

**FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT 2018**  
**26 FEBRUARY – 11 MARCH**



*Every year, to coincide with Fairtrade Fortnight, the Fairtrade Foundation produces resources aimed specifically at churches. What follows below is taken from this year's material. The readings the Fairtrade Foundation has chosen for this year are Leviticus 19:13 and 25:14, Luke 10:25-37 and Romans 13:8-10.*

This year, the theme of Fairtrade Fortnight is “**Come on in to Fairtrade**” and meet your neighbours – the farmers who grow and produce the food we eat each day. For churches, this theme gives the opportunity to celebrate God’s welcome for all, and helps us consider how as Christians we can be good neighbours to others.

The calls to love our neighbour and to love God sit in profound relationship at the heart of both the Old and New Testament. The verses from Leviticus make the love of neighbour very practical, legislating for fair treatment of others in trade, business and employment in unambiguous language. St Paul in Romans emphasises that the spirit of the law is love, and that “love does no wrong to a neighbour”. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus radically expands our understanding of who our neighbour is to include anyone and everyone that we are in relationship with, including our “enemies”.

We live in very close relationship to millions of farmers and workers who live in developing countries all around the world – farmers who are often very poor – they grow the food on which we depend, and they depend on the income from trading with us. But many live in poverty, struggle to provide for their families, or experience serious human rights abuses. They are our neighbours, our sisters and our brothers, equally loved by God. How can we all be better neighbours?

We know that neighbours are important because all the way through the Bible we are asked to love our neighbours and treat them fairly. But it is very hard to love our neighbour, or treat them fairly, if we’ve not met them...

**Florentina Beitia\*** is a banana farmer from the Bocas Del Toro region of Panama. Florentina is a member of Coobana, a Fairtrade Co-operative producing bananas that are sold in UK supermarkets. Coobana is made up of approximately 550 members and

workers who work cooperatively. They produce 4,000 boxes of bananas a week. There are no machines that can grow and harvest bananas so each stage of the process relies on human labour. Before they joined the Fairtrade programme the price that the bananas were sold for was not high enough to cover the costs of producing them, Florentina and her family often did not have enough to eat.

She says, "As soon as we started selling as Fairtrade the price improved to \$9.75 per box, and we received an extra dollar [the Fairtrade Premium] per box too, which has enabled us to achieve a lot." Coobana could now give grants to workers and Co-op members to build new homes or improve what they had. The Fairtrade Premium they receive has enabled them to achieve a lot. Especially in education for the children, because if there's no money, there's no education. Education in Panama is very expensive. They were able to provide grants to children of Coobana members to attend school and university, as well as investing in projects, like vegetable patches and chicken coops at schools so that pupils can eat a decent meal at school as well as learn about where food comes from.

Thanks to Coobana, Florentina has been able to educate her children. Her youngest is now a policeman, her daughter is also a graduate and she hopes for the same for her granddaughter.

We can all choose to be a good neighbour at home. And we can choose to be a good neighbour to Florentina and those like her:

- We can buy Fairtrade so that she and her family get a fair price for their bananas.
- We can speak out about unfair trade, to say that we want business that is fair.

And we can pray, to ask that God will "come on in" and help us make a fairer world.

What will you do to be a good neighbour today?

Shelly Dennison