

SMALL-FARMER FAIRTRADE CERTIFIED TEA COLLABORATION IN THE DARJEELING HILLS



OUR TEAS

Our range, from fine Darjeeling and malty Assam to healthy Green contains the finest Indian teas whilst the Standard Blend will satisfy any desire for a strong and flavourful cuppa.

Those with a desire to try more refined teas should explore our loose leaf teas.

WHERE TO BUY

Go to our website
www.equalexchange.co.uk
or ring Jo on 0131 554 5912

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST TEA

Begin with the best loose tea you can afford — it will have the finest flavour of your preferred style. Otherwise, use one bag per person. Always use boiling water* and leave for up to 5 minutes to let the flavour develop.

*Unless making green or oolong teas when it should be cooler, perhaps 85°C.

FROM GREEN LEAF TO 'CHAMPAGNE' OF TEAS... HOW OUR TEA IS GROWN

Imagine steep misty hillsides, ❶ tea bushes swathed in early morning dew. Soon, as the tea garden day begins, excited voices drift up the valley, figures emerge from between the rows, rattan baskets strapped around the heads of woman tea pluckers. As they get closer we can see their fingers flying backwards and forwards across the top of the bushes ❷ plucking only the essential two leaves and a bud for the finest and most delicate tea flavours.

In another valley, on their tiny Mineral Springs farm, Saraswati's daughter has already harvested 3kg from their small plot and will take it to the weighing point for the afternoon delivery to Selimbong factory too. She will continue working in the tiny fields and plant potatoes this morning too.

Back at Selimbong garden, full baskets are eagerly weighed ❸ before the pluckers eat lunch (perhaps a potato curry and rice prepared at 5.30am before work). Whilst plucking continues throughout the afternoon, the weighed green leaf is carried to withering troughs in the factory where it lies until next morning (the moisture reducing in long trays under a stream of cool then warmer air for up to 16 hours.). Orthodox tea making begins when the giant rolling machines curl and crush ❹ for an hour or more releasing enzymes that then oxidise the leaf via a short fermentation. Finally into the drier at 120°C. where the famous muscatel flavour is locked in.

Just like fine wine the final flavour depends on local climate, soil type, garden altitude and the type of tea bush ... not to mention the skill of the tea maker.

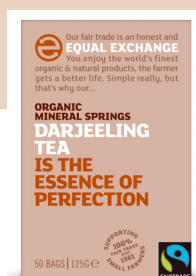
After machine sorting, real value is added by patiently hand-sorting out the best whole leaf from the broken grades and fannings. ❺

It is only the next morning, after each batch of 120kg is tasted ❻ (slurping and spitting into a basin!) that the pale golden liquor reveals its secrets.

After a 16 hour road trip down to Calcutta 'the city that never sleeps' the tea you recognise emerges. The different character of several batches or tea types are artfully blended to meet our market specification. Our teas are one of the few Fairtrade certified teas actually packed in the country of origin! This business increases value-added and jobs in Calcutta, whilst also providing direct experience of the exacting quality required by UK consumers.



Try Equal Exchange Darjeeling tea, grown high in the Himalayas by farmers of the Mineral Springs garden it is famous for its complex flavour and unbeatable bouquet. www.equalexchange.co.uk/products



TEA PROMOTERS INDIA

VISIONARY AND INNOVATIVE SOCIAL PARTNERS

Tea Promoters India (TPI) is a small family company, whose innovative social and environmental vision was a pioneer for the first FLO tea standards and who have remained our partners for more than 10 years. Their work is changing the face of Plantation tea growing in North India and providing an alternative model, where a wider 'political economy' philosophy offers livelihood security and market access for neighbouring small-holder tea growers too.

TPI runs certified organic gardens in the Darjeeling hills (Selimbong, Seeyok, Singell and Samabeong), Banaspaty in Assam and Putharjhora in Dooars. Each garden has a factory to process its collected green leaf and in some cases buys green leaf from partnering small farmer groups such as Mineral Springs association.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

TPI follows a philosophy of guardianship, being both custodians of the local environment and economic engine for the local community. To achieve these goals all gardens are organic or under conversion, Fairtrade certified and aim to produce a range of top quality teas.

