

Impact Study: Liberation Foods CIC (Liberation)



Image

Liberation's popular packs of wasabi peanuts, seeds, nuts and goji berries.

"We small producers are beginning to enjoy secure, sustainable livelihoods and plan for the future – now that is truly liberating."

Julian Perez Ortiz, farmer and President of COINACAPA, a Bolivian co-operative and supplier of brazil nuts to Liberation.

Contents

Contents	2
Why we measure impact.....	4
Liberation Foods	5
Background.....	8
Shared Interest and Liberation	9
Summary: Shared Interest's support and financial relationship.....	10
Graph 1: Sales Value.....	12
Graph 2: Sales Channels.....	13
Graph 3: Cost of Sales	14
Social Impact	16
Bolivia.....	17
Protecting environments	18
Strengthening co-operatives.....	21
Malawi	22
Safeguarding smallholders	22
Nicaragua.....	24
India	27
Securing livelihoods	28
Burkina Faso	30
My Story: Dan Binks.....	31
Looking ahead	32
Conclusion	34
Appendices	35
Glossary.....	36
Sample of Interview Questions.....	38

Acknowledgements

This study and report have been prepared and written by Joshua Betts, Marketing and Communications Officer of Shared Interest.

Our sincere thanks to Dan Binks, General Manager of Liberation, for giving permission for this case study and for support with data collection, research and access to secondary data sources used in this study including images.

We also express our gratitude to farmers and employees of Liberation.

Methodology

This study involved a mixed method of investigation, which included a semi-structured interview and secondary data collection.

An interview was carried out with Dan Binks, Liberation Managing Director, in May 2025.

Secondary data was collected through desktop research to learn more about the commodity, region and context of the co-operative. We have also reviewed all available Shared Interest documentation about Liberation, such as loan proposals, annual reviews, financial statements and visit summaries to support the study and the development of the graphs in this report.

A sample of the interview questions can be found in the appendices of this document. Secondary data sources have also been used and include resources and materials produced by Liberation and those in their supply chain.

Why we measure impact

Shared Interest Society is an ethical investment organisation offering fair finance to producers and buyers across the globe. Shared Interest was set up in 1990 and brings together a community of over 11,740 people in the UK with a shared goal of investing in a fairer world. We work hand in hand with people in communities where income opportunities may be limited and businesses are facing increasing challenges. Last year, we made disbursements totalling £57.8m to 165 organisations in 42 countries, improving the livelihoods of 397,379 farmers and artisans in some of the world's most disadvantaged communities.

In 2004, Shared Interest Society established a subsidiary, Shared Interest Foundation. The charity delivers technical assistance, business support and climate mitigation and adaptation projects with small-scale producer organisations and community groups across Africa and Latin America.

Our mission is: 'To provide financial services and business support to make livelihoods and living standards better for people as they trade their way out of poverty. We work collaboratively and innovatively with those who share our commitment to fair and just trade. With a community of investors and the support of our donors and volunteers, we seek to contribute to a world where justice is at the heart of trade finance.'

As an impact driven organisation, we and our stakeholders strive to understand the impact our work has. This impact study forms part of our wider commitment to monitoring and evaluation. We measure impact at each stage of the investment process: initial assessment, due diligence, investment memorandum, post-investment monitoring and annual reviews with all of our customers. This is complimented by producer committees and surveys as well as these individual impact studies of selected customers and project beneficiaries.

These detailed studies evaluate whether and how these businesses support farmer and artisan livelihoods and offer a justifiable account of our contribution to this. Other resources focused on demonstrating our impact include our annual Social Accounts, quarterly publication QR and our website.

These case studies are primarily intended to demonstrate two levels of impact: that of our financial support to producer organisations, either directly or indirectly through lending to buyer organisations, and the wider impact on the livelihoods of the smallholder farmers or artisans they serve. We qualitatively describe other types of impacts on their communities, as well as on the surrounding environment.

Finally, we situate these impacts within the broader context of the country and value chain, to illustrate how these businesses, end-buyers and social lenders like Shared Interest work together to grow rural prosperity for smallholder producers and their communities.

These studies enable us to better understand both levels of impact (enterprise-level and household-level) and provide both Shared Interest and our customers with the information necessary to continuously improve our services. We are grateful to the contributors who share their stories and lived experiences, so that we can understand this impact as fully as possible.

Liberation Foods

Formerly known as The Ethical Nut Company, Liberation was established by two pioneers of the fair trade movement, Twin Trading and Equal Exchange, in July 2005. Initially, the company was used as a vehicle to test the mainstream nut market by supplying fairly traded, white label, Brazil nuts to Tesco and salted peanuts to the Co-op.

Subsequent sales exceeded five metric tonnes of nuts per month, and the move proved to be an effective way to bring nuts from Asia, South America and Africa to European markets.

In 2007, The Ethical Nut Company bought itself out from Twin Trading and changed its name to Liberation Foods CIC. Its renewed goal: to launch an entirely Fairtrade nut enterprise to address trade injustices experienced by smallholders in developing countries.

Today, Liberation is the UK's only Fairtrade, farmer-owned nut company, selling products in stores such as Sainsbury's, Tesco and the Co-op with raw materials sourced from smallholder farming communities in Bolivia, Chile, Burkina Faso, India, Malawi and Pakistan.

By paying above-market prices and working with co-operatives to increase economic resilience, environmental sustainability and access to global markets, Liberation's work has benefited the lives of over 35,000 farmers and their families. Meanwhile, their commitment to ethical sourcing, shared producer ownership and sustainable business practices has positioned them as a leader and innovator in the wider fair trade sector.

Since 2007, Shared Interest has supported Liberation with a revolving line of Buyer Credit, enabling the organisation to address barriers to growth, build financial resilience and strengthen its support of nut producer groups across the world.

A 'buyer credit' facility, comparable to an overdraft, is an important resource for buyer organisations which is available uniquely through Shared Interest and allows pre-shipment and post-shipment finance for confirmed orders. This allows the buyer to make pre-finance payments to producer groups. You can learn more about it in the appendices of this document.

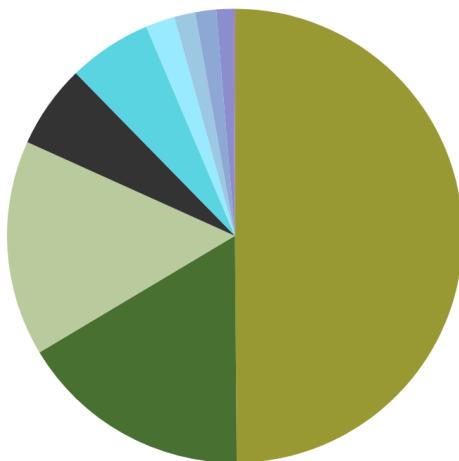
Speaking about Liberation's unique farmer co-ownership structure, Dan Binks, Liberation Managing Director, said:

"We're a Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by shares. Our communities of interest are worldwide smallholder farmers. So, you could be a two-acre dairy farmer in Derbyshire, or you could be a two-acre peanut farmer in Nicaragua. And we're interested. We have ordinary and preference shares, but 50% of our ordinary shares are owned by the International Nut Cooperative, which is a UK-based co-op, made-up of smallholder farmers."

Liberation works closely with the International Nut Co-operative (INC), a global co-operative network of small-scale farmers and indigenous nut gatherers who work collaboratively to enhance trade opportunities, strengthen capacity, exchange technical knowledge, influence policy and broaden global influence for their members. The INC represents six nut co-operatives from South America, Central America, Asia and Africa.

Dan said: *"The INC has one farmer representative that sits on our board who speaks on behalf of the other co-operatives which are members of the INC. From a governance point of view, the INC are able to almost detail the way the business goes..."*

Cracking open farmer co-ownership: Meet the shareholders of Liberation



Ownership

International Nut Co-operative	50%
Stichtung Cordaid	16.57%
Etico	15.14%
The Walbrook Foundation	5.96%
Social Business Network	5.95%
Candela Peru	2.09%
Equal Exchange	1.49%
Sam and Alison Clarke	1.49%
Elements Homestead Pvt Ltd	1.19%
Nutcellars Ltd	0.12%

Image

Ownership breakdown of Liberation Foods.

Liberation's second-largest shareholder is Stichtung Cordaid, a value-based emergency relief and development organisation based in the Netherlands, working with a network of 617 partner organisations in 38 countries affected by conflict and poverty.

Ético (The Ethical Trading Company Ltd.), Liberation's third-largest shareholder, is a trading initiative based in London offering a variety of products produced by small-scale farmers around the world. Ético is 100% owned by co-operatives and charities, and is dedicated to bringing justice, empowerment and equality through quality trading relationships.

The Walbrook Foundation is a Derbyshire-based charity working towards the relief of poverty, improvement of nutrition and development of opportunities for the personal development of young people in the UK. The Foundation has a 5.95% stake in Liberation, equal to that of The Social Business Network, a London-based non-profit agency providing project management and consultancy services directly to small-scale farmer cooperatives, farmer networks, non-profits, food businesses and brands.

Candela Peru, a Brazil nut co-operative based in Lima, Peru, hold a 2.09% stake in Liberation. Candela are also one of Shared Interest's longest-standing customers. We have supported Candela with finance since 1999, enabling the co-operative to meet the needs of its 300 farmer members and sustain its precious ecological relationship with the rainforest.

With a 1.49% stake in Liberation, Equal Exchange are a farmer-owned co-operative working directly with producers to source, market and sell products like coffee, tea, and chocolate. With an equal stake, Sam and Alison Clarke are private shareholders in Liberation.

Elements Homestead Pvt Ltd. (Elements) is a business based in Kerala, India, which holds a 1.19% shareholding and aims to mainstream the production and marketing of organic produce in India to strengthen socioeconomic and environmental conditions for farmers.

Lastly, Nutcellars is a family-owned, UK-based nut brand with a 0.12% share in Liberation. Nutcellars source fairly traded Macadamia nuts from small-scale farmers in Malawi. In September 2024, Nutcellars brought the first, 100% Fairtrade Macadamia products to the UK.

