**Fair Trade Puts People at the Forefront of Sustainability in the Dairy Sector with New Initiative**

**By Kasi Marti, Sr. Communications Manager, Fair Trade USA**

**Why Dairy?**

When it comes to sustainability on dairy farms, nearly every program is focused on the animal welfare and/or the environment. While these programs are critical to the sustainability of the industry, they are leaving out one of the most important parts of the equation: the dairy farmers and workers. Through our work, we’ve discovered there is a disconnect between these programs and the value that is placed upon employee welfare in animal agriculture. These are extremely hard-working people who often lack a basic workplace safety, a voice, or a seat at the table to represent their interests and those of their families and communities. This is where Fair Trade USA comes in -- as a driver of sustainable livelihoods, social responsibility, and community development.

Fair Trade USA executes on this through the application of robust and credible social and economic standards that support farms, fisheries, and factories in a transition towards improved social welfare and environmental sustainability. Since 1998, producers in more than 45 countries have earned over $400 million in Community Development Funds through sales of Fair Trade Certified™ products, which they have used to address their communities’ greatest needs: these include clean water, education, healthcare, and environmental protection. A cornerstone to this success has been Fair Trade USA’s Agricultural Production Standard (APS) for crop production, which was designed to be applied to a variety of crops and farm settings.

Building upon the strong foundation of the APS, Fair Trade USA saw an opportunity apply its standard to US dairy farms to bring about positive impact. Our team has spent the last year exploring the US dairy sector, meeting with cooperatives, farmers and workers, manufacturers, and industry stakeholders, to determine how fair trade certification could be most relevant, impactful, and valuable. The goal of our research was to determine whether and how the systems, operations, implementation, and auditing of Fair Trade USA’s APS could be applicable in a dairy setting. We made sure to understand current initiatives to ensure fair trade certification would be additive to those efforts and that key issues would be addressed by our program.

**Fair Trade USA’s Approach**

We learned that the producer context for dairying is similar to that of agriculture in terms of the challenges faced by small-scale producers and by workers on larger farms, making the Fair Trade USA model and the APS a potential fit for this industry. We also learned that, like other industries we work in, this one has its own unique complications, and we plan to approach it cautiously with open minds.

Our initial focus will be on the human and social aspects, specifically, to working conditions and remuneration, representation, and access to service to improve health and well-being for farmers and workers. Over time, we will partner with other organizations to continuously improve upon the social aspects of the program and address other important issues related to animal welfare and environmental stewardship as we believe a multi-solution approach is best to drive holistic industry transformation.

We will be piloting the certification in partnership with Chobani, a company that has made fair trade a key pillar of its "Milk Matters" initiative, which tackles issues like workers' and animal rights, sustainability, localization and community development. However, this is an industry-wide initiative, meaning all U.S. dairy producers are eligible to apply for certification and all dairy sourcing brands are eligible to buy from those certified farms to label their products. Our goal is to make the benefits of fair trade available to as many in the industry as possible to create true transformation at scale for dairy farmers and workers.

**Next Steps**

Ultimately, ***we aim to deliver similar protections and premium dollars to dairy farmers and workers*** as we have to those in cocoa, produce, seafood, coffee and so many other products. Recognizing that we are still at a very early stage in this initiative, our approach in dairy will be to learn simultaneously from work in the field while creating opportunities for public comment and feedback on the draft expansion of scope of the standard, including at least one public comment period during the initial pilot program.

We welcome you to email us at standards@fairtradeusa.org with questions, comments, or to be contacted at the start of the public comment period.