

SEVEN YEARS ON - ruminations from the MAFTTI Chair, Paul Renshaw.

**Paul, it is seven years since MAFTTI was formed. At the end of the year MAFTTI will enter into a new phase when you and Arlene step back to take care of other items that are pressing on your transatlantic agenda. What are your main reflections right now?**

1. How time flies! In October it will be five years since MAFTTI's work enabled the Mankato City Council to pass a resolution (unanimously, as I recall) that enabled Mankato to claim 'Fair Trade Town' status according to the criteria of the national Fair Trade Campaigns.
2. Mankato is definitely on the 'Fair Trade map', both nationally and globally. To borrow the City Council's slogan, Mankato is "leading the way" as the first 'Fair Trade Town' in Minnesota. Here I'm talking about the consumer-focused movement that began in Garstang, north-west England (pop. 5,000) in 2000 and has since spread to over 1,800 towns in 28 countries. The 44 in the USA include Boston, San Francisco, Chicago and Philadelphia as well as much smaller places.
3. Sustainability is a buzz-word for our time, necessarily so. Its use in Minnesota seems to have been largely focused on the environment. That is, obviously, key but there is a broader way of thinking about it. Sustainability in the communities all along the supply chains of the products we want but do not produce is required, and thus is part of any modern 'fair trade' agenda.
4. Awareness of Fair Trade certified products in the marketplace is certainly growing in the USA. These names and logos have become familiar on a growing list of products in area stores.



The appearance in recent years of multiple product labels necessitates greater understanding on the part of 'conscious consumers' and makes more complex the task of MAFTTI and similar groups working in Towns, Colleges/Universities, Schools and Congregations around the country.

As one of the motivations for awareness-raising about Fair Trade products is to increase demand for them, MAFTTI's documentation of progress on this front certainly represents progress.

It's important to remember that some companies are committed 100% to internationally-agreed Fair Trade principles, but their products do not have Fair Trade labels! They may well belong to dedicated Fair Trade business associations, national and/or international.



5. While within the Fair Trade movement there are some sharp disagreements, especially on the role of co-operatives, all Fair Trade actors want to do several things:
  - to tell stories from the Global South of producers' struggles and achievements.
  - to explain the merits of Fair Trade for farmers and other producers in the Global South.
  - to show how the Fair Trade movement can help to build bridges across the continents.
  - to encourage consumers in the Global North to use their awareness of Fair Trade principles in making purchasing decisions about growing range of products - coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, bananas, olive oil, sugar, molasses, baking mixes, wine, fresh fruit, honey, ice cream, rice, flowers, herbs, spices, nuts, seafood, energy bars, handcrafts, body care products, wearing apparel, sports balls and gold - so far. The opportunity to make such decisions is available in and around Mankato as never before.

### **What have been some of the highlights for you in working on Fair Trade in the Mankato area?**

1. Some individuals have shown extraordinary commitment in their contributions to the cause – in producing educational materials for use indoors and outdoors and in talking up Fair Trade in a variety of local contexts – churches, stores, schools, workplaces, Farmers’ Market.
2. There have been some moving moments of personal encounter, as with a young mother AND child at the Farmers’ Market a few years ago. The mother said that she understood what the Fair Trade movement stood for but her circumstances didn’t enable her to purchase more than one Fair Trade item at a time – but that she would do that.
3. On two occasions MAFTTI people were able to visit places of origin of Fair Trade products – Margo Druschel went to the Dominican Republic in 2012 and Jane Dow to Southern Mexico in 2013. Such visits have great impact. It would be good if there could be more.
4. There is now a constituency for Fair Trade in the Mankato area that is more alive to collective action. I see this in several ways:
  - support for MAFTTI events (where the record attendance is 140 for the Fair Trade Fashion Show and talk by Kelsey Timmerman in September 2014).
  - participation in public advocacy of Fair Trade - Mankato Area International Festival, Sustainability Expo, North Mankato Fun Days Parade, Fair Trade coffee-sampling on World Fair Trade Day in May etc.
  - the positive feedback that MAFTTI received when a survey was done with help from MSU/Communication Studies in the fall of 2015 – about the social networking around Fair Trade that MAFTTI facilitates, the value of the monthly Newsletter, the number of suggestions that were made about the development of Fair Trade in the area in future.

### **Have there been any ‘low lights’?**

1. Well, there was the occasion in the early days when no-one came to a meeting at the Y! We concluded that the specific location wasn’t the right fit, though it wasn’t the swimming pool.
2. There was the surprise finding from the Survey about the lack of use of Facebook among members of our mainly senior demographic. We thought the ‘silver generation’ had taken to the cyber-world more than they had.
3. As a corollary, while we rejoice at Loyola’s status as a Fair Trade K-12 School, MAFTTI has largely failed to find ways of involving younger people on a sustained basis. There is a deep generational issue at work here, summed up by two words, ‘social media’. Connectivity has never been easier, but capitalizing on it has been difficult.
4. The Survey last year produced more ideas about the future work of MAFTTI than offers of help!

### **What hopes do you have for Fair Trade work in this area in the next few years?**

- 1.. Other Fair Trade Town initiatives will take root in our part of the Minnesota River Valley.
2. There is much more that could be done with Mankato area business leaders, I am sure. Perhaps that is an area where the gender imbalance can be rectified, though there is plenty about Fair Trade that should appeal to women business leaders.
3. The Fair Trade Town idea has spread amazingly from a small British village half the size of St. Peter. It forces anyone vaguely interested, even in where their clothes come from, to raise their sights and make connections - to think globally and act locally, as a well-worn phrase has it. It encourages people of all ages and walks of life to come together and engage with this ancient, evocative, even haunting question, “what is a fair trade?”