Good from the ground up: Working with farmers, for farmers

Liberation pays producers the highest price possible for their raw materials – offering farmers, on average, 36% above the Fairtrade minimum price and Premium, combined.

Liberation's decision to pay more than the Fairtrade prices is a powerful testament to its dedication of supporting workers in regions far-too often underserved by global markets. For farmers, this commitment to fair pricing is vital for their livelihood and financial security.

As well as offering fair prices, Liberation works innovatively and collaboratively with its producer network to support farmers to improve farming practices, implement sustainability initiatives, enhance health and safety, foster inclusivity and promote value addition to increase the economic value of farmers' crops beyond their raw form.

Working with farmers and gatherers to support their health and welfare is of particular importance in the nut industry, because of the pervasive threat of aflatoxin. Aflatoxin is a poisonous substance produced by certain fungi which can contaminate nuts before and after harvest – but particularly during storage.

Aflatoxin has been identified as a cause of liver cancer, immune system suppression and impaired growth in children under five. Whilst strict safety regulations prevent aflatoxin from entering food supply chains in Europe, the Center for Disease Control estimates 4.5 billion people¹ are chronically exposed to aflatoxin in their diets, mostly in developing countries. In Malawi, a small country in south-east Africa, Liberation has worked side-by-side with groundnut producers to develop processing facilities, ensuring the protection of workers against aflatoxin and the maintenance of product quality.

Other challenges facing producers in Liberation's supply chain include inequality, the impacts of climate change and a lack of access to credit, pre-finance and technical assistance to maintain farms, increase productivity and improve product quality.

Liberation works to address these challenges by working hand-in-hand with producers, providing direct market access, long-term trading relationships and above-market prices, delivered in advance with the support of Shared Interest's buyer credit facility.

What is a buyer credit facility?

A buyer credit facility is a revolving line of credit, comparable to an overdraft, available to buyer organisations which allows pre-shipment and post-shipment finance for confirmed orders. This allows the buyer to make pre-finance payments to producer groups.

What is pre-finance?

Pre-financing is crucial in the Fairtrade system because it provides producers with upfront capital, enabling them to cover the costs of sustainable production, invest in their business and manage their cash flow effectively. This financial support is particularly vital for small-scale farmers and producers, who often face challenges accessing traditional financing.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557781/>

Background

Speaking about Liberation's steadfast mission and ambitious vision, Dan said:

"We're a purpose driven company ... We exist to make sure that smallholder farmers across the world receive full and fair value for the work they do and our vision is that we live in a world where smallholder farmers and their communities are able to thrive. And then our mission then becomes very, very simple: to connect smallholder farmers across the world with consumers in developed markets through, using delicious foods as the vehicle."



Image

A gatherer collects cashews in India (left). Farmer, Judith, harvests peanuts (middle). Farmer, Salvador Ruiz Mendoza, harvests peanuts in Nicaragua (right). Each farmer works with Liberation.

Liberation sources Fairtrade, Organic nut products from eleven producer groups across eight countries, including: brazil nuts from Bolivia; macadamia nuts from Malawi; peanuts from Nicaragua and cashew nuts from India and Burkina Faso ².



Image

Map showing major raw materials purchased worldwide by Liberation in 2023.

² <https://chooseliberation.com/pages/location>

Shared Interest and Liberation

Since 2007, Shared Interest has delivered flexible and prompt financial support to Liberation in the form of a buyer credit facility, which has helped the organisation purchase nuts, cope with price rises, plan effectively and make pre-finance payments to producer groups.

Pre-finance is crucial for producer organisations as it provides the necessary capital to invest in their operations, improve productivity and access new markets, ultimately boosting their income and resilience for the future. For farmers, it supports purchasing of essential inputs like seeds and fertiliser, adoption of new technologies and management of seasonal cash flow challenges, leading to more sustainable and profitable farming practices.

Fundamentally, Shared Interest finance has enabled Liberation's network of producers across several continents to be paid fairly and when they need it most – in advance, before their goods are sold. Throughout the last decade, Shared Interest has remained Liberation's only lender.

Against the backdrop of Liberation's storied growth and social impact, this relationship underscores Shared Interest's vital role in supporting the resilience of businesses – as well as the livelihoods of workers – within the global fair trade system.



Image

Dan Binks, Managing Director of Liberation, speaks to guests and delivers a presentation about Liberation at a Shared Interest supporter event in Bristol, 2024.

Explaining how Shared Interest finance is used in his own words, Dan said:

"We do about 2.5 million worth of raw material purchases every single year. We've got a credit line with Shared Interest of USD 1.1 million. We utilise that credit line for trade finance to – first of all – send pre-finance to farmers, so we might be in a position where we pre-finance and pay 60% of the cost of a container upfront knowing that we're not going to get that container for a couple of months. Shared Interest helps us do that."

"And the advantage of that is the farmer organisation gets money when they need it. The co-operative gets the money that they need to buy the crop. It all eases their cash flow. And then from our perspective, having a credit line for our cash flow purposes combined with reserve cash that we have in our bank helps us to keep the business turnover year on year."

Summary: Shared Interest's support and financial relationship

Finance Timeline					
2007	2008	2010	2011	2012	2017
Buyer Credit USD 600k	Buyer Credit increase Permanent <i>USD 600k to USD 1.1m</i>	Buyer Credit increase <i>Temporary increase for a 6-month period</i> USD 1.1m to USD 1.95m	Buyer Credit increase <i>Temporary increase for a 6-month period</i> USD 1.1m to USD 1.95m	Buyer Credit increase <i>Temporary increase for a 6-month period</i> USD 1.1m to USD 1.95m	Buyer Credit increase <i>Temporary increase for a 6-month period</i> USD 1.1m to USD 1.5m

Our financial support enables Liberation to address its complex and evolving needs. Namely, working with major supermarkets presents a variety of unique opportunities and challenges to address. For example, retailers do not provide Liberation with contracts – they solely confirm orders via email, which can create challenges.

Some supermarkets also pay 30 days in arrears, as a result of their scale and associated capacity constraints, disrupting Liberation's cash flow. In addition, supermarkets can provide orders of significant volume at short notice – which may often require finance to fulfil.

Furthermore, supermarkets work with a large number of suppliers, and they have the flexibility to switch these suppliers with ease – posing a risk of sudden revenue loss. Again, access to finance is a vital resource for organisations like Liberation to mitigate the economic implications of these events.

When our relationship with Liberation began in 2007, we provided an initial proposal of USD 600k as buyer credit, with USD 300k delivered immediately, and USD 300k delivered when Liberation raised sufficient share capital from private investment. This security offset the risk conducive to a new loan proposal, therefore protecting the investment of Shared Interest.

In May 2008, Liberation identified a need for additional capital to facilitate necessary planning and provide contingency to mitigate falling into a negative cash position due to unforeseen circumstances. In response, we increased their credit facility to USD 1.1m on a permanent basis.

In 2010, Liberation faced barriers to growth and came to Shared Interest for support. In response, we reviewed and increased their credit facility, providing a peak purchasing temporary excess of USD 850k, raising Liberation's buyer credit facility to USD 1.95m for six months, for three consecutive years. This enabled the organisation to increase stock purchasing from producer co-operatives in order to fulfil large seasonal orders with supermarket chains, Sainsbury's and Tesco.

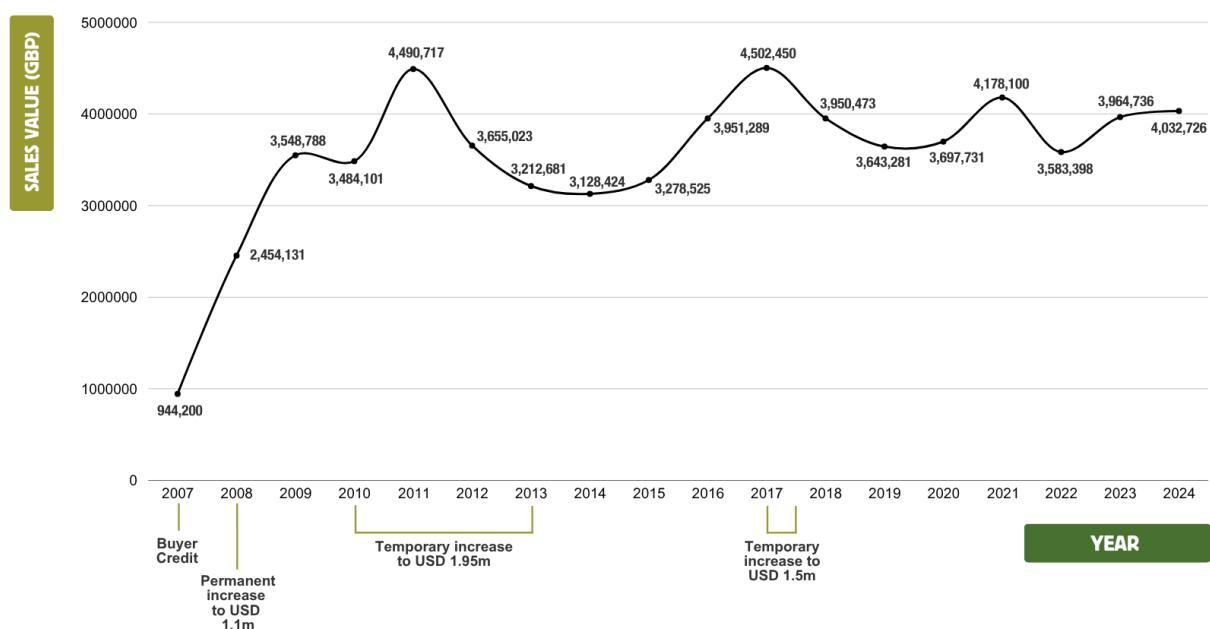
Between 2017 and 2018, the impacts of Brexit and a weakening sterling meant that raw materials became substantially more expensive. During this time – within Liberation's peak harvest season – we increased their credit facility by USD 400k to USD 1.5m, enabling the business to procure brazil nuts and cashews earlier than in previous seasons, which was quintessential due to emerging supply chain challenges and escalating purchasing prices.

