower workers shouldn't be poisoned, or dismissed for trying to improve conditions.'"

The Flower Label Programme includes all 10 criteria for flower production outlined in the ICC developed in Switzerland. The criteria include the right of workers to have permanent contracts which entitle women to maternity leave, benefits for children, social security, overtime regulations and training and health protection. Since then, 47 flower farms in Ecuador, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe have accepted

independent monitoring and comply with the standards set out in the Flower Label Programme and the ICC. NGOs and unions conducting monitoring have the right to involve workers and local organizations in flower-producing countries. The first inspections of participating flower farms are carried out by the Agrar Control GmbH, a German monitoring and control agency for agricultural production. Based on the agency's report, the label programme will decide whether or not to give conditional approval to a farm for code compliance. Follow-up inspections are carried out after three to twelve months. These are conducted by local, independent institutions; in Ecuador, an NGO with experience in health and labour issues is involved; in Zimbabwe it is an NGO with experience in community development. The NGOs bring in other people with knowledge about issues such as pesticide application, to help with monitoring.

German NGOs and unions involved in the Flower Campaign have spent a total of U.S. \$500,000 to \$600,000 on the campaign since its inception. Five years ago, the campaign employed one person part-time; now Brassel is employed full-time to work on cut flower issues. The Food First International Action Network, which houses the flower label campaign, has for the past two years also employed a Colombian unionist in exile who often works on the flower campaign as well. The German campaign has received widespread print, radio and television coverage, and German documentary film makers have made sequels to a film produced by a Colombian about the flower industry, *Love, Women and Flowers*. A "newspaper" produced by the Flower Campaign, which explained the flowers issue in an easy-to-read format, was so popular that 300,000 copies were distributed.

The European flower campaign continues to hold conferences and organize Mother's Day actions and other educational events to draw public attention to working conditions for Third World flower growers. The difference nowadays is that their partners in the campaign are Migros, Coop and other florists who have accepted the code of conduct. Today's campaigns promote the purchase of flowers from farms that have adopted the ICC, and encourage other retailers to sign the code. Supermarkets offering "fair flowers" sell them in bunches with a yellow label that has "Fair Flowers" on one side, along with the price and country of origin. The other side of the transparent label tells consumers that the flowers were produced in accordance with the ICC, and lists the NGOs and unions that support the code. Migros has a sign beside bunches of mini-roses from Zimbabwe. It says that the supermarket "recommends" fair flowers and guarantees that they were produced under environmentally and socially sustainable conditions.

## Fair Trade and Public Education - Experience in Belgium and Great Britain

Oxfam Wereldwinkels is a fair trade success story that began 30 years ago in Belgium following a conference organized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) that promoted “trade not aid.” Today Oxfam Wereldwinkels runs 200 fair trade shops in the Flemish part of Belgium. It has 6,500 volunteers, up to 50,000 regular customers and as many as 150,000 customers who shop at its stores once a year, generating US\$8 million in sales annually. Oxfam Wereldwinkels focuses on trade issues. It imports fairly-traded products like bananas, wine and chocolate, engages in political action and educational activities concerning fair trade and supports southern producers. Its counterpart, Oxfam Solidarity, runs development projects. More than 85 percent of the Belgium public have heard of Wereldwinkels.

Oxfam Wereldwinkels uses a combination of tactics to engage the public. First and foremost, explains director Marc Bontemps, the organization makes sure its volunteers are informed through a monthly newsletter, leaflets on issues such as the banana and cocoa trade, a volunteers-only website, and workshops offered by Wereldwinkels staff. The workshops, which are available for any Belgium group of 25 people or more, are called World Shop University and have an “a la carte” menu that includes sessions on everything from the World Trade Organization to how to make an attractive window display in a fair trade shop. Twice a week, volunteers can call Wereldwinkels’ free phone lines and ask the staff questions about any issue so that volunteers can better deal with the public’s questions.

An introductory leaflet about Wereldwinkels emphasizes the organization’s important educational role: “You’re looking for information on a particular partner in a particular country? You want to unravel the coffee file? You want to know whether you wear clean clothes? We can help you! You can find a summary of dozens of leaflets, brochures, videos, games and exhibitions about our most important partners and other world shop subjects in our information-and-animation material catalogue.” Out of a staff of twelve, Wereldwinkels has four people working full-time on methodologies for public education—devising leaflets, publications and games to help the public learn about North-South relations and pertinent issues.

