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Fair for Life – a Successful Fair Trade Certification Programme Celebrates its Third Anniversary

September 18, 2009 – Exactly three years ago, in September 2006, a new Social and Fair Trade Program was launched by the Swiss Bio-Foundation, in cooperation with the Institute for Marketecology (IMO): **Fair for Life**. It all started with a handful of relatively small but dedicated companies and their supply chains, who set off to establish a fair trade certification program that would work independent of the traditional FLO / Transfair Fairtrade system. This new certification program created an opportunity for all serious fair trade producers and products that had not previously been eligible for fair trade certification.

Three years ago - A pioneering effort ...

While hundreds of companies and organizations operated with in-house fair trade programs without having them certified by a third party, there was a pioneering effort in the fair trade movement to develop a certification system that could open the fast growing fair trade market to all types of natural products. It was thought that this certification should work for all types of production systems, and push the existing fair trade envelope by going beyond what already existed. Hence, the name: Fair for Life. From the very beginning, 'Life' was in the centre of the new program: improving the lives and livelihoods of marginalized producers on all continents, in all societies and in all industries where such marginalization occurs. But 'Life' is no privilege of humans; meaningful consideration of the lives of animals and plants as well as their habitats is part of the environmental criteria of Fair for Life, as symbolized by the label's twin leaf.

... Today - A powerful movement

"Fair for Life allowed a new view on fair trade by taking a closer look at the supply chains of a product, from production to processing, trade and sales", explains Dr. Rainer Bächli, director of IMO. "While initially this was an experiment undertaken by IMO and the Bio-Foundation, the program has since become part of a powerful movement." Fair for Life opened fair trade certification to many new producers and widened the traditional fair trade definitions, by providing a stringent standard and certification system that is free of political, religious or economic preferences and that has 'Life' in its heart.

Certification by a flexible but stringent and transparent program

While Fair for Life's comprehensiveness and flexibility are characteristics well appreciated by clients, the program's rigor and stringency in implementation certainly were a challenge for many operators. Although certification from Year One is not an easy goal because of Fair for Life's detailed requirements on social responsibility, health and safety, working conditions and fair relationships between partners in the trade chain, many producers, traders and buyers worked hard and ultimately succeeded in complying with the requirements and obtaining certification.

"Looking back on three years of program implementation, Fair for Life has contributed to improved income and livelihoods of thousands of workers, smallholders, and plantation farmers and employees in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas", notes Wolfgang Kathe, head of the Social and FairTrade Department at IMO. The www.fairforlife.net website illustrates the program's transparency approach: on this website all relevant information on certified companies (including performance at the latest audit) and products is published.

Serving as a benchmark

Fair for Life, however, does not only work within the more or less rigid scope of a certification program. It is also being used to verify the performance of larger companies with regard to their own social or fair trade principles, policies and related compliance claims.

Three years ago, nobody involved in the development and implementation of Fair for Life knew if this approach would be successful. Today, it is obvious that fair trade needed this new perspective and approach. Creating a high quality Social and FairTrade Program and label with only little marketing and PR funds relying on client networks and information systems has been a challenging enterprise but it has paid off. Fair for Life has become a well known and fast growing segment of ethical and fair markets.

For more information, please visit the web sites www.fairforlife.net and www.imo.ch, or contact Julia Edmaier at (+41) – 71 – 6260683 or by email at: info@fairforlife.net