These challenges were accentuated by the need for Liberation to purchase an additional container of brazil nuts that year, which was essential for the company to accommodate its year-round business contracts with Tesco, as well as two new large Christmas orders with the retailer.

The following year, Liberation welcomed an increase in sales, predominantly as a result of the revenue generated from its increased trading volume with Tesco.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Liberation's gross profit exceeded £1m, its highest in a decade. Dan credits this achievement to the strength and closeness of Liberation's producer-relationships, the success of its recently launched online store and the impacts of internal restructuring, which involved 'taking some costs out [and driving] a little bit more profitability' Liberation's way, according to Dan, Liberation Managing Director.

Graph 1: Sales Value



In 2011, Liberation received private investment and a positive trading result, leading to a significant appreciation in sales value for the first time. Between 2017 and 2019, Liberation experienced a loss in sales and by the end of 2022, Liberation's sales revenue had decreased by 12% as a result of multiple events explained below.

Explaining the situation at the time, Managing Director, Dan, said:

“With the breakout of conflict in Ukraine, things started to change rapidly in an already uncertain market. The impact of inflation in the market and a subsequent cost of living crisis saw a significant change in consumer behaviours and demand for Fairtrade nuts dropped.”

Despite these challenges, Liberation was able to benefit from its strong, transparent and collaborative working relationship with producers, to continue sourcing products and stocking shelves. As a result, Liberation was able to recover its sales revenue by 10% by the end of 2023 – in a market severely affected by inflationary pressures.

Speaking about Liberation's ability to deliver on buyer commitments during the pandemic, Dan explained that although overall orders were lower due to reduced consumer demand, Liberation fulfilled 100% of the orders placed, maintaining uninterrupted supply where competitors experienced stockouts. Dan said:

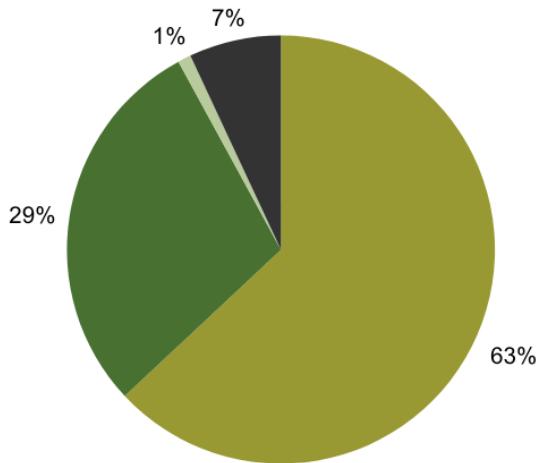
“During COVID we did not go out of stock on anything. We serviced all of our customers 100% during COVID times. We just kept going – and where our competitors were actually going off shelf and out of stock, we were able to maintain it.”

“When retail customers have asked me in the past, ‘How did you manage to do it?’ I said, it is all down to that base relationship. We own the relationships with the farmer organisations across the world and we work through the situation together. We made sure that we always had stock in the country to be able to continue servicing. The difference between us and some other suppliers, is that they don't have those relationships.”

Graph 2: Sales Channels

Sales Channels in 2025

- Supermarkets
- Exports
- Online
- Wholesale



Sales to supermarkets in the United Kingdom have remained the primary access to market and sales channel for Liberation, accounting for between two-thirds and three-quarters of total sales consistently since the business was founded.

Richard Cooper, former Chair of Liberation Foods, said ³:

"We have had a partnership with Tesco for nearly 10 years now – they were our first big own label customer when we launched Fairtrade nuts into the UK market. Today, Tesco remains our biggest customer and is an incredibly important foundation to our business and the security of our small-scale producers. We are delighted to be trading with Tesco to provide a nutritious, natural snack whilst sustaining livelihoods in far flung communities."



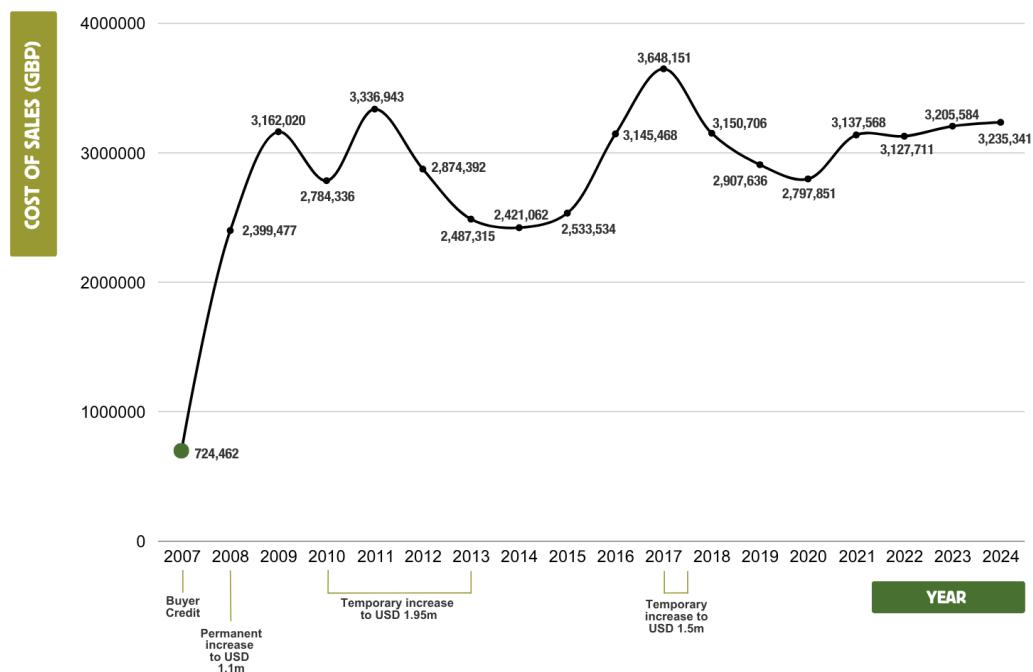
Image

Richard Cooper, whose conversation and photograph is included in the 110th issue of our Quarterly Return magazine (left). Liberation's Fairtrade Brazil nuts supplied to Tesco (right).

Amidst the pandemic, Liberation continued to look for new development opportunities. In February 2023, the organisation launched its new website and online shop. As a result, for the first time in its history, Liberation was able to sell directly to consumers through a new, owned sales channel, contributing to the growth of its sales revenue.

³ <https://www.tescoplc.com/celebrating-national-nut-day/#:~:text=We%20at%20Liberation%20have%20had,of%20our%20small%2Dscale%20producers>.

Graph 3: Cost of Sales



In 2007, Liberation entered a period of significant change – and growth. Rental, payroll and marketing costs grew substantially as the organisation invested in more staff, a new office and promotional activities, reflected in the rise in cost of sales between 2007 and 2008. Meanwhile, Liberation needed to purchase nuts from various producer groups, all before the nuts could be processed, packaged and sold.

As a result, pre-finance was necessary, and the buyer credit facility provided by Shared Interest was an integral resource to pay producers up front and support Liberation's growth during this period. Although the issuance of this facility presented risk, a review of the growing Fairtrade nut market presented opportunity for success.

In 2008, the increase of Liberation's credit facility supported the organisation in business planning and mitigating cash flow crises.

In 2009, as per Liberation's plan to re-launch its then-named range, Harry's Nuts, with a new packaging design, Liberation's marketing and packaging costs were above-average. These expenses, as well as increased Fairtrade License fees and delivery costs, factored into increased accruals and cost of sales for the year.

In 2010, Liberation actively sought to reduce costs as much as possible. This plan was reflected in reduced marketing, consultancy and board expenses for the financial year.

Between 2011 and 2014, Liberation's cost of sales continued to reduce as the company continued to minimise expenses in areas like new product development, store promotions, distribution costs and license fees.

From 2014 to 2017, the reason for the incline and peak in Liberation's cost of sales was multifaceted. Foremost, marketing costs increased in 2015 as Liberation aimed to strengthen its brand by distributing more samples, attending PR (public relations) events and investing in design services related to new lines and packaging.

In addition, Liberation incurred costs due to the development and distribution of a short film . As part of the film, Chairman, Richard Cooper, visited the community of Puerto Perez in Bolivia, to document the path of the company's products from origin to store-shelves, and illustrate the benefits of the Fairtrade business model for Bolivian gatherers.

The film was showcased to audiences during National Nut Day, a nationwide campaign launched by Liberation in 2015 to highlight the benefits of ethically sourced nuts.

Another expense attributing to an increased cost of sales for this time period was the hiring of a new Sales Director with a strong background in the food sector and a purpose of assisting in the management of Liberation's own-label business.

In addition to increased payroll costs, a weakening Sterling meant that importing raw materials became significantly more expensive during this time period. Other costs were also high, such as product development, sales, insurance and technical charges, some of which are costs associated with Liberation visiting a number of overseas farmers.

From the outset of the pandemic in 2020, Liberation supported farmers by buying raw materials at the highest possible price, paying between 36% and 41% above the combined Fairtrade minimum price plus Fairtrade Premium – far above non-Fairtrade equivalents. In conjunction with inflationary pressures, Liberation's cost of sales increased sharply between 2020 and 2021, before plateauing in subsequent years – in part, thanks to a reduction in marketing costs, as in-store promotions were suspended as a result of COVID-19.

Dan Binks, Liberation Managing Director, said: *“Coming out of COVID, prices across the board increased in early 2022. For Liberation, that meant higher raw material, storage, manufacturing and distribution costs. Although market conditions were low, we were determined to support our farmer networks with higher prices for their raw materials”*

Speaking about the impact of the prices he receives for his crops, Julian Perez Ortiz, brazil nut farmer and President of Bolivian nut co-operative COINACAPA, a brazil nut co-operative in Beni and supplier of Liberation, said⁴:

“Being part of Liberation Foods brings a sense of empowerment and equality of opportunity. It's this opportunity that helps liberate not just our livelihoods but also our children's... We have a better house and education thanks to Fairtrade sales. One of my children now attends university, which would have been impossible ten years ago.

