

Chocolate is one of many familiar foods in Ireland that are grown elsewhere in the world. In this unit we will learn how these foods are farmed, shipped, processed and packaged before ending up on supermarket shelves. We will also learn how we can ensure that growers in other countries get a fair deal.

Keywords import climate tropical plantation port supermarket negotiate Fairtrade Fairtrade premium

Where Does Food Come From?

It's easy to tell where some foods come from. You have probably seen apples growing on a tree, or a farm with sheep or cows in the fields. Farmers in Ireland grow crops and raise animals to provide a lot of the food we eat. But many food items are grown abroad and **imported**.

Warm Weather

Climate is one of the main reasons we get food from abroad. The climate here isn't warm enough to grow foods such as pineapples or bananas. These come from **tropical** countries where there are warmer temperatures. Getting food from abroad means that we can have it all year round. Strawberries grow in Ireland, but only in the summer. If you want strawberries in the winter, you can grow them in a greenhouse, or you can grow them in a warmer country and transport them here by airplane.

Ingredients from Everywhere!

Some dishes use ingredients that come from many different places. A pizza might use flour from wheat grown in Ireland. But it could also use tomatoes from Italy, olives from Spain and cheese made from the milk of cows in the UK. A smoothie might include bananas from Colombia, blueberries from Morocco and strawberries from a greenhouse in the Netherlands.

Think About It: What is your favourite dish? Do you know what ingredients it uses and where they come from?

Many bananas are grown on plantations in the Caribbean.

From Farm to Plate

It takes several steps to get food from the farm to your plate. This is true even for everyday foods such as bananas. Here is the typical journey that a banana would take to end up in your lunchbox.

1. Banana plants are planted on a **plantation**.



2. Farmers care for the growing bananas. They put bags over the plants to protect them from pests.



3. The bananas are cut down when they are still green.



6. The ship arrives in Ireland 1–2 weeks later. The bananas are taken to a ripening room where they will turn yellow.



5. A lorry takes the boxes of bananas to the **port**, where they are loaded onto a ship in refrigerated containers.



4. Workers cut the bananas into smaller bunches, then wash and carefully pack them in boxes.



7. A lorry takes the bananas to the **supermarket**.



Map It: Many bananas sold in Ireland come from the Dominican Republic. Find this country on a map.

Slicing Up the Payment

Many people are involved in producing bananas. Big companies often own banana plantations. They must pay workers and buy farm machinery and fertiliser. The workers on the plantation work hard in hot temperatures. People also load and drive the lorries. The shipping company pays for the ship's fuel and the crew's wages. The supermarket must pay its staff members. Supermarkets also have to pay for electricity, advertising and equipment such as tills. All of these links in the chain get their slice of the money that you pay for a banana.

Is Cheaper Better?

Supermarkets want to keep prices low so people don't go to other shops instead. If supermarkets pay less for the food they buy, they can charge their customers less. So supermarkets **negotiate** the lowest price they can with the banana companies. But this means there is less money to pay the plantation workers. The people at the start of the chain may not be getting a fair deal.

Plantation workers often receive low wages.



What is Fairtrade?

Fairtrade is a movement that tries to get a fair price for small farmers. Fairtrade helps farmers to cooperate so that they can compete with bigger companies. The organisation is worldwide, linking up more than 1.5 million farmers and workers in 74 different countries. It sets a minimum price for the crops that these farmers sell. It also sets rules that companies must follow, such as paying fair wages and ensuring that workers are kept safe. Farmers or companies who follow these rules can put the Fairtrade logo on their products.

The price that food companies pay for Fairtrade crops includes something called the **Fairtrade premium**. This is money that goes to help the farmers and workers. They get to decide how it will be used. Some groups use the premium to build wells or hospitals. Others use it to invest in new farming equipment.


Fairtrade Foods

Bananas and chocolate are familiar Fairtrade foods. Many sweets and biscuits are made using Fairtrade chocolate. You can also find Fairtrade coffee, tea, pineapples, rice and sugar. To see if a product is Fairtrade or contains Fairtrade ingredients, look for the Fairtrade logo.

Some people think that Fairtrade foods will be more expensive than non-Fairtrade versions, but this is not always true. In fact, sometimes Fairtrade foods are cheaper! Even if they are not, many people don't mind paying a little bit extra if it means that the people who produce the food are getting a fair price for it.

Fact File

Cut flowers and cotton products can also be produced under Fairtrade.



Fairtrade helps improve the lives of people around the world.



Think About It: Why do you think companies might want to put the Fairtrade logo on their products?

The food we eat comes from all over the world, and many people are involved at each stage of its production. Fairtrade isn't perfect, but it is one way of making sure that all the people involved in producing the food we eat get a fair deal.

Activities

Fact Finding

1. Why don't we grow pineapples or bananas in Ireland?
2. How long does it take for bananas to travel by ship to Ireland?
3. What happens to bananas in a ripening room?
4. Give two rules that companies must follow if they want to put the Fairtrade logo on their products.
5. List three products Fairtrade offers.

Explore More

1. List two reasons that we import some foods from abroad.
2. Why do you think bananas are transported on ships instead of airplanes?
3. Do you think supermarkets are right to try to keep their prices low?
4. How do you think the Fairtrade premium helps farmers and their communities?
5. Do you think it's fair to expect to pay more for Fairtrade foods?

Working as a Geographer: Investigating and Experimenting

Take a trip to your local supermarket or look at an online supermarket. Find foods that are certified Fairtrade – coffee, chocolate and bananas are a good place to start. Make a note of how much these items cost. Then try to find non-Fairtrade versions to compare the prices. What did you find? Was there a difference in the price between Fairtrade and non-Fairtrade goods? If so, why do you think this is?

Tip: Remember to check sizes and weights to make sure you are comparing like for like.

Working as a Geographer: Recording and Communicating

Do your local shops stock Fairtrade products? What about cafes – do they sell Fairtrade coffee, tea and snacks? Draft a letter to a local business that encourages them to stock Fairtrade products. Make sure to explain:

- What Fairtrade is
- Why Fairtrade is a good thing
- How the money paid for imported products gets split up
- Which Fairtrade products the business could use or stock.

Tip: Include facts and statistics to make your letter more convincing!