

## Text Study: Fair Trade from a Jewish Perspective

From “Better Beans,” a partnership between Equal Exchange and American Jewish World Service

### Benefits of Fair Trade for Farmers

- Direct and long-term relationships with farmers
- Fair Trade buyers pay farmers a minimum price for fair trade goods, but the actual price that buyers pay is frequently higher than the minimum required price
- Producer organizations receive a fair trade premium that enables them to improve the well-being of their communities with regards to issues like health and education
- Farmer co-ops are guaranteed pre-harvest financing of up to 60% of the value of their contracts, which means they aren’t dependent on cash offered up front by predatory middlemen
- Small farmers have increased access to export markets

### Jewish Texts Related to Fair Trade

#### Emphasis on poverty in the Jewish tradition

“There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty - the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers have said: if all the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other, poverty would outweigh them all.” (*Midrash Exodus Rabbah 31:12*)

#### Duty to ensure that the poor are self-sufficient

“The highest level of tzedekah (charity) is when you support someone by giving him a gift, or a loan, or entering into partnership with him, or create a job for him so that he supports himself until he no longer needs to depend upon others.” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:7*)

#### A Jewish view on treatment of laborers

“You shall not abuse a needy or destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and his life depends on it; else he will cry to the Lord against you and you will incur guilt.” (*Deuteronomy 24:14-15*)

“In disputes between employers and workers, the rights of the worker were given preference over those of the employer.” (Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia 77a*)

#### Business dealings

“It is forbidden to cheat people in buying or selling or to deceive them, whether they are Jewish or gentile – they are equal in measure.” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mechirah 18:1*)

#### Questions to Consider

- 1) What do these texts teach us about our responsibility as Jews to the poor and about the type of actions we should take to lift people out of poverty?
- 2) What is the highest level of *tzedekah*, and how is it connected to fair trade?
- 3) Based on these texts and any other knowledge you have, *what is Jewish about fair trade?*