

APPLE

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Washington State University, retailers take in 68 cents of every dollar that consumers spend on apples. In contrast, growers earn only 7 cents of that dollar, and workers 4 cents. The remaining 21 cents goes for packing, sales and transportation costs.

Gamboa emphasized that farmworkers aren't being pitted against farmers in this campaign. Both stand to come out ahead.

"Fair-minded consumers will buy apples when they can be confident that the workers who harvest those apples are being treated fairly," he said.

It might be a year before consumers see some sort of labor-friendly sticker — perhaps the symbolic black eagle stamp of the UFW — on the fair-trade apples.

While some retailers say customers won't pay higher prices for the apples, others point to the organic food industry as proof that some consumers will pay more for their food under certain conditions.

Dick Boushey, a Yakima Valley farmer who grew apples for 25 years before switching over to cherries and grapes, said public sympathy for the workers might turn out to be the best way to raise consumer awareness about the meager share of profits growers actually get for their produce.

With 20,000 to 25,000 acres of orchards being pulled out in Eastern Washington due to low prices, he said it's also becoming increasingly clear to the

workers that they can't just focus on the growers.

"The only one with any leverage in all of this is the consumer," he said. "Maybe if we pooled our efforts and targeted the consumer, we'd all be better off."

A similar fair-trade coffee campaign appears to be working.

Starbucks began offering customers fair-trade-certified coffee last fall. Tully's has also begun selling it and plans to expand its fair-trade selection as demand increases.

Dan Kelly of Washington Growers Clearing House said while he doesn't know enough about the campaign to make any comments on it, he didn't hesitate to say that anything that gets more money back to the grower is a step in the right direction.

"The grower is putting his livelihood on the line for a mere 7 cents of the retail dollar," he said. "That needs to come up. Growers are scraping the bottom of the barrel."

Michael Gempler, executive director of the Washington