

# Fair-trade items offer Christmas gifts with a conscience

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**By Hannah Elliott**

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NEW YORK (ABP)—What's the perfect revenge for the flannel-lined hot-water bottle Aunt Sharon gave you last year? Or the Michael Bolton CD from your brother-in-law?

Maybe a toilet. Or an ox. A bag of seeds would work, for that matter.

This year, as the world continues to grow more interconnected, increasing numbers of Christians are giving gifts with global economics and ethical sensibilities in mind. That's where an ox—donated to a farmer in the name of someone on your gift-giving list—comes in handy. It's part of a greater movement toward supporting fair trade—a way of doing business that promotes equal, sustainable relationships between local communities and consumers.



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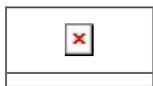
And as department stores bulge to overflowing, there may be a need for just such an attitude adjustment.

Fair-trade strategies mandate paying fair wages in local regions and using environmentally friendly methods, all the while maintaining healthy working conditions. Trade partners focus on capitalizing on returns by investing them in health clinics, education and child care. Put most simply, the relationships are based on mutual respect, not necessarily the bottom line.

Andrea Mullins, director of World Crafts, said her organization aims to help people away from poverty and toward spiritual and social health.

“Our focus is holistic,” Mullins said. “Our focus is to bring people to and help provide income for people who have great skills, great marketable products, but they have no markets.”

World Crafts, a nonprofit company based in Birmingham, Ala., holds more than 1,000 parties each year to introduce Christians in the United States to the men and women who create fair trade products. Next spring, it’ll join an ebay store, [stores.ebay.com/World-of-Good](http://stores.ebay.com/World-of-Good), dedicated to selling fair-trade-only items on the auction website.



Hundreds of products have been certified for sale in the United States and bear the Fairtrade Certified logo, with more than 3,000 approved for sale in the United Kingdom, according to leaders from London’s Fairtrade Foundation. Products include everything from bananas, spices, flowers and juices to cotton, jewelry, sporting equipment and tree ornaments—some of World Crafts’ most popular sellers, Mullins said.

Worldwide, 17 countries carry the Fairtrade Mark—the trademark of the

Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International that ensures standardized levels of pay and working conditions. The nonprofit, multi-stakeholder group has more than 20 member organizations, plus traders and external experts who develop and review trade standards. Those countries work with 452 companies sourced through 36 production countries, which hold 4.5 million growers and their families.

Baptists in the United Kingdom in particular are far ahead of their American counterparts in this area, Jeanie McGowan said. McGowan, pastor of equipping at First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Mo., first became interested in fair trade agreements after friends from England told her about their own efforts to buy goods in a deliberate and ethical manner.

“So many Christians in the U.K. are so focused on this,” she said. “I just thought what a wonderful thing. It’s really a simple thing if you make it a priority to do. It really ought to be.”

Indeed, a Google search for Baptist churches promoting holiday fair-trade events reveals far more churches in England than in any other country. Eastleigh Baptist Church in Eastleigh holds a fair-trade shopping morning every holiday season. Carshalton Beeches Baptist Free Church in Surrey buys and serves fair-trade tea and coffee during worship services and sells fair-trade fruit and nuts during “Fairtrade Fortnight.”



The Fortnight event is an annual promotional campaign that combines producers, campaigners, retailers, licensees and NGOs in an effort to promote products carrying the Fairtrade Mark.

It’s part of a substantial trend. Fair-trade sales in the United Kingdom have been running at growth rates of 40 percent over the past five years, according to the Fairtrade Foundation.

Harriet Lamb, executive director of the independent foundation, said the fair-trade movement is vital.

“Far too many companies are burying their heads in the sand and ignoring the mounting calls from consumers who want to understand more about the origins of the food they eat and the clothes they wear,” she said. “These companies still buy blind as cheap as they can and then make gestures of charity to farmers on whose work their annual profit mountains are built. Those companies are out of step with the nation’s mood.”

The British made an impression on McGowan, who regularly buys fair-trade coffee and is encouraging her church to “become more focused about it.”

Brits “seem to incorporate it into their daily lives I think in some really wonderful ways,” she said. “I’m so impressed. They go to great lengths to try to do it.”

And besides buying goods to use stateside, fair trade also encompasses gifts that are bought in a loved-one’s name and given to a family or community overseas.

Oxfam, World Vision and ChristianAid provide even more options for Christmastide shoppers. By visiting [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org), choosing a price range and selecting a fitting gift, families in Africa and Asia can receive a pig, chickens or sheep, for example. The charity then sends a descriptive and appreciative card to the “recipient.”

True, children may not be overly enthusiastic if they get a gift certificate for an apple tree this year instead of an iPod. But for adults, it could be the way to go.

Maybe this year, revenge is best served warm—with a higher good in mind.

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