“The premium we get paid has helped to improve housing for many gatherer families and we are very thankful for that. We have also used Fairtrade Premium funds to improve the quality of our produce and the efficiency with which we can deliver it.”

⁴ <https://www.tescoplccom/what-does-fairtrade-mean-for-the-farmer/>

Social Impact

Liberation has been described as a purpose-led brand which was “Born good” in 2007, producing both high quality and ethically sourced products. Some feel that ‘*the world has been catching up to where Liberation started*’⁵. High quality, nutritious foods which support dignified livelihoods for the communities that grow them are in demand like never before. At the core of Liberation’s born-good business, is a unique producer co-ownership model which works with farmers to ensure their voices are heard, their concerns are addressed, and their families are fed.

Juan Bravo, member of Nicaraguan producer Del Campo and President of the International Nut Co-operative (INC), explained the significance of the INC holding shares in Liberation.

Juan said ⁶: “*I think it's a great opportunity for small producers. It's the first time in history that small producers are owners of their own businesses in Europe. And I believe that it is a great victory that has cost lots of work, lots of time, lots of effort and lots of people and it was worth it to celebrate that we are in this position now.*”

Since becoming President in 2017, Juan’s primary task has been working on developing proposals for an integrated model for the INC to expand its networks and have a more direct influence in the supply chain. In that time, the INC’s shares in Liberation have increased from 45% to 50%, meaning farmers receive a more powerful voice and representation in the supply chain, whilst shaping Liberation’s operational strategy. Against this backdrop, the wider nut industry has remained largely unjust for small-scale farmers.

Liberation Managing Director, Dan said: “*Alone, [smallholders] just cannot compete with massive, commercial farms which have got economies of scale and large production ...that's where Liberation steps in – and the co-operative model steps in.*”

Speaking about Liberation’s approach to building producer relationships, Dan said:

“I've managed to build my own personal trust with farm organisations by actually being there with them and collaborating on projects, on difficulties, on anything really ... It can be that 'there's an opportunity in the market, what are we going to do about it?' It could be they're telling me they've got a problem with their products. 'How can I help them?' And it's only by building those strong, long-lasting relationships that you can make the thing work.”

The success of this innovative approach to doing business demonstrates how resources and technical experience can be effectively combined with grassroots farmer organisations – through representation and collaboration – to offer the scale which international markets demand, all the while ensuring sustainable impact is generated through ‘bottom-up’ projects.

Through these projects, Liberation has supported fairer trade, environmental sustainability, gender equality and economic resilience for small-scale farmers. In an effort to evidence and promote its high standards of social and environmental responsibility, Liberation initiated the robust process of applying for B Corp certification in 2022. Liberation submitted their B Corp assessment in 2023, following which, B Labs performed a legal review in preparation for Liberation to progress with a full application which is underway.

⁵ <https://junxion.com/case-studies/liberation-foods/>

⁶ https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/where-it-started-and-extra-for-long-titles?srsltid=AfmBOoqaP9KntZZjCnjZY7RD1IPWKhqwZ3l6k4MD_SYocQwMN-3B7bF

Speaking about this milestone, Dan said ⁷: “*This is a major piece of work and an excellent opportunity to evaluate our impact on a greater scale, both locally and globally. As part of this process, we have set ourselves targets that align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and are already helping guide decision-making and the direction of the business.*”

Since May 2023, Liberation has partnered with Transform Trade, a charity which assists farmers and workers affected by unfair trade. As part of this collaboration, Liberation will join Fairtrade businesses such as Zaytoun and True Origin, in presenting a partnership logo on its online store and offering customers the option to donate to Transform Trade at checkout, fostering co-operation and support to effect change.

Bolivia

In Bolivia, brazil nuts – known locally as ‘pará nuts’ (referring to the state of Pará in Brazil, where they are commonly found) are collected from wild, towering trees in the humid lowlands of the Amazon rainforest. Gatherers, known as ‘castanheiros’ (in Portuguese) or ‘castaños’ (in Spanish), split open fallen brazil nut fruits to reveal between 12 and 24 edible seeds inside, which are the brazil nuts. Workers transport the nuts to collection centres for processing. The harvest takes place between November and May, the rainy season.

In 2023, Bolivia exported 22,686,200 kilograms of Brazil nuts worth an estimated £95 million, representing 49.19% of the product’s global export value, affirming the country’s position as a global leader in the production of brazil nuts⁸, followed by Peru and Brazil.

Despite its resource-rich economy, Bolivia has faced historical challenges related to the exploitation of land and indigenous populations by European forces. This legacy continues to affect income levels, poverty rates and ecosystems nationwide – but particularly in rural areas such as Beni, in north-east Bolivia, where Liberation works closely with nut farmers.

An estimated 14,000 Bolivians work as brazil nut harvesters, and an additional 8,000 workers are involved in processing (Van Der Wal, 2021). In Beni, 40 percent of household income stems from Brazil nut production – yet 64% of the population cannot satisfy their basic needs⁹.

Despite this, co-operatives are helping rural communities to mobilise and build an industry that is both environmentally sustainable and economically lucrative. However, the support of co-operatives alone is not enough – buyers and consumers must each make conscious decisions to support them by choosing Fairtrade.

On this front, Liberation leads as a buyer working collaboratively with several Bolivian co-operatives – both on the ground and in the market. Liberation sources brazil nuts from several co-operatives in Beni. Since 2006, Liberation has supplied these nuts to Tesco.

⁷https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0601/9016/3133/files/Liberation_Foods_Impact_Report_2022_sml.pdf?v=1701773622

⁸

<https://wits.worldbank.org/trade/comtrade/en/country/ALL/year/2023/tradeflow/Exports/partner/WLD/product/080120#:~:text=In%202023%20Top%20exporters%20of,14%2C957.20K%20%2C%202%2C078%2C540%20Kg.>

⁹ <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/media-centre/blog/brazil-nut-co-operatives-in-bolivia-build-a-safer-fairer-industry/>

Richard Cooper, former Chair of Liberation Foods, said¹⁰:

“The bag of Brazil nuts you buy is the miraculous work of many hands from the families that gather to the boatman who coursed down the river with the raw product. ‘Nut by nut’, this journey is a long way from the convenient world we see when we do our shopping.”



Image

A map representing the Brazil nut production area encompassing Bolivia, Peru and Brazil (left). An employee of Candela holds Brazil nuts in Puerto Maldonado, Peru (middle). A nut gatherer of Candela, Esmiker de la Peña Huanuire, holds a Brazil nut tree plant on his farm (right).

Protecting environments

In 2023 alone, Liberation sourced 47.9 tonnes of brazil nuts from Bolivia. Beyond trade, Liberation’s relationship with Bolivian co-operatives is helping to preserve the environment and improve worker welfare. Producers in Bolivia face the threat of deforestation, driven by an unsustainable expansion of agriculture (and particularly, soy), which is leading to habitat loss, declining soil fertility and reduced productivity of agricultural land.

‘Slash-and-burn’ cultivation also persists in the region¹¹ – whereby forests are cut and burned to create fields for crops. As a result of this practice, carbon emissions and pollutants are released into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change and damaging human health, whilst disrupting ecosystems and depleting seed diversity¹².

Despite holding a membership in the few hundreds, members of the co-operatives Liberation works with are responsible for monitoring and preserving over 100,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest, as well as promoting the conservation of biodiversity within the wider community.

What makes brazil nut cultivation truly unique, however, is that the success of the industry is contingent on the protection of Brazil nut trees and the conservation – rather than exploitation and deforestation – of the surrounding Amazon rainforest.

¹⁰ <https://www.tescoplcc.com/celebrating-national-nut-day/>

¹¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0167880924005310#:~:text=Slash%2Dand%2Dburn%20wiped%20out,67.6%20Mg%20C%20ha%20this%20farming%20method.>

¹² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378112723000543#:~:text=We%20compared%20seed%20density%20seed,exposed%20to%20this%20farming%20method.>



As brazil nut farmer, Edivan Kaxarari, of Rondônia – a state bordering north-west Bolivia – explains¹³:
“We work with brazil nuts because they have no environmental impact.”

Edivan (pictured left), receives between 45 to 50 Brazilian reais (equivalent to £6), for each bucket of 40,000 brazil nuts he harvests. Edivan and his gatherer community are aware that their nuts would sell for up to 65 times this price at their final selling points.

Despite this, Edivan says: *“We do not have access to the retail market. So, we sell to middlemen, who pay very little.”*

Liberation’s action to pay above-market prices to producers not only reduces this dependency on middlemen but also empowers them to protect their environment.

Julian Perez Ortiz is President of COINACAPA, a brazil nut co-operative in Beni and supplier of Liberation. A brazil nut farmer himself, Julian expressed how Liberation and Fairtrade have helped transform his livelihood and provide opportunities for future generations.

As a result of COINACAPA’s relationship with Liberation, Julian said¹⁴:

“We are better able to operate on a level playing field, with access to market opportunities to help our co-operatives and communities. We at Liberation have supplied Tesco with Fairtrade Organic Brazil nuts for nearly ten years now; it’s a great long-term partnership.”

“Thanks to regular, reliable, sustainably priced purchases and a Fairtrade Premium over the years, we have invested in our businesses, communities and families.”



Image

Nut producers of COINACAPA walk into the forest.
Credit: Eduardo Martino; Fairtrade Foundation

¹³ <https://dialogue.earth/en/forests/45504-international-markets-boost-sustainable-brazil-nut-production/>

¹⁴ <https://www.tescoplcc.com/what-does-fairtrade-mean-for-the-farmer/>

Reflecting on the protection of his environment, Julian said:

“As long as small-scale nut gatherers make a good living, we keep the cattle-ranchers off our precious patch of rainforest – doing our bit to preserve the precious environment in which we live. Organic farming and conserving the environment are my passions and my main motivation in life beyond taking care of my family.”

Casildo Quispe, brazil nut gatherer of COINACAPA, says the payment received by his co-operative has been of great benefit to its members.

