

THE WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL AND TOBACCO FARMING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Does the FCTC hurt tobacco farmers and farm workers?

- No. The tobacco industry, not the FCTC, hurts tobacco farmers and farm workers. The FCTC contains provisions that are intended to help interested farmers find economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco farming.
- Cigarette manufacturers and leaf buying companies are primarily responsible for tobacco farmers' problems. The exploitative buying practices and unfair contracts of cigarette makers and leaf buying companies trap farmers in cycles of poverty, push farmers into debt, and create conditions that promote child labour.^{1,2}
- Any decline in global demand for tobacco that results from implementation of the FCTC will take one or more generations because tobacco is highly addictive. Moreover, because the global population is increasing, the overall demand for tobacco is likely to remain constant even if the global percentage of smokers declines. The slow decline in the number of tobacco users gives governments and farmers time to transition away from tobacco leaf, and to examine how companies' contracts with farmers contribute to debt bondage.

Will FCTC Articles 17 and 18 hurt tobacco farmers?

- No. Articles 17 and 18 encourage signatory countries to provide farmers with economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco farming, and to safeguard the health of workers and the environment from the negative effects of tobacco farming. Articles 17 and 18 do not force farmers or countries to stop growing tobacco.³
- Alternatives to tobacco farming are available. Agricultural studies in China, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, and Zimbabwe have shown that a number of commercial crops produce a better net profit and rate of return than tobacco.⁴ The transition away from tobacco includes a mix of cash crops and those for home consumption, not just one crop.

Will FCTC Article 6 hurt tobacco farmers?

- Article 6 calls on countries to use tobacco tax policy to reduce tobacco consumption and meet health objectives. Raising tobacco taxes is the single most effective way to reduce tobacco use and save lives.
- Any decline in global smoking rates that result from tax increases implemented by countries that are Parties to the FCTC will be slow and gradual, giving governments and farmers time to transition away from tobacco leaf.
- Article 6 allows governments to use tobacco tax revenue to provide resources to farmers and farm workers who want to begin to exit tobacco farming and grow healthy crops.

Is the tobacco industry exploiting farmers and children?

- Yes. Tobacco companies and leaf buyers exploit farmers and the use of child labour is prevalent in tobacco growing countries.^{5,6,7}
- The majority of profits from tobacco farming go to leaf buying companies and cigarette manufacturers, while many farmers and farm workers find themselves poor and in debt.⁸ In the United States, tobacco growers' share of each dollar spent on a pack of cigarettes dropped from US\$ 0.07 in 1980 to US\$ 0.02 in the late 1990s, while the companies' share rose from US\$ 0.37 to US\$ 0.49.⁹
- Tobacco companies often entice farmers to produce tobacco leaf by offering farming loans and a guaranteed buyer. However, low leaf prices set by the tobacco industry as well as manipulation of leaf prices, often trap farmers in a vicious cycle of poverty and indebtedness.^{10,11}
- The industry claims that it is "protecting livelihoods of farmers" but its exploitative buying practices in countries around the world, including Malawi, Indonesia and Bangladesh, often lock farmers and farmworkers into cycles of poverty and increase the need for child labour.
- In the major tobacco growing countries, over 1.3 million children work on tobacco farms

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producing profits for leaf companies and cigarette manufacturers.¹²

- The production requirements imposed on tobacco farmers by tobacco companies force many farmers and their families to endure long hours of stoop labour, food insecurity, exposure to nicotine poisoning ('green tobacco sickness'), toxic pesticides, the lack of clean water, poor health, miserable housing conditions and basic labour and human rights violations.

Is tobacco farming bad for farmer's health?

- Yes. Tobacco farming undermines the health and wellness of tobacco farmers and farm workers.
- Tobacco farming exposes farmers and farm workers to a range of chemicals used in fertilization and pest control.
- In addition to the chemical poisoning, farm workers absorb nicotine through their skin during the tobacco harvest. On humid days the average field worker may be exposed to as much as 54 mg of dissolved nicotine — equivalent to more than 50 cigarettes.¹³ Green tobacco sickness can result from such exposure.

- Green tobacco sickness often causes nausea, vomiting, headache, muscle weakness and dizziness. Other symptoms may include lethargy, abdominal cramps, headache, and fluctuation in heart rate and blood pressure.

Is tobacco farming bad for the environment?

- Yes. The environment suffers due to tobacco farming. Tobacco cultivation contributes to deforestation, soil depletion of nutrients, contamination of water sources and pollution from pesticides and fertilizers.¹⁴

Does tobacco farming aggravate food insecurity?

- Yes. Replacing food crops with tobacco may aggravate food insecurity in some countries, and could lead to food shortages. In 2009, undernourishment rates in 6 of the top 10 tobacco-producing countries were between 5% and 27%.¹⁵ As cigarette makers and leaf buying companies seek to keep profits high by keeping costs low for labour and leaf, many tobacco families struggle to meet basic food and nutrition requirements.

For additional information and to share local news and achievements relevant to tobacco farming, contact: editor@fctc.org

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