While Wereldwinkels uses similar public engagement strategies in all of its campaigns, Bontemps points out that sometimes they do not work. He sees this not as a failure of Wereldwinkels’ strategies but as a reflection of the power of the companies and governments whose policies Wereldwinkels is trying to change. “We know we are not strong enough to win every battle,” he says. A campaign to persuade Nike to improve working conditions at Asian shoe factories was only marginally successful, and the Clean Clothes Campaign has not yet been able to come up with viable alternatives for corporations and retailers who agree to independent monitoring, says Bontemps.

On the other hand, Bontemps believes that Wereldwinkels succeeds in disseminating valuable information to the public even when it does not meet all of its objectives. For example, Wereldwinkels supported the recent European Union's 'Everything But Arms' proposal to eliminate tariffs on essentially all non-military goods entering the European Union market from the world's poorest countries. In the end, opposition from the European Union farm lobby, in particular the sugar lobby, resulted in a postponement of the roll-backs of tariffs for several commodities, including sugar.<sup>3</sup> However, Wereldwinkel's promotion of the 'Everything But Arms' proposal did lead Belgium journalists to question the Belgium trade minister about government acquiescence to the European sugar industry at the expense of sugar producers in less developed countries who would have benefited from the removal of tariffs on their sugar exports. "The fact that journalists questioned her again means that we have put the issue on the political agenda, and that is our point," explains Bontemps.

Wereldwinkels is widely respected and its views on trade issues are solicited by the mainstream media at least once a month. Bontemps estimates that a Wereldwinkels campaign even makes the top nightly television news story every three to four years. In October 2001, for instance, Wereldwinkels was featured in the Belgium media for the launch of a campaign attacking a major coffee company, Douwe Egberts, part of the Sara Lee chain. Wereldwinkels caught public attention by engaging in culture-jamming with mock posters. It changed the Douwe Egberts slogan attracting coffee drinkers from "It smells Douwe Egberts here" to "It smells of exploitation here." Instead of Douwe Egbert's prominent image of a cat curled up inside a coffee pot, Wereldwinkels substituted a cramped and uncomfortable Third World coffee farmer.

As well as working with NGOs and unions in the South, Wereldwinkels also works with Belgium unions, who are regular consumers of its fair-trade coffee and tea. Bontemps says Wereldwinkels has not become involved in the European flower campaign because its shops cannot sell flowers, given the logistics of transporting them and keeping them fresh, and because there are no small producers from whom to purchase. He adds that Wereldwinkels does not believe the flower industry, with its high pesticide use and complex distribution networks, fits under the rubric of sustainable development.

Britain's Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) has succeeded in bringing together corporations, NGOs and trade union organizations to try to ensure that working conditions for people making products sold in Britain meet international labour and human rights standards. The ETI is not a monitoring body and does not pass judgement publicly on the practices of member companies. Instead, it strives to "promote good practice in the implementation of codes of labour practice, including the monitoring and independent verification of the observance of code provisions." Participating corporations, which include Levi Strauss & Co., Marks and Spencers and Safeway Stores, must meet three requirements. They agree to produce an

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<sup>3</sup> For sugar, the proposal would have gone into effect in three progressive stages to be completed by Jan 1, 2004. However, the Commission has now put forward an informal proposal that would phase out tariffs on sugar from 2006-2008.

annual report about monitoring activities, participate in a pilot project with unions and NGOs to monitor a Third World factory or farm that makes their products, and disclose at least one place from which they source in order to allow spot checks by other ETI members. ETI's corporate members commit themselves to a code which includes the payment of a "living wage", security of employment, and the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. "We are a learning initiative to try to understand what is good and bad monitoring," explains Mick Blowhouse, ETI's research and information manager. The ETI relies largely on member NGOs, which include Christian Aid, the Fairtrade Foundation, Amnesty Business Group, Oxfam Great Britain and the World Development Movement, to educate the public about fair and ethical trade issues.

