

Tesco – Response to Oxfam reports

For the last two years [Oxfam](#) have reviewed our policies and practices relating to human rights in supply chains. In both 2018 and 2019 we have been assessed as doing most, of all major supermarkets globally, to ensure human rights are respected in food supply chains. Our score in 2019 increased by 15% compared to 2018; demonstrating our continued commitment and recognition that there is always more to do.

We support Oxfam’s clear framework; to adopt a human rights due diligence approach, to prevent human rights harms in supply chains and to achieve positive social impact. We are in the process of developing specific actions plans to greater support progress on gender equality and living wages in key supply chains. These two challenges make up two of the four thematic areas of our new human rights strategy launched earlier this year. More information on our updated strategy can be found [here](#).

Tea – Assam, India

All our own label black tea sold in the UK is 100% Rainforest Alliance certified. In conjunction with our tea supplier, we also assess each tea producer against defined ethical criteria and we will only source from producers once we are satisfied they meet our minimum requirements. Our sourcing strategy means we buy larger volumes of tea from producers who have scored highly in our assessments, ensuring that our purchasing practices align with our approach to human rights.

But we know there is always more to do, and we are working collaboratively with suppliers, NGOs, trade unions and others to improve wages and ensure working conditions are fair. For example, we are the only multi retail member of the Ethical Tea Partnership, a not for profit organisation that convenes the tea industry, development partners, NGOs and Governments to create a thriving, socially just and environmentally sustainable tea industry.

We are also funding and working in partnership with [Unicef and the Ethical Tea Partnership](#) to support women and young people in Assam. Since the partnership began in 2014, 35,000 girls have been equipped with the skills and knowledge to reduce the risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. Part of the programme involves developing sanitation facilities that women and girls can easily access. This improves their day to day lives and will help prevent diseases and improve menstrual hygiene, which is linked to improved school attendance for girls.

In June 2018, we signed the Women, Children and Families in Assam Commitment alongside producers and other retailers. This commitment sets out the change we want to see for women, children and families on tea estates, and how we will work to gather support and accelerate action from the wider industry.

Tropical Fruit – North East Brazil

As a founding member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), we want to play a leading role in helping to create good jobs that enable people to care for their families and develop their skills. We recognise that it is our responsibility as a business to respect and enhance the rights of people in our supply chains, while minimising the risk of labour and human rights abuses occurring.

As recognised in Oxfam’s report, collective bargaining is vital to improve working conditions and ensure standards are upheld over the longer term. Effective mechanisms for workers to raise any concerns including on women’s rights, wages and the hazards of working with agro-chemicals is essential to maintain standards and continuous improvement. That is why effective worker representation is one of the four themes in our revised human rights strategy.

Our work in this area includes promoting dialogue between trade unions, suppliers, industry organisations, certification & audit companies as well as governments in Latin America. In our banana supply chain for example, we are in regular dialogue with union representatives at the Ethical Trading Initiative, alongside representatives from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), International Union of Food (IUF) and Trades Union Congress (TUC). We also have regular bilateral meetings with regional civil society organisations such as Banana Link and COLSIBA- the Confederation of Latin American Banana Unions. As part of these efforts, Tesco as a founding member of the World Banana Forum (WBF) has played a leading role in promoting better dialogue between trade unions and banana producers. Direct improvements to health and safety issues, convening discussions about implementing living wages and a gender working group are specific steps the WBF has been taking to ensure labour conditions are continuously improved.

Nevertheless, we recognise worker representation continues to be one of the greatest challenges to improving labour conditions for workers in Latin America. In September 2019, a Tesco Responsible Sourcing Manager based in the Americas visited several Brazilian suppliers and identified opportunities to improve labour conditions. One concern noted was that worker committees on sites only focus on health and safety issues and many worker representatives were in high ranking management roles and potentially not representative of the wider workforce. Because of this, Tesco is requesting all our sites to promote either the creation of stand-alone worker committees to deal with all labour issues or to broaden the mandate of the health and safety committees. A vital part of this change is to train worker representatives on how to effectively deal with these issues as well as ensuring all workers are made aware of this new service by their elected representatives.

Separately, we have also been engaging SEDEX, SMETA auditors and Rainforest Alliance to improve the quality of auditors so that going forward there is better identification of inadequate worker representation as well as any other labour standard concerns.

In relation to the concerns raised in the Oxfam report about agro-chemicals, it is absolutely essential that no worker is being exposed to dangerous chemicals, and this is a key focus for auditors, and Tesco ethical and technical teams visiting our supplying sites. We will be engaging our suppliers and audit bodies on this matter to ensure our suppliers are abiding by our strict standards, and that our controls are effectively detecting and addressing any bad practice. Extensive risk-based product testing is done to identify the use of unauthorised chemicals, and we will be enhancing this testing for any products from Northern Brazil as a result of the concerns raised.