

Evergreen backs fair trade

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The Evergreen School Board has agreed to support the concept of fair trade and consider the purchase of fair trade products.

Trustees recently passed a supportive resolution after the world-wide fair trade program was described to them by a delegation composed of Zack Gross of the Manitoba Council for International Co-Operation (MCIC); Emily Lair, a Gimli High student and member of the Gimli Youth Community Partnership; and Ian Goodall-George, development co-ordinator for East Interlake Community Futures and chair of the Gimli Fair Trade Committee.

Gross, program co-ordinator for MCIC, said fair trade means buying products from companies whose producers, workers or artisans receive fair wages or payments for their efforts while working in healthy and safe environments. He said fair trade products must also be environmentally-friendly and come from communities or countries where a portion of the price goes to such initiatives as local health care and education.

He told the school board that fair trade takes aim at sweat shops and child labour while improving incomes and conditions for workers toiling for responsible off-shore companies. He said the school board can help the cause by supporting the fair trade program and possibly buying from a list of fair trade products that includes coffee, tea, other food products, clothing, handicrafts, shoes, soap and sports equipment.

“Is there evidence that you are making any progress with this?” asked Trustee Thor Johannson.

Gross said fair trade is helping producers of food and clothing in Africa and Asia. “There are video testimonials of how the program has created more income for people and how they have benefitted,” he said, adding that he has personally seen results while travelling in East Africa and South America.

Gross, a Sandy Hook resident, said he and a local committee are working with Mayor Tammy Axelsson in the hope that Gimli will declare itself as Manitoba’s first “Fair Trade Town” within the next year. He said the program has been embraced by hundreds of towns and cities in Europe and about 20 in the United States, but only two or three so far in Canada.

“We have some catching up to do, “ said the fair trade advocate who thinks Evergreen’s endorsement will boost the program in Gimli.

Lair said Gimli High’s social justice student committee is doing its bit by urging students and staff to use coffee made by a fair trade company. Students and staff will also participate in the third annual “Fair Trade One Month Challenge” in February. During the challenge, they will choose fair trade coffee, tea and chocolate over other options for 30 days beginning on Valentine’s.