Oxfam Great Britain has an extensive fair trade campaign. As well as providing information to the public through its stores, Oxfam maintains an engaging website that includes a large section on fair trade. The public can read about unfair trading regimes and learn how fair trade can benefit both consumers and producers. People can study Oxfam's history of engaging in fair trade, read about the origins of a particular product sold by Oxfam, print out a recipe that uses fairly-traded products, learn about the lives of producers, see their photographs, read about Britain's first free trade town, and even book a fair trade holiday to a sunny locale.

### **European Public Engagement Strategies and the Canadian Context**

When assessing whether European strategies for cut flower campaigns and fair trade initiatives are suitable for Canada, it is helpful to consider at least four key differences between the European and Canadian contexts.

Firstly, European companies include the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining in their codes of conduct. Recognition of these international labour rights is a condition of membership in the ETI and a requirement for any signatory to the ICC.

Compared to their European counterparts, Canadian retailers are less vocal in demanding that overseas suppliers meet international labour standards. It was the issues of freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as the question of a living wage, over which discussions between Canadian retailers and the Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group to establish a code of conduct for Canadian retailers fell apart in the spring of 2000. In contrast to Canada, the U.S. Fair Labor Association code, while lacking independent monitoring provisions, at least acknowledges workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Fair Labor Association code has been signed by Levi's, Nike, Reebok and Liz Claiborne, among other companies.

Secondly, there is more distrust between Canadian unions/civil society and retailers than exists between their European counterparts. Commenting on the failure of Canadian code of conduct talks, government-appointed facilitator John English wrote that members of the Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group and the business community did not know each other's concerns well. "There are no national tripartite institutions that bring labour and business together in Canada," English wrote in his paper, *Negotiating a Code of Conduct: A Canadian Experience*. "Unlike Europe, which has strong corporatist traditions and social democratic parties, and the United States where both major parties have had union and business support, Canadian labour stands apart from the major federal parties. As a result, the discourse of business and civil society/labour is markedly different, and those differences created difficulties in the discussions."

Thirdly, the federal government has adopted a more "laissez-faire" approach towards corporate responsibility than many European governments and the former U.S. administration. The British government has provided substantial funding for the ETI through the Department of International Development and former U.S. President Bill Clinton himself convened a task force to address abuses of workers in the global garment industry. The Canadian government's biggest step to date was the appointment of John English to facilitate discussions between the Canadian Ethical Trading Action Group and the business community. English's appointment came only after a lengthy campaign by NGOs, unions and church groups, as well as a petition signed by 30,000 Canadians calling for a federal task force on sweatshop abuses. Notably, it also came soon after the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development's 1999 seminar *Commerce with Conscience: Options for Business in the Global Economy*, attended by federal government representatives.

Fourthly, the role of the media in promoting fair and ethical trade is less well developed in Canada. In Europe, where media ownership is far less concentrated than in Canada, newspaper, television and radio coverage plays an integral role in engaging public attention about cut flowers and other ethical trade issues. In Canada, on the other hand, mainstream media coverage of fair trade and other social justice issues is marginal. The implication for NGOs that want their views in the mainstream media is that they have to dedicate increasing funds for communications work, building the cost into their own budgets or hiring under contract professional writers or communications firms committed to social justice issues.

Nevertheless, public engagement strategies used by European groups have been remarkably effective and much can be learned from them. Notably, European campaigns use bold, visual initiatives to grab public attention. Fair flowers campaigners gave free flowers to consumers, and then regaled them with grim tales of how the flowers were produced. Wereldwinkels uses the increasingly popular tactic of culture-jamming to engage public attention, altering posters and images recognized by the public in order to get its own fair trade message across. In each case, as consumers learn about working conditions and wish to make ethical purchases, they are immediately presented with options. For example, Belgium

consumers are told that they can help Wereldwinkels to lobby Douwe Egberts to improve working conditions and continue to enjoy their coffee with a clear conscience by purchasing Wereldwinkels fairly-traded coffee. If Swiss and German consumers don't like what they hear about conditions for flower workers, they can buy "Fair Flowers" and help lobby other merchants and growers to adopt the ICC.

The European campaigns involve many different groups—unions, a plethora of NGOs and, in some cases, corporations. The campaigners work closely with human rights, labour and church groups in the developing world to ensure that actions taken in the North have a positive impact on Southern producers. Where appropriate, they also lobby governments to take action to improve working conditions and terms of trade. European campaigners also meet with industry and corporate representatives.

