Get busy on the Virtual Farm Walk

www.virtualfarmwalk.org

Fact Sheet - Food miles or fair miles?

Often the high number of food miles (the distance the food has travelled from a farm in a faraway country to UK shop) are used as a reason not to buy produce grown in countries such as Kenya, Ghana and Senegal.

However the distance travelled (and the amount of pollution caused by transport) is not the only thing to consider. It is important to know about the smaller scale farmers in Africa and how growing to feed consumers in Europe helps them.

We also need to bear in mind that many smaller scale African farmers use very little fossil fuels in the production of crops. Consequently they produce very low emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) which makes their carbon footprint much lower than farmers in UK.

Transport of food, even by air, is a relatively small part of the whole emissions equation.

Who grows?

The fresh fruits and vegetables we buy sustain us – but they also help to sustain the people who grew them. If the farmer in question lives in the developing world, that transaction at the supermarket till can be a crucial one. For a smaller scale farmer in Africa, profits from exports can pay for housing and food, as well as medical care and education, for the entire family.

The export of fresh produce from Africa to the UK supports a multitude of Africa's smaller scale farmers, farm workers and packers. An estimated 1 to 1.5 million livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa depend directly or indirectly on supply chains to UK consumers.

Grown how?

Although their produce is transported to the UK by air, which produces a small amount of greenhouse gases (GHG), it is interesting to see how little GHG are emitted by the whole production process because of how their crops are grown.

Hand power

African farmers use a lot of hand power to prepare the land, plant, weed, harvest and pack the crop.

Growing conditions

Growing outside in the warm African climate uses a lot less energy than growing the crops in heated glasshouses in Europe.

Renewable energy innovation

African farmers use very energy-efficient technology.

For example solar-powered drip irrigation delivers very small quantities of water to the crop just when and where it is needed. Charcoal coolers – which use the cooling power of evaporation from dampened charcoal-packed walls – lower the temperature of harvested crops to prevent deterioration.

Further information

Explore the African Field on the LEAF Virtual Farm Walk to see and hear African farmers on what crops they grow and how, and the ways in which communities benefit from exporting crops to Europe www.virtualfarmwalk.org.

You can find out more about Renewable Energy Innovation in Africa in the two films ('Charlcoal Cooler' and 'Solar Powered Irrigation') in the Dig Deeper section of the Virtual Farm Walk. www.virtualfarmwalk.org/dig.html.

For more information see the pamphlet Fair miles: re-charting the food miles map published by Oxfam and IIED (the International Institute for Environment and Development) from which many of the above points are extracted. http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/15516IIED.pdf.