Unlike many growers who are organic by default (e.g. no composting or permitted controls) deep changes are made to the traditional tea garden agronomy. For example implementing new garden management methods on Selimbong and Puthajhora gardens where the worker is the eyes and ears of the organic production system. When pluckers identify pests their group supervisors call in neem sprayers directly without reference to managerial hierarchy. Quick responses help restore the ecological balance whilst garden workers and pluckers see that their efforts improve production and quality.

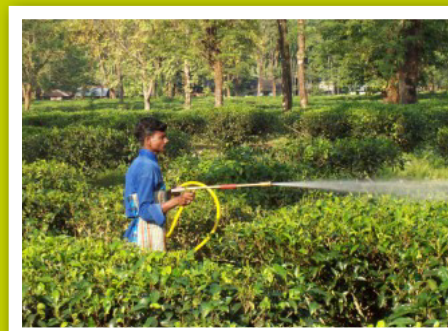
Soil improvement is critical. We saw a large number of worm compost pits. Thousands of tonnes are produced by highly labour intensive processes which also bring economic benefit for the garden families who sell their cow dung back to the garden. Cow dung mixed with green material from the ground cleaning activity is converted by thousands of little red worms, ❶ into a soft dark compost within months.



❶



❷



❸

One indicator of returning ecological balance is the reduced loss due to tea mosquito infestation. *Helopeltus theivora* is a beautiful little green insect ❷ but its emergence in October across swathes of North India heralds the spread of brown & blistered shoots unfit for plucking. This pest was rare in Darjeeling until 30 years ago; in warmer areas such as Dooars and Assam it now accounts for massive losses. This spread has been attributed to uncontrolled pesticide spraying (including DDT in the past) leading to resistance. ❸

CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE

Try Equal Exchange Green tea, a delicious cuppa that's chock-a-block with those free radical busting antioxidants. www.equalexchange.co.uk/products



FLO PREMIUMS

Of course the garden Joint Body also distributes the FLO social premium . Here too an innovation is helping to disperse 'islands of wealth' . In some districts the large certified gardens supplying British supermarkets via large corporations have accrued massive premium funds creating a problem of practical dispersal and causing envy between neighbouring 'have and have-not' communities. The TPI group has solved this problem by managing the premiums collectively via the TPI Tea Action Trust made up of elected members from Joint Bodies from each of its FLO certified gardens. ④



④



⑤

AND RESPONSIBILITY TO SMALLER FARMERS NEARBY

Small farmer livelihood is at the mercy of climatic conditions and volatile markets. Most families have no opportunity to take advantage of tea growing as they have no factory.

TPI now purchases green leaf from small farmers living near 3 gardens. Each year, the long plucking season now gives small farmers secure and predictable income; along with essential farm training and quality instruction and of course market access. Fair trade customers' willingness to buy fine teas is essential to secure this long term security.

Equal Exchange has supported one such community called Mineral Springs for 10 years. ⑤

Try Equal Exchange Jasmine Green tea, made from the top two leaves and bud and infused with the flavour of Jasmine. www.equalexchange.co.uk/products



MINERAL SPRINGS... SARASWATI'S STORY

As the colonial era of India was winding to an end in the 1940s, Mineral Springs Tea Garden was owned and operated by a British Tea Company. ❶

Narbir Rai was a founder of Sanjukta Vikas Cooperative at Mineral Springs. His inspiring on our facebook pages:
www.facebook.com/EqualExchangeUK

We first met Saraswati ❷ in 2006, she has been a model farmer for 5 years showing others how Fairtrade tea growing can help the Mineral Springs Community.

As a measure of the increasing recognition of the impact of Fairtrade in the community over the last three years membership has increased from 309 families to 455.

In November 2009 we met Saraswati again. Her youngest daughter had just had her first child ❸. Saraswati had this to say about the involvement of women:

‘In every village, they feel more level with their men folk. We talk directly with visitors, that increases our confidence.

We also sell milk directly in Darjeeling town, not through middle men.

Our tea income is steady. Some years the price for ginger or oranges is very low.’

Binita Rai ❹ has the responsible job of secretary in the Cooperatives Organic Internal Control System tracking each farms production for certification. She wants her two children to get the best education.



❶



❷



❸



❹