The European campaigns also recognize the important role of the media in public engagement. Many resources are devoted to building good relationships with journalists and providing them with accurate, timely information and contacts, thus ensuring widespread media coverage of fair and ethical trade issues.

Finally, dynamic websites also play a key role in European fair and ethical trade campaigns. Consumers can access detailed information without leaving their homes. Websites usually contain links to related sites, such as that of the International Federation for Alternative Trade, that allow the public to learn even more about pertinent North-South issues.

### **Building on the European Cut Flower Campaign Strategies**

In many respects, the initial groundwork for a Canadian cut flowers campaign is already in place. A strong international code of conduct for the industry exists, one that has already been accepted by some major European flower retailers, scores of smaller retailers, and increasing numbers of flower farms in Africa and South America.

Like the European approach, organizers of a cut flowers campaign in Canada should work not only with the public, but also with the Canadian floral industry. This would include approaching Flowers Canada, the national trade association for the Canadian floral industry, about adopting the ICC. "With the experience we have from our work in Europe, this contact with Flowers Canada is key because it is the importer which can channel consumer pressure towards the industry," according to a Cactus spokesperson.

In addition to engaging the public and meeting with flower industry representatives, it may also be prudent to follow Europe's example and approach several individual Canadian flower retailers. Here the work of the European cut flowers campaign may prove invaluable since flower farms that subscribe to the ICC can be easily identified and interested Canadian retailers may be able to purchase "fair flowers" from them. The two Colombian farms that have accepted the code are thought to export to Canada as well as to Europe. It is important to note that no flower retailers were

named or publicly criticized during the first five years of the European campaign. This decision likely made Migros, Coop and other flower retailers far more conducive to engaging in talks. Retailers were only named publicly after they accepted the ICC.

Key to the success of any Canadian cut flowers campaign is the realization that it would, in all likelihood, be a lengthy undertaking. Even with widespread media coverage it took almost a decade for European groups to achieve a code of conduct for the flower industry. A cut flowers campaign in Canada, however, would offer more than a chance for consumers to buy “fair flowers”. It would be a tangible means to promote fair and ethical trade to Canadian consumers.

It would also draw attention to an industry characterized by serious inequities and poor working conditions and provide an opportunity for the Canadian government to promote trade relationships based on international standards of accountability and corporate responsibility.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers**

#### **Preamble**

The following code aims to guarantee that flowers have been produced under socially and environmentally sustainable conditions.

The code provides a concise statement of minimum labour, human rights and environmental standards for the international cut-flower industry. Companies should pledge to require their suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors to observe these standards. The code is concise in order to display it in workplaces and in order to avoid any confusion between these basic principles and the application of principles.

An independent body established to provide independent verification of compliance with the code and to assist companies to implement the code, will provide an auditable checklist of practices and conditions that are consistent with the standards set forth in the code.

The company pledges to observe the core ILO standards, the universal human rights standards and basic environmental standards, which are the base for this code. The company pledges to make observance of the code a condition of any agreement that it makes with contractors and suppliers and to require them to extend this obligation to their sub-contractors. The company accepts that the implementation of the code is subject to independent verification.

The code establishes only minimum standards that must not be used as a ceiling or to discourage collective bargaining. The company shall comply with all national laws and legal regulations. When national law and these criteria address the same issue, that provision which is most stringent applies.

The text of the code, which is intended to be posted where workers can see it, shall also include a means by which workers can report failure to comply with the code in a confidential manner.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

### **1. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

The rights of all workers to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively shall be recognized (ILO Conventions 87 and 98). Workers representatives shall not be subject of discrimination and shall have access to all workplaces necessary to enable them to carry out their representation functions.

(ILO Convention 135)

### **2. EQUALITY OF TREATMENT**

Workers shall have access to jobs and training on equal terms, irrespective of gender, age, ethnic origin, colour, marital status, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion or social origin (ILO Conventions 100 and 111). Physical harassment or psychological oppression, particularly of women workers, must not be tolerated.

### **3. LIVING WAGES**

Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week shall meet at least legal or industry minimum standards and always be sufficient to meet basic needs of workers and their families and to provide some discretionary income. Pay should be in cash, direct to the workers, promptly and in full. Information to wages shall be available to workers in an understandable and detailed form.