Casildo said¹⁵: *“The father [of a] member was working and a tree fell and hit him hard on his head. Because of Fairtrade they could take him to the best hospital – they knew COINACAPA had the resources to pay the bill, and his family knew he would be well looked after. This gives such a feeling of security that there is help if anything goes wrong.”*

Without Liberation’s above-market price plus the guaranteed fair price which comes with Fairtrade, gatherers would often resort to making extra money by cutting down precious timber¹⁶ – which would otherwise impose devastating repercussions on the environment.

Supporting the rights and way of life of brazil nut farming communities – as a buyer or consumer – is subsequently vital, both from a human rights and environmental perspective¹⁷.

The Fairtrade minimum price is the minimum price that buyers must pay producers for a Fairtrade product. The price is determined through consultation with various stakeholders including farmers and workers. It aims to act as a safety net to farmers of market fluctuations, kicking in when the price gets too low. In the nut sector, separate Fairtrade minimum prices are set for brazil nuts, cashew nuts and peanuts - varying by Conventional or Organic, whole or broken nut and also by how processed the nut is (i.e. shelled)¹⁸.

¹⁵ <https://latinamericaconference.org.uk/2011/11/how-buying-fairtrade-nuts-can-help-change-lives/>

¹⁶ <https://impakter.com/deforestation-why-poverty-root-cause/#:~:text=In%20the%20decades%20since%2C%20the,to%20destroy%20even%20more%20forests.&text=Seema%20Jayachandran%2C%20a%20North%2DWestern,crop%20to%20feed%20their%20family.%E2%80%9D>

¹⁷ https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/agroforestry-for-climate-adaptation?srsltid=AfmBOoo1NOn7FhmlZ5nDjJ7k9EPD6bqZ_M-f_wQtjQ5GmtJlGaDLj1Gb

¹⁸ <https://www.fairtrade.net/en/why-fairtrade/how-we-do-it/standards/fairtrade-minimum-price-and-premium-information.html>

Strengthening co-operatives

Smallholder farmers typically have the least amount of information about their wider industry than any other actor in the supply chain. To compound this issue, brazil nut farmers in particular face a complicated supply chain acutely affected by adverse weather conditions, market and currency fluctuations and the challenge of managing contract processes to shell and pack nuts at origin. This supply chain complexity makes communication and transparency even more difficult to achieve than in more conventional set-ups.

However, as well as supporting environmental sustainability, Liberation's farmer-first philosophy has enabled Brazil nut co-operatives to address communication and information-flow challenges, improving performance and farmers' understanding of the supply chain.

Liberation has invested in reopening communication channels and creating new ones for Bolivian co-operatives to become stronger, more prosperous trading partners. This investment has included training co-operative boards, management and staff in best working practices; supporting staff to understand how the brazil nut market functions and developing basic tools for planning and controlling business processes.

Managerial staff and gatherers of brazil nut co-operatives working with Liberation were shown how their nuts were packaged and purchased in the UK, something many had never seen before. Liberation also provided succinct and relevant information on market movements and the wider industry context.

This information intrinsically motivated the gatherers and raised their understanding of quality standards and associated pricing. Meanwhile, management were empowered with new communication tools and insights into their operational knowledge gaps.

Following the project, Liberation welcomed an improvement in the quality, quantity and timeliness of supply, demonstrating the value of transparency as a means to improve two-way communication flow. Liberation also observed improvements in the timeliness and frequency of reporting from co-operatives, enabling Liberation to retain more knowledge and speak confidently to customers and consumers about their product and supply chain.

Responsiveness to emerging challenges has also benefitted from this investment, exemplified in 2024, when a case of metal contamination was identified in a batch of brazil nuts packed in the UK. Liberation promptly visited the origin supplier in Bolivia, identified the source of the contamination and oversaw the implementation of corrective measures. This included the installation of a new production belt at the point where the contamination had been isolated, ensuring improved quality control and mitigating the risk of future recurrence.

In the longer term, this project has created opportunities for collaboration – for example, becoming involved in plans for a new processing plant. This has the potential to increase value added by the co-operative, and give them more control over timing and quality of processing. It can also enable Liberation to work in partnership with the co-operative to have more input into the standards adhered to when processing, and make the co-operative a more economically resilient, sustainable and reliable business partner.

Malawi

In Malawi, a landlocked nation bordering Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique, macadamia production thrives in elevated areas with moderate temperatures, ample rainfall and soil which is slightly acidic and well-draining. Liberation sources macadamia nuts from the Highlands Macadamia Co-operative Union Limited (HIMACUL). HIMACUL is a Liberation shareholder and member of the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council, a platform built to inspire, connect and represent the interests of the global nut and dried fruit industry.

In 2022, on the International Day of Co-operatives, Central England Co-operatives launched a five year pilot project with Co-operative College titled: Our Malawi Partnership. Through this initiative, the project involved collaboration with Liberation's Malawian suppliers, including HIMACUL, to build trade relationships and bring Malawi-focused brands to store shelves across the United Kingdom.

In its first year, the project generated sales of around £500,000, representing a significant 10% of Malawi's export to the United Kingdom. In 2023, 22,300 Liberation products were added to store shelves and the project was expanded to include more co-operatives across the country, developing marketing and sales opportunities for Malawian producers¹⁹.

Safeguarding smallholders

Groundnuts are an essential part of life in Malawi. As well as being another important export crop, groundnuts are a key protein source for families and are used to make flour, soup and milk. However, groundnuts are particularly susceptible to aflatoxin.

Despite the economic importance of groundnuts for farmers, aflatoxin outbreaks in the 70s and 80s were insufficiently managed by supply chain actors, discouraging government investment in domestic infrastructure and extension services. Consequently, Africa's share of the global groundnut market plummeted from 70% in 1970 to just 5% in 2005.

To address the challenges Malawian farmers faced, the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) was established in 1997. NASFAM is a network of smallholder-owned businesses, working with farmers to achieve production, processing and distribution at scale, whilst controlling problems like aflatoxin.

In 2016, Liberation partnered with Twin Trading and the Mchinji Area Smallholder Farmers' Association (MASFA), a groundnut co-operative with 2,700 members, to run a project which involved the purchasing and mechanical processing of groundnuts. The project brought shelling into a controlled environment and reduced the risk of aflatoxin contamination for MASFA members – which also posed a constraint for MASFA's exports to the UK.

In 2018, Liberation continued to provide business, marketing and agricultural extension support to small-scale peanut producers in central Malawi. A new approach to purchasing and shelling peanuts using mechanical shellers was trialed, enabling producers to aggregate nuts and add more value. Farmers were also trained in improved agricultural practices and post-harvest handling, contributing to quality improvements and higher prices in the market.

¹⁹ <https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/its-all-about-malawian-co-operatives#:~:text=Central%20England%20Co%2Doperatives%20announced,on%20Malawian%20soils%20as%20possible!>

In 2022, Malawian farmers experienced first-hand the devastating impacts of climate change, as tropical storm Ana affected thousands of residents, including the 3,800 farmers of macadamia co-operative and INC member HIMACUL.

Ken Mkengala, Manager of HIMACUL, said²⁰: *"The storm has damaged the houses of our members and has caused some of the macadamia trees to fail due to the heavy wind that was associated with the cyclone."*

In response, Liberation, the Neno Macadamia Trust and NASFAM are working together to assist HIMACUL in developing climate-smart initiatives, such as agroforestry systems, carbon sequestration and crop diversification on members' farms. As monoculture farming can lead to the loss of an entire harvest through one extreme weather event, this initiative will mitigate climate change impacts and build economic resilience for farmers.

Today, NASFAM organises 100,000 smallholder farmers into clubs of 10 to 15 members. These clubs collaborate to share information among themselves. Liberation's work with NASFAM underscores the value of feeding back information from the market in efforts to improve safety and prosperity for farmers, whilst demonstrating the need for comprehensive traceability and accountability throughout the supply chain.



Image

Ken Mkengala visits the agroforestry field of a lead farmer who intercrops macadamia with maize, groundnuts and soya. Credit: Liberation.

²⁰ <https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/agroforestry-for-climate-adaptation?srsltid=AfmBOoogsoTDIwcsWczFqQkULoKOSmsED66Fbjmck--CQRidiuL4DsE5>

Nicaragua

In Nicaragua, peanuts – known locally as cacahuates – are harvested in areas with a high concentration of volcanic soils, such as the north-western regions of Cosiguina, Chinandega and León. The soil itself distinctively contains high sand content and a pH between 6 and 8, whilst the climate is characterised by a high level of humidity, sunshine and distinct wet and dry seasons, providing optimum conditions for peanut cultivation.

To harvest peanuts, workers cut and lift peanut plants from the soil, often using specialised machinery to shake off excess debris. Following this, plants are arranged in rows, with pods facing up towards the sun to dry out. After several days, the dried peanuts are cleaned and sorted. Peanut kernels are then separated from the shells before being processed and prepared for export.



Image

A farmer of a peanut and sesame co-operative in Nicaragua (left). Peanuts are lifted from the ground (right).

In 2024, Nicaragua exported 180 million kilograms of peanuts with an export value of over £80 million, reflecting 2.8% of global exports and Nicaragua's position as the sixth-largest peanut exporter worldwide²¹. It is estimated that Nicaragua's peanut industry supports the livelihoods of over 20,000 workers and their families.

At the heart of this industry is Del Campo, an umbrella organisation constituting eight co-operatives located across the western coast of Nicaragua, in the municipalities of Rivas, León and Chinandega. Collectively, Del Campo supports over 3,600 smallholder farmers trading in peanuts, soya, honey, sesame, oil, cashews and hibiscus.

As a key supplier, Del Campo sells peanuts to Liberation, which are used for the company's popular wasabi peanut range. Del Campo is also a member of the INC, holding shares in Liberation. Since 2017, Juan Bravo, a member of Del Campo, has also held the responsibility of President of the INC, representing and amplifying the voices of farmers.

²¹

[https://www.tendata.com/blogs/insight/5915.html#:~:text=%C2%B7India:%20US\\$710.6%20million%20,\(Vietnam:%20\\$6.7%20million%20\(0.2%25\)](https://www.tendata.com/blogs/insight/5915.html#:~:text=%C2%B7India:%20US$710.6%20million%20,(Vietnam:%20$6.7%20million%20(0.2%25))

Juan (pictured right) said²²:

“Being part of the INC with Fairtrade certification has enabled us to improve infrastructure within the co-ops, promote agro-ecological technologies and the production of [honey], integrate the use of renewable energy and develop vocational training programmes for the families of co-op members.”



