

WHAT IS YOUR T-SHIRT MADE OF?

Most of you are, by now, aware of the trade issues related to food such as coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate etc, but do you know about 'COTTON'?

Cotton: the most used natural fibre in the world should be the 'white gold' that propels ten million West African farmers out of poverty. But a major new report from the Fairtrade Foundation reveals how the West African cotton industry is blocked by a wall of free cash dished out by the United States and European Union to their farmers.

Harriet Lamb, Executive Director of the Fairtrade Foundation, said: 'This report reveals one of the greatest trade injustices of our time. Ten million farmers are locked into poverty while trade-distorting subsidies are paid out by the EU and the US. It is incredible that EU cotton subsidies are worth more per pound than what cotton trades for on global markets. This is why we are calling on the EU to eliminate its cotton trade distorting subsidies and to include this urgently needed measure in the new Common

Agricultural Policy reform process'. She also explains how in Mali the Foundation is working with one co-operative of 8,000 members. With their help these farmers have been able to earn 50% more by producing and selling organic Fairtrade cotton. As a result, 95% of their children are enrolled in school compared with a national average of 43%. This is what a small uplift in farmers' income can achieve.

So what can WE do?

I suggest the three Bs:

Buy Fairtrade cotton items when we can (available in a number of supermarkets as well as specialist producers).

Be aware of the issues, go to www.fairtrade.org.uk

Be active and support campaigns to end these subsidies. (Contact the Secretary of State via the Fairtrade Foundation web site).

So help to end

The Great Cotton Stitch-up.

Wendy Beaumont