



Judith Harry – the face behind the world's first Fairtrade salted peanuts

Judith Harry is 33 and the single mother of a teenage girl. She is a peanut (groundnut) farmer in Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world. Judith chairs the Mchinji Smallholder Farmers' Association (MASFA) of peanut farmers. Their peanuts are being sold in Co-op stores across the UK in 50g packs of salted peanuts which carry the FAIRTRADE Mark. They are also sold in Tesco stores all over the country in a mixed Fairtrade peanuts and raisins pack. They have been brought to the UK by Twin Trading, the organisation behind other Fairtrade success stories Cafédirect and the Day Chocolate Company. As a result of the terrible drought in 2005 and the associated extreme poverty, the MASFA membership declined from 16,500 in 2004 to just over 2,000 farmers in 2005, many of these are women. But Fairtrade gives hope for the future.

Judith says:

“I am very proud to have grown some of the groundnuts which have become the world's first Fairtrade salted peanuts.

“In Mkanda where I live most farmers live below the poverty line. They earn below \$1 per day and do not have enough food to last them the whole year. The guaranteed fair price which comes with Fairtrade is important as we will make a profit when we sell our nuts and we can use the money to lift up our lives.

“I start work at 3.30am every morning to work in my garden where I grow maize for my family. Before seven I cook porridge for my daughter who is 13 and two orphans who I also look after who are a girl of 14 and a boy of 17. I also look after my mum who is 66.

“I work very hard. Last year I grew more than four metric tonnes of groundnuts – enough to make 14,000 jars of peanut butter. We used to live in a mud house but I have been able to build my family a brick house with concrete foundations and a tin roof.

“When I was a teenager, I became pregnant and the father of my daughter didn't stay with me. We lived in poverty and lacked basic necessities which made me very miserable. When I was a girl it was difficult to get a school uniform, note books and pencils. I wanted things to be different for my daughter and I thought the only way we would have food would be if I became a farmer.

“I went over the border to Zambia and was hired to work on a farm and was given some groundnut seed as my pay. I planted it at home. When the groundnuts grew I sold them but the vendors who bought them used to bring tampered scales in order to steal. They used to buy unshelled groundnuts using a 50kg sack for measurement, but they used to boil the sack first in order to enlarge it so that it carried more groundnuts than the 50kg it was meant to hold. They always paid low prices. Smallholder farmers were not able to borrow money or to invest in good quality seed.

“Then I heard about NASFAM – the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi - an organisation which represents farmers all over Malawi, helping find markets for the produce of farmers who are organised into groups. I travelled to see



them and told them about our difficulties. NASFAM helped the Mchinji Association with production and training and a lot of things have improved in our lives. NASFAM helped establish MASFA and the farmers in Mchinji now partly own the National Association along with similar organisations around Malawi. NASFAM believes that *“The Future Belongs to the Organised”*

“In 2002 when I had been a farmer for three years I was voted chair of the Mchinji Association. Some farmers thought because I was young I wouldn't be able to handle responsibilities but I have had leadership training from NASFAM and have won the confidence of everyone in the Association. We discuss issues and are able to work together.

“One of the great things about Fairtrade is the Fairtrade premium – the money which comes directly to us to spend on our community. In the future we will use the premium to start a clinic which will mean health facilities are nearer for families. We also need a guardian shelter at the hospital: somewhere for the sick and their carers and relations to stay and make meals while they wait for a chance to be seen to at the clinic. If we had more space and less congestion at guardian shelters airborne diseases may be reduced and people will have more time to concentrate on farming.

“We also need boreholes to provide clean water. Currently we get water from shallow wells and we have no tap water. We need boreholes because this water is cleaner and can be installed closer to our homes.

“There are very few health workers here and so outreach work is not carried out adequately. We miss a lot of information on health due to staff shortages. This is important partly because HIV and AIDS levels are high and medicines and medical equipment are in short supply.

“If, through Fairtrade, we can reduce the prevalence of diseases because of better health education and an improved guardian shelter, farmers will have more time to give to their farms. A new clinic would give children access to health services and they wouldn't miss so much school due to sicknesses. We will be able to earn extra money which we can invest in the areas we need most, to improve our lives.

“It would be good to spend premium money on education for older children. Most of the schools near here are junior primary schools. There is a lack of other buildings which means students in senior classes have to travel long distances to find a school. Some students learn outside under trees and in the rainy season they are unable to study.

“I am a determined woman and I confide in friends whom I rely on and who give me encouragement to accept issues and find a way forward. I believe that a problem shared is half solved but only if shared with people I trust. I pray to God day and night to have another door open should one close and I prioritise my future and that of my children in the hope that it will be ever bright.”
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