Championing equality

Nicaragua’s economic dependence on agricultural exports deepens its vulnerability to external shocks, such as increasingly prevalent weather and price volatility. The resultant multilateral crisis is not one which farmers can face alone. However, despite comprising at least a quarter of the agricultural workforce, women are at a particular disadvantage.

Whilst land reforms took place following Nicaragua’s Sandanista revolution – which toppled a four-decade dictatorship in the 1980s – 90% of land under the reforms went to men, despite promises of empowering the nation’s poorest citizens. Rural women, in particular, were affected by entrenched cycles of poverty²³. Today, women remain locked out of land, with less access to credit, inputs and decision-making compared to male counterparts.

María Teresa Fernández, President of the Coordinating Committee of Rural Women, said²⁴: *“Women receive the smallest land, the less fertile. People believe that once they get married, daughters are someone else’s property, so they’d rather give sons the land.”*

This inheritance process, described by María Teresa as the first step in a cycle of ‘asset violence’, systematically disempowers women, impacting their livelihoods and food security.

Liberation supplier and shareholder Del Campo is committed to addressing this systemic inequality. As a member of the National Federation of Co-operatives (FENACOOP) – a nationwide network of 620 co-operatives and 41,000 farmers, 39% of whom are women – Del Campo has worked to improve women’s rights and participation in agriculture. Del Campo unites with FENACOOP on its aims of equal economic and social development.

Since 2009, Del Campo has led a project to recognise unpaid women’s work, after listening to the concerns of women within the local community. By adding a minimal, additional cost to their main export – sesame oil (which they sell to clients such as The Body Shop), the programme was sustainably funded and has since offered a range of free vocational courses, each increasing women’s participation in decision-making and entrepreneurship.

²² <https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/where-it-started-and-extra-for-long-titles?srstid=AfmBOoomjmqmrejPtLoVPI65U2B6TXo0jRVneMe5BSnag47faHulRvli>

²³ [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/](https://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/) <https://nscag.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Nicaragua-Now-13.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/nicaraguan-women-like-farm-animals-despite-promised-land-reform-idUSKBN15B167/#:~:text=%22He%20told%20me%20if%20you,landless%20as%20well%20as%20loveless.>

To date, 669 women have enrolled in multiple courses through the programme, setting inspiring examples of female leadership for future generations. In addition to free courses, Del Campo's project includes an inclusive credit system which supports groups and individuals to set up their own businesses.



Cindy, a member of Del Campo and a participant of the programme, said²⁵:

"We now have a lot of knowledge. Before we didn't have any... we were not integrated and now that we are organised through the co-operative, we have been able to further our expertise. I have been in the group for 12 years and now I have a business selling wine."

Image

Del Campo's confectionary courses are popular, with several women starting bakeries in the area.

Since 2019, the Fairtrade Premium earned by Del Campo from Liberation's peanut sales has also been reinvested in handcraft courses for women. As part of the free courses, women have learned how to sew, bake, use natural medicines and cut hair. The classes have been popular and available to the wider community, not just co-operative members.

²⁵ <https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/the-value-of-unpaid-womens-work-in-nicargua>

India

In India, cashew nuts, known as Kaju in local Hindi and Marathi languages, are grown in the peninsular regions of the coast, where the climate is tropical and the soil is well-draining, providing optimum conditions for cashew cultivation. While native to Brazil, cashew nuts are harvested in many tropical regions, including Ivory Coast, Vietnam and Tanzania.



Image

A cashew apple grows on a tree (left). Keralan cashew nuts sold by Liberation (right).

Cashew nuts are harvested by allowing cashew apples to mature and fall to the ground naturally. The nuts are separated from the bottom of the apple and removed from their toxic shell, before being cleaned and dried to enter the marketplace for further processing. Globally, India accounted for 13.5% of raw cashew production, 36.5% of cashew processing and 30.5% of cashew consumption in 2024. To meet demand, India imports over one billion kilograms of raw cashews from countries such as Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo each year.

Despite its importance, agriculture in India – such as cashew production – is under threat. Severe flooding, landslides and unpredictable rainfall are leading to more frequent pests and diseases, diminishing crop yields and profitability²⁶. In turn, farming is losing its appeal and young people are migrating to seek opportunity. Meanwhile, a growing indebtedness of farmers has tragically led to a series of farmer suicides.

Elements, an exporter in Kerala, play a pivotal role in Liberation's supply chain. Tomy Mathew Vadakkancheril, and his wife, Seepja, founded Elements in 1999 to enable Keralan farmers to capitalise on the emerging fair trade movement. Since then, Elements has traded organic raw materials from India. Meanwhile, it has focused on developing international trade relationships based on respect and economic justice for farmers.

Elements remained an organic store for several years, until a farming crisis – which marked a severe decline in India's agricultural sector in the early 2000s – incapacitated farms and indebted farmers. For example, in the late 1990s, coffee prices plummeted and farmers cut down their trees to plant spices. The next year, pepper prices crashed and farmers grew increasingly impoverished, acquiring mounting debts. In despair, some took their own lives.

In response, FTAK was established through Elements in 2005, as a farmer-led network mobilising over 4,500 producers from the Western Ghats, a mountain range sprawling India's south-west coastline. Elements then became an Alternative Trading Organisation; a partner and vehicle for FTAK to organise, negotiate, communicate and execute sales.

²⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/650718/export-value-of-cashew-india/>

Securing livelihoods

To date, Liberation has procured over 1,000 tonnes of Fairtrade cashews from FTAK farmers, whilst Elements manages two organic shops and a factory which processes local ingredients into finished products. Working with Liberation, FTAK have conducted initiatives to advocate for farmers' rights and strengthen the financial and climate resilience of India's farming communities.

FTAK was created to support small-scale farmers to access global markets and improve their livelihoods through trade. FTAK is a founding member of the International Nut Co-operative (INC). As such, they have worked closely with Liberation, as a trading partner, shareholder and voice representing Keralan farmers.

Tomy, Founder of FTAK and Elements – and former Chair of the INC – was also a Board member of Liberation from the company's inception until 2011.

Speaking in 2022, Liberation Managing Director, Dan, said²⁷: *"With a difficult year behind us, we reset ourselves and are anticipating a much better year in 2023, including product development and sourcing of shelf ready finished products from our farmer members that will drive more value into the part of the chain that we are set up to serve."*

The following year, Liberation achieved exactly that by moving to source finished, retail-ready products directly from FTAK farmers in Kerala. The launch of Organic Fairtrade cashews from the region ensured farmers received better margins. In addition, Dan pointed towards the wider socioeconomic and environmental impacts of origin-packed, added-value sourcing.

Dan said: *"It generates local employment in these countries of origin. The whole concept of picking up a container and shipping it 6,000 miles across the Atlantic or up through the Suez Canal, around the Mediterranean from India, doesn't make any sense whatsoever."*

The magnitude of this milestone is amplified by the context of the agrarian crisis, which materialised through the degradation of land, a lack of government investment and the impacts of climate change.



Image

Tomy Mathew Vadakkancheril (middle), with FTAK farmers in Kerala, India.

²⁷

https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0601/9016/3133/files/Liberation_Foods_Impact_Report_2022_sml.pdf?v=1701773622

Tomy said²⁸: “I was among the first set of farmer representatives that met in Turin, Italy in 2006, where the idea of the Ethical Nut Company, that later christened itself as Liberation, was communicated (...) Elements put on board the first container of cashews from FTAK to Liberation Foods – since then, the relationship has been guided by one maxim: preferential commercial terms with business entities committed to trade justice.”

Reflecting on FTAK’s relationship with Liberation, Tomy said: “We are glad that Liberation Foods continues to strive and uphold the interests of smallholder producers disadvantaged by global commerce as a core value of its business.”

Liberation has conducted a Fairtrade Premium and grant-funded programme with FTAK to support farmers in remote, inaccessible regions, whose crops have all been lost to diseases. Most farmers were planning on selling their land and moving to the plains to make ends meet and secure a stable income.

The project was three-fold. Part one involved the provision of interest free loans to initiate income generation activities to bring immediate relief to the families. Part two involved the delivery of medium-term loans to help farmers plant seasonal and annual crops, boosting land productivity and improving livelihoods so farmers could meet costs of education, housing and livestock for their families.

Lastly, part three involved the provision of long-term loans, to help plant and grow perennial crops such as cashew and coffee, ensuring farmers had predictable returns from their farms. After the launch of the programme, a minimal number of families sold land and migrated away from the area.



Image

Members of FTAK and participants in the co-operative’s self-help group for women.

