

What smallholders can do

If you are a smallholder, this chapter explains what you need to know about international labour standards and how they are being applied to you. It also suggests things you can do to understand the background or take action to improve working conditions on your farm.

This chapter has been written so that it works as a separate document for readers who want to extract and photocopy the section for distribution to smallholders. If it is used this way, it should have the following sections attached to it:

- the booklet *Working for a better life: what smallholders need to know* (Toolkit, section F)
- Toolkit, section A: the application framework
- Toolkit, section E: sample documents.

6.1 About international labour standards

The quality of your working life matters – to others as well as to you and your family. The produce from your farm is sold in many different countries overseas, including Britain. British shoppers are among many, world-wide, who believe that all workers producing their food should enjoy good conditions at work.

Your buyers might already have talked to you about workplace standards. Over the next few years buyers will expect you to meet a set of standards developed initially by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). These ILO standards have been adapted by a British organisation, the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) for use by British companies throughout their entire supply chains. (The supply chain means all the people and companies involved in getting produce from farms into the supermarkets in Britain. There might be as many as six links in this chain between the farmer and the supermarket.) Buyers and their direct employees are also working towards these standards.

In outline, the labour standards used by ETI are:

- Employment is freely chosen
- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected
- Working conditions are safe and hygienic
- Child labour shall not be used
- Living wages are paid
- Working hours are not excessive
- No discrimination is practised
- Regular employment is provided
- No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed.



6.2 How these labour standards can help you and your business

Working towards better working conditions will benefit your business in the long term by:

- promoting better relations between you and your buyers, and ensuring that you have clear terms and conditions with the buyers;
- improving product quality and productivity by making better use of equipment, record-keeping and planning. In turn this will improve farm income;
- promoting good relations between you and your workers, which in turn means a loyal, motivated workforce with less worker absenteeism and higher productivity;
- reducing accidents and work-related illnesses, and time lost because of these;
- enhancing respect in your community;
- bringing potential new business from other exporters.

6.3 How working with your buyers can help

Many buyers already have experience of working towards international labour standards which you can learn from. They can help you to understand where responsibility for labour conditions lies – including their responsibility for their own workers, and responsibilities right up the supply chain to the supermarkets in Britain. However, the main thing they can offer is greater understanding of the whole export process from your farm to the end consumers of your crops. They can offer:

- better understanding of the market and the standards you are asked to meet for the market. For example, buyers might be able to offer training or provide more information at buying centres;
- advance notice of changes at the market end of the supply chain so that you can plan your work better;
- a chance to express their point of view about what they need from you to benefit from outgrowing;
- an opportunity for you to tell them what you need from them to produce your crops effectively;
- practical support to improve working conditions. For example, some buyers have offered better prices to smallholders or easier access to credit as a result of working on these standards.

6.4 What your buyers might ask you to do

If your buyer is starting to introduce the ETI labour standards, they need reliable information about all their smallholders first. They might send someone to inspect your farm or they might ask you to take part in discussions about what needs to be done. The aim of such discussions is to find out what you think the main workplace issues are. You might be asked to answer questions about your farm and to meet with other farmers to talk in a group about your concerns. For example, you might be asked how important it is to you to have a written contract with your buyer.

The information collected in these ways will help the buyer to plan what to do next. The list of labour standards is very long and nobody expects buyers or you to tackle everything at once. Your buyer should come up with a plan to tackle your main concerns first. They will explain the next steps to you. But please note this could take quite a long time.

6.5 What you can do now

You don't need to wait for your buyer to make the first move. You can begin to learn more about the labour standards and take action if you wish:

- read the booklet *Working for a better life: what smallholders need to know* which introduces the main ideas behind the labour standards;
- read the full list of labour standards – see the Toolkit, section A of this document. This not only sets out the standards in full, it also has a column (in green) showing the action you can take to meet the standard. Note that in the application framework 'worker' can mean anyone who works on the farm – yourself and your family members as well as people you employ;
- talk to your family and other local farmers about what this means for your businesses;
- talk to any organisations you belong to (for example, your co-operative or trade union) about what this means for your business;
- talk to your workers, if you employ any, about their main concerns at work. They may find it difficult to be open with you at first. Even so, asking them makes the point that you are interested in their concerns and want to do your best for them;
- look at the sample documents in the Toolkit, section E which have been written for smallholders. One of these is a sample contract between a smallholder and a buyer, another suggests records you can keep and one is a checklist of some relevant health and safety issues. You might be able to adapt the first two documents for use on your farm. The health and safety checklist may give you ideas for improvements.

When you have read all the background and talked to as many people as you can, you might want to think about your main priorities and plan what needs to be done to improve them. Some improvements might be very easy to do. For example, you might find it relatively easy to improve some aspects of health and safety. Other issues will be more complex and you should ask your buyer for advice on making the improvements.