### **4. WORKING HOURS**

Hours of work shall comply with applicable law and industry standards. In any event, workers shall not on a regular basis be required to work in excess of 48 hours per week and shall be provided with at least one day off every week. Overtime shall be voluntary, shall not exceed 12 hours per week, shall not be demanded on a regular basis and shall always be compensated at a premium rate.

### **5. HEALTH AND SAFETY**

A safe and hygienic working environment shall be provided. Companies shall provide free and appropriate protective clothing and equipment, and comply with internationally recognized health and safety standards. (ILO Convention 170) Workers and their organizations must be consulted, trained and allowed to investigate safety issues. There should be regular monitoring of workers' health and safety. Companies shall supply drinking water, provide clean toilets and offer showers and washing facilities. Where housing is provided, it should comply at least with the minimum standards for size, ventilation, cooking facilities, water supply and sanitary facilities. (ILO Convention 110, Articles 85-88)

## 6. PESTICIDES AND CHEMICALS

Every company should assess the risks of the chemicals used and apply measures to prevent any damage to the health of their workers. Companies shall re-cord and reduce pesticide and fertilizer use by adequate techniques and methods. No banned, highly toxic (WHO I) or carcinogenic pesticide and chemical should be used. Safety instructions and re-entry intervals must be strictly observed and monitored. Spraying, handling and storing pesticides and chemicals should be done by specially trained people with suitable equipment. Stores, apparatus and equipment must be clean, safe, handy and conforming to international standards.

## 7. SECURITY OF EMPLOYMENT

Work which is by its nature not seasonal or temporary shall be done by workers on permanent contracts. Provisions for non-permanent and seasonal workers, including freedom of association, should be not less favourable than for permanent workers. Every worker shall get a copy of their contract.

## 8. PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Companies should make every effort to protect the environment and the residential areas, avoid pollution and implement sustainable use of natural resources (water, soil, air, etc.).

## 9. CHILD LABOUR IS NOT USED

There shall be no use of child labour. There shall be no workers under the age of 15 years or under the compulsory school-leaving age, whichever is higher. Children under 18 shall not work in hazardous conditions. (ILO Convention 138) Adequate transitional economic assistance and appropriate educational opportunities shall be provided to any replaced child workers.

## 10. NO FORCED LABOUR

There shall be no forced labour, included bonded or involuntary prison labour (ILO Conventions 29 and 105). Nor shall workers be required to lodge "deposits" or their identity papers with their employer.

## Section of Implementation

1. To overview the implementation of the Code of Conduct an independent body, accepted by all parties involved (for example trade unions, NGOs, employers), shall be formed.
2. This body will set the terms for an independent process of verification of compliance with the Code of Conduct.
3. The companies shall report regularly about the progress made in the implementation of the Code.
4. The independent body shall make provisions for workers, trade unions and other concerned groups to lodge complaints about violations of the Code, which if serious, have to be followed-up.
5. The Code shall be translated into local languages and prominently displayed in the place of work.

Language: The English version of the text of this Code is the authoritative version. August 1998 proposed by:

- IUF – International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, Geneva
- Flower Campaign, Germany (Bread for the World, FIAN, terre des hommes)
- IG BAU – Trade Union for Construction, Agriculture and Environment, Germany
- FNV – Trade Union Confederation, Netherlands
- OLAA – Organisatie Latijns Amerika Activiteiten, Netherlands
- INZET, Netherlands
- Fair Trade Center, Sweden
- Flower Coordination, Switzerland
- Christian Aid, UK

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**Interviews**  
**(conducted by phone, fax and email)**

Mick Blowhouse, research and information manager, **Ethical Trading Initiative**, United Kingdom, 24 October 2001.

Marc Bontemps, Director, **Oxfam-Wereldwinkels**, Belgium, 22 October 2001.

Frank Brassel, **FIAN** (Food First Information and Action Network), Germany, 30 October 2001.

Cynthia Mellon, expert on the flower industry, 6 October 2001.

Laura Rangel, **CACTUS**, Colombia, 26 October 2001.

Lynda Yantz, **Maquila Solidarity Network**, 29 October 2001.

Hans Z'graggen, **Flower Coordination Switzerland**, 6 October 2001.

**Selected Resources**

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Ten Thousand Villages (website—[www.tenthousandvillages.org](http://www.tenthousandvillages.org)).

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