²⁸ https://chooseliberation.com/blogs/journal/meet-the-members-thomas-kalappurackal-ftak-india?srsltid=AfmBOoqywPOoe3A_YrdoA6jcdQs8mzoebzWEOezBhZ8wQaK5W5tZUup

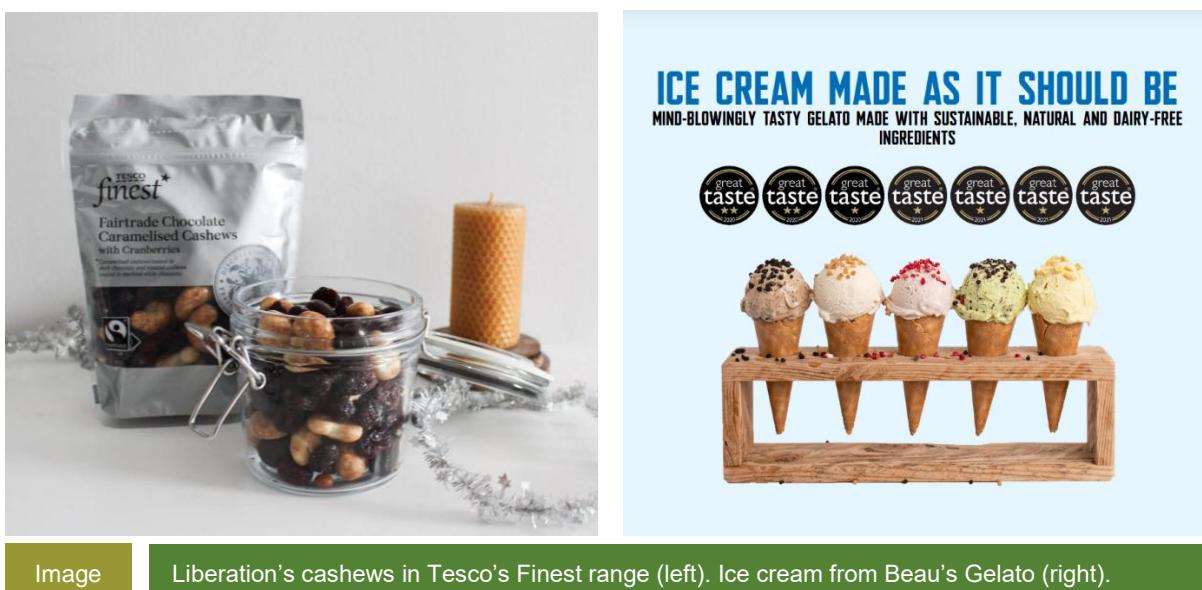
Burkina Faso

In addition to sourcing cashews from India, Liberation has also procured raw cashews from producers in Burkina Faso for over 15 years. Coprolef, a Burkinabé co-operative of over 400 members, is part of Liberation's international network of smallholders. Through their relationship with Liberation, cashews from Coprolef members have reached the shelves of Tesco as part of the retailer's Finest festive range.

Coprolef's cashews are also slated as a 'miracle ingredient' in a range of multi-award-winning, vegan ice cream handcrafted by Beau's Gelato in Northumberland, north-east England. Using a Fairtrade certified supplier such as Liberation provides organisations like Beau's Gelato²⁹, complete transparency over their cashew supply chain.

Speaking about the importance of sourcing Fairtrade, Beau's Gelato said:

"By switching to Liberation nuts, we are not only able to understand exactly what happens to our cashews from fruit to gelato, we can also know that they are being grown using ethical practices and that everyone involved in the production and processing is being compensated and treated fairly throughout. That's no small thing."



Image

Liberation's cashews in Tesco's Finest range (left). Ice cream from Beau's Gelato (right).

²⁹ <https://beausgelato.com/scoop/fairtrade-certified-cashews>

My Story: Dan Binks



Dan Binks (pictured at a Shared Interest supporter event in 2025), joined Liberation in early 2013 as Technical Manager, bringing extensive commodity sector experience in organic, conventional and Fairtrade, and a solid technical and manufacturing background.

Through his time at the company, he has worked in collaboration with producer organisations, both on projects and technical strategy.

Dan was also responsible for Liberation gaining BRC accreditation in 2017 (recognising food safety, quality and sustainability). In June 2020, the Board invited Dan to step up into the leadership role for an interim period. In December 2020, Dan was offered the permanent role of Managing Director. Dan holds a degree in Food Quality from Bournemouth University.

Reflecting on some of the ways he builds trust with producers, Dan said:

"I take a personal approach. I travelled since year two to destinations that would never have been on my go-to list, I would never have gone to India, for example, I'd never have gone to Nicaragua. But I find that the best way of engaging anybody in business is by having that personal touch, that personal approach. My preference would be to actually meet, shake hands, have a cup of tea, sit and have a chat about something and build the relationship."

With concern to the unjust nature of the nut value chain, Dan said:

"What makes it unjust for a smallholder farm business? That alone they just cannot compete with the massive large commercial farms. In the fair trade world, smallholders club together, – and they make far more organisations – and then all of a sudden, 3,500 farmers have got enough production to compete with the large commercial farm."

Regarding some of the key challenges Liberation's nut producers face, Dan said:

"It varies by region, [but] the most common theme is climate change [with common impacts including] weather variability. The farmers in Kerala, India, used to be able to set their calendar by when the monsoon season would start and every year, the monsoon would come. Now, the monsoon might come three weeks early, five weeks late, it's very variable.

"How this impacts their lives? If a season is shifting and changing, it means that the other weather systems around the year shift and change as well, and we get situations where the rains haven't come at the right time and the cashew trees haven't produced enough fruit ... or seeds become diseased, or the fruit hasn't ripened, or they don't get the same yield."

Speaking to Shared Interest investors, Dan said:

"Invest more. It's a great company. We really value the relationship that we have with Shared Interest, it's a really big help to our organisation and to the farmers that we work with. Thank you for the support by continuing to invest money with Shared Interest – and please invest more if you can in the future. And talk about it with your friends to accumulate even more."

Looking ahead

In the coming years, Liberation is focused on growth, with strategic goals outlined in several key areas. Brand development is a top priority, with plans to expand the Liberation brand by introducing seven new products. This includes sourcing two to three value-added products directly from the regions where their ingredients are grown, further strengthening the company's connection to – and impact upon – its community of small-scale farmers.

To develop its brand, Liberation is working with external expertise. Dan said: *"I'm working with an organisation [to understand] email marketing flows. They're putting together email marketing campaigns for us. I'm also utilising their expertise in the SEO space.*

"I genuinely do believe our brand is great. We have a great website, which is modern. It's easy to use. We've got a nice little web-shop to go along with it. The next step is to try and drive more growth. More visits to the site ... Re-engagement with people and that will hopefully result in higher business-to-consumer sales."

Entering new markets and expanding distribution is another priority for Liberation to achieve 10% year-on-year revenue growth, meet growing demand for ethical food products and reduce its dependency on supermarket sales.

Dan said: *"We're taking our brand into the Chinese market. The reason it's going to work is because the mentality of the consumer in the Chinese market is they like foreign brands ... And then there is such a large population. Therefore, the size of the market [with disposable income] is far bigger than the population of the UK and most countries in Europe."*

"We're thinking that we might have a go at getting into the U.S. market ... the marketing information coming out of the States is that they've got quite a large base of ethical, vegan and alternative diet consumers out there, which will actually put their hand in their pocket and pay extra for something if they believe it's been sourced ethically."

Additionally, Liberation is targeting The Co-op for expanded distribution, particularly focusing on lunchtime meal deals, to tap into the convenience food market. The company is also refining its finance strategy by broadening the tools used to manage foreign exchange risk. This will help mitigate financial volatility amidst Liberation's intricate global supply chain.



Image

Liberation's eclectic product range, supporting smallholder farmers across the globe.



Image

Sadheeshan, FTAK farmer and nut gatherer, pictured on his farm in Kerala, India. Sadheeshan also grows beetle, runner and cashew as cash crops.

In the last year, Liberation has also identified additional opportunities for its producer organisations to make finished products in country of origin.

Dan said: *"We don't have a price negotiation with them. We just get them to quote us a finished product price and we bring that product to Europe. So that's the trajectory that we're taking the company at the moment. It does offer a better margin for producers [and] it's a really good way to get Liberation to differentiate itself from competitors in the market."*

Liberation has also diversified its product offering, launching its first subscription-based 'Great Keralan Farmer's Box' in 2025. This initiative aims to create a more predictable, direct-to-consumer revenue stream, further reducing dependency on fewer, larger orders.

Tomy said: *"This Farmer's Box offers you a partial glimpse into the crop diversity of our farms. You are now a participant in the efforts of a 4,000-strong farmer collective to steward their homesteads to conditions near akin to a tropical rainforest."*

The first Farmer's Box was hand-delivered to the UK in March 2025. The box has been donated to Transform Trade for their annual raffle draw which took place at the end of April.

Liberation also plans to continue supporting Transform Trade as an ethical partner. Receiving B Corp certification is another important part of Liberation's future plans, helping to promote its ethical business practices, open up new sales opportunities and reinforce the company's commitment to social responsibility, ethical sourcing and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

As Elements Managing Director and FTAK Founder, Tomy, explains³⁰:

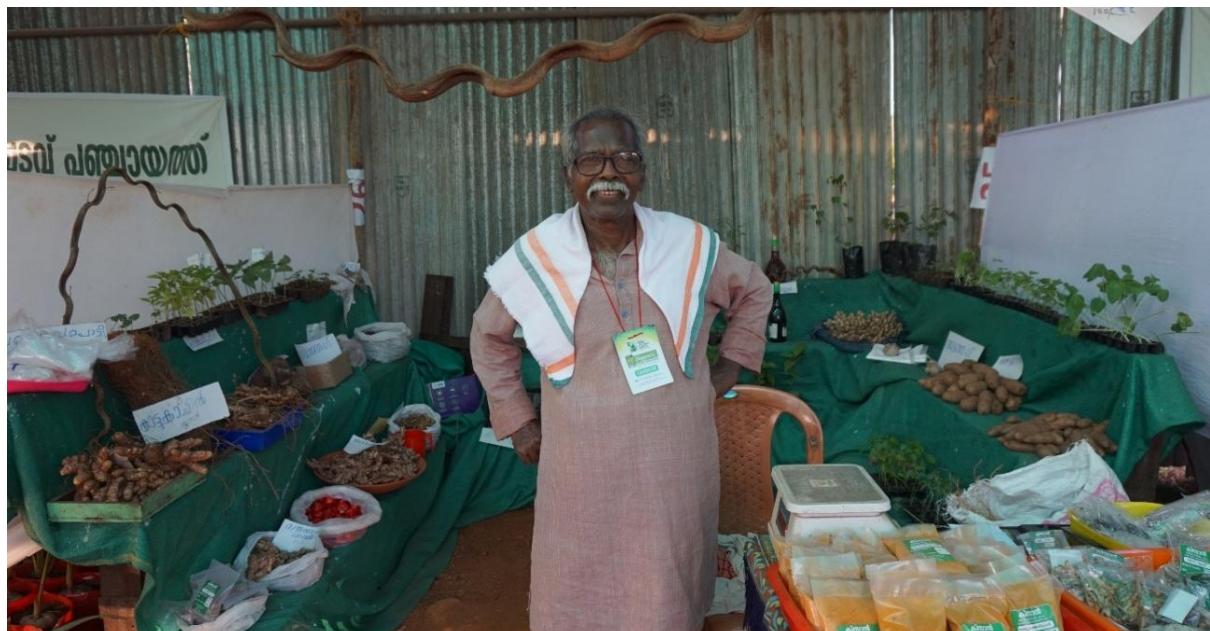
"Organic Fairtrade principles are vital for upholding producer interests. If there had been more relationships like the one between FTAK and Liberation, many farmers' futures may have been saved during the pandemic."

