

'Kick in the teeth' for parishes as Sainsbury's drops Fairtrade tea

Catholic parishes have expressed their dismay after Sainsbury's announced it is to move away from the hugely popular Fairtrade mark in favour of its own branded tea.

While Sainsbury's claimed the 'fairly traded' scheme it will trial for its tea will operate in a similar way to Fairtrade, the supermarket has drawn criticism from small-scale producers concerned that they will lose control over how money made from their goods can be spent.

The Fairtrade Mark guarantees that producers receive a minimum price for their goods alongside an additional premium, which communities themselves decide how to spend to improve their living conditions. Sainsbury's have said they would continue to pay the social premium, but that the Sainsbury's Foundation would decide how that money is spent, with producers having to apply for grants.

There are over 500 Catholic parishes

across England and Wales which are certified as Fairtrade.

Fr Joe Ryan, parish priest at St John Vianney in North London, said that any organisation stepping away from the Fairtrade Mark will be a blow to the thousands of Catholics who have thrown their weight behind the mark.

"In this parish people are very concerned about Fairtrade; there is huge awareness and our young people are very involved and did tremendous work during the last Fairtrade Fortnight," he said.

"If Sainsbury's are going to be the ones dispensing the premium going forward, then that is not a happy place to be. How are they going to supply a grant where it's needed in the middle of Nicaragua? The whole essence of Fairtrade is the empowerment of the producers so I'm very displeased with this change and know my parishioners will be too."

Anne Lamont, who volunteers for the Westminster Justice and Peace Commis-

sion and supports parishes in Westminster to affiliate themselves as Fairtrade parishes, said the move was "a real kick in the teeth".

"We're only 10 parishes away in Westminster from becoming a Fairtrade diocese and with parishes continuing to become Fairtrade, including several in recent months, this is a real kick in the teeth," she said.

"Sainsbury's is one of the supermarkets that I always point to as stocking Fairtrade products and I regularly shop there for my own Fairtrade products.

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"The Catholic community has really taken Fairtrade to heart and so there are going to be an awful lot of people really upset by this news."

CAFOD co-founded the Fairtrade Foundation in 1992 alongside Christian Aid, Oxfam, Traidcraft and others. The Fairtrade Foundation has said that 229,000 farmers would be affected by Sainsbury's proposed changes. Tea producers across Africa have told Sainsbury's in an open letter that they are concerned about 'the power and control that Sainsbury's seeks to exert over us.'

Neil Thorns, director of advocacy at CAFOD, said Sainsbury's had failed to explain how small-scale farmers would be better off under the new proposed scheme than with the current Fairtrade mark. "We are concerned that this new pilot scheme will not meet the rigorous and important standards set by Fairtrade, which people can recognise on their shelves through the Fairtrade mark," he said.

"Taking control of the premium out of the producers' hands can never be the right thing to do," he added.

"Our supporters look for the Fairtrade mark because they believe in supporting



Confirmation candidates show off their Fairtrade bake-off products.
Photo: Tony Sheen/CAFOD.

poor farmers around the world. Sainsbury's has previously been a leading light in enabling them to do this and we urge them not to move away from this."

Fairtrade certified parishes have committed to providing only Fairtrade teas and coffees at meetings and after Mass

and holding an event each Fairtrade Fortnight to raise awareness.

The Catholic dioceses of Hexham and Newcastle, Portsmouth, Nottingham and Lancaster are all Fairtrade dioceses, which means more than half of the parishes in each diocese are Fairtrade certified.