Liberation's story is an exemplification of how supporting producers to tackle their own development needs and priorities can be integrated into a viable business model. This means development projects become effective and self-sustaining by their association to profitable trading, and Liberation's value proposition is strengthened by positive impact stories.

With Shared Interest the only social lender to offer a credit facility specifically designed to support the needs of buyers, Liberation's story also demonstrates the power of ethical financing as a resource for buyers to build resilience, strengthen their supply chains and reach smaller, more vulnerable producer groups in areas we otherwise might not be able to reach through producer financing.

Empowered by Shared Interest finance, Liberation has worked to create a supply chain with sustainability, accountability and equality at its heart, leading to agile problem-solving, increased efficiency and greater inclusion for supply chain actors. Commercially, this means increased output and access to global markets for co-operatives, building their resilience in complex and volatile nut supply chains.

But fundamentally, for the often overlooked smallholders at the root of the supply chain – this means stability, opportunity and visibility is fostered, catalysing personal development, improving livelihoods and securing the future of precious agricultural practices for generations to come.



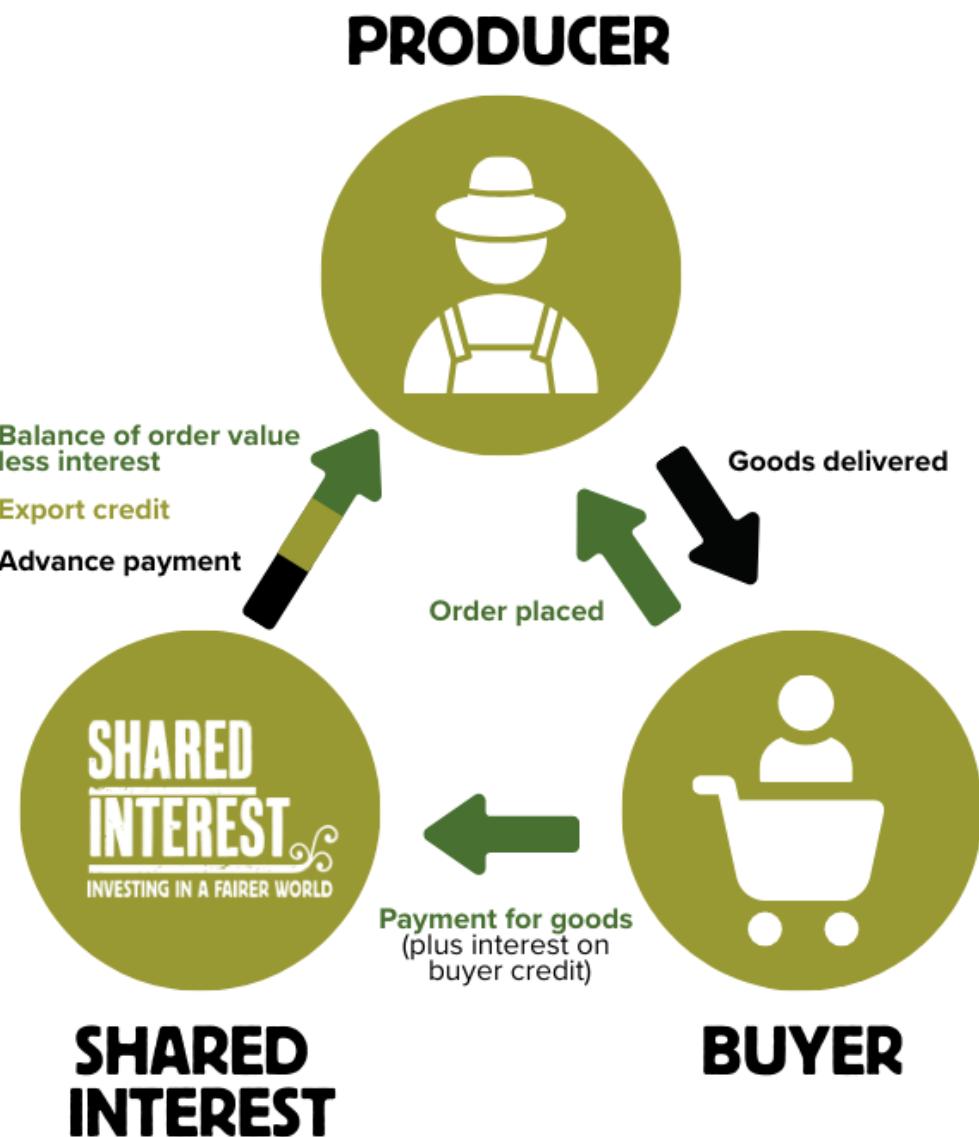
Image

Nut farmer and supplier of Liberation, Kissan Jose, working on his stall in Kerala, India.

³⁰ <https://www.shared-interest.com/en/blog/learning-liberation-national-nut-day>

Appendices

Prefinance Triangle



How it works

- The buyer places an order with the producer and they let Shared Interest know the order details
- The prepayment is made to the producer by Shared Interest
- Additional credit (up to 30% of the order value) may be requested by the producer and paid if required
- The goods are delivered to the buyer from the producer by the agreed date
- The buyer authorises Shared Interest to make the final payment to the producer
- The buyer repays the credit (plus interest) to Shared Interest after they have delivered the goods to their consumers.

Glossary

Agroforestry: Agroforestry is a land management approach with multiple benefits. Planting trees and shrubs on farms can improve soil health, reduce pests and increase yields – not to mention creating vital homes for wildlife.

Buyer Credit: A Buyer Credit facility is a revolving line of credit, comparable to an overdraft, available to buyer organisations through Shared Interest which allows pre-shipment and post-shipment finance for confirmed orders. This allows the buyer to make pre-finance payments to producer groups.

Climate adaptation: Adapting to the effects or impacts of climate change this could be changing farming methods, growing different crops or managing water sources for example.

Climate mitigation: Avoiding and reducing the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to prevent the planet from warming. This includes improvement of agricultural practices and the application of new technologies such as solar.

Diversification: Diversification is the process of broadening into new crops, products, services or markets. This helps producers reduce risk, strengthen resilience and create new income opportunities.

EUR, GBP, USD: The main currencies in which Shared Interest lends - EUR: Euros; GBP: Pounds Sterling; USD: US Dollars.

Facility: A facility is the customer's account with a borrowing limit.

Fairtrade: Fairtrade is used to denote the product certification system operated by Fairtrade International. When a product carries the Fairtrade Mark it means the producers and traders have met Fairtrade Standards.

Fair trade: Fair trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing rights of marginalised workers.

Fairtrade Premium: An extra sum of money paid on top of the selling price that farmers or workers invest in projects of their choice.

Gender equality: Gender equality is when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

pH: A figure expressing the acidity or alkalinity of a solution on a logarithmic scale on which 7 is neutral, lower values are more acid and higher values more alkaline.

Pre-finance: Pre-finance takes place when Shared Interest advances funds to a customer based on proven orders from buyers. Usually, customers require funding in order to produce and supply the goods. One of the key reasons for pre-finance is so the customer has sufficient working capital to enable them to complete and deliver new orders or contracts.

Supply chain: A system of organisations, people, activities, information and resources involved in producing and moving goods or services.

Technical assistance: The process of providing targeted support to an organisation with a development need or problem, which is typically delivered over an extended period of time by Shared Interest Foundation.

Value added: Value added refers to practices that increase the economic value of agricultural products beyond their raw form.

Value chain: This is the full lifecycle of a product or process, including material sourcing, production, consumption and disposal/recycling processes.

White label: A white label product is a product or service produced by one company and rebranded by another company.

Yield: The harvested production of a crop.

Sample of Interview Questions

- 1) Liberation is fulfilling their mission by placing farmers at the heart of every decision, not at the end of a convoluted supply chain. What is the mission of Liberation?
- 2) How active are farmers in the governance of Liberation? Can you tell us about any decisions farmers have made or influenced which have benefited the organisation?
- 3) Liberation builds long-lasting trade relationships, nurturing trust and stability in an often volatile and unjust system. Which factors make the nut supply chain volatile?
- 4) Which factors make nut production unjust for farmers?
- 5) What are some of the ways that you build trust with producers?
- 6) What are some of the common challenges you have observed facing nut producer groups in the areas you operate?
- 7) What kind of climate-related challenges are facing producers in particular?
- 8) Are there any particular climate responses that you can support or implement – any mechanisms like agroforestry that you can implement to protect environments and livelihoods?
- 9) Liberation helps farmers access international markets. Which international markets do you foresee bringing in the most revenue for Liberation farmers in the next five years and why?
- 10) Nuts can be highly diversified into products like peanut butter, nut flour, nut oils and pastes. Are the nuts produced by all Liberation farmers usable and applicable to these different derivative products? If so, do these diversified products offer different margins for producers?
- 11) In 2022, following the launch of your online store, online orders increased by 289% whilst gross online sales increased by 889%. Have you experienced any particular challenges when managing this growth in online sales and how do you intend to maintain this growth?
- 12) Gross profit increased in 2021 to exceed GBP £1m, reflecting the highest sales and gross profit in a decade. Which factors do you think resulted in this surge in sales?
- 13) In 2023, Liberation paid on average 36% above the combined Fairtrade Minimum Price plus Fairtrade Premium to farmers for their raw materials. In which ways does Liberation maintain profitability and sustainability whilst operating at smaller margins?
- 14) Since 2007, Shared Interest has supported Liberation with access to finance. How has Liberation used Shared Interest finance to support the organisation? Can you provide an insight into the impact Shared Interest finance has had on smallholder farmers working with Liberation?
- 15) Do you have any message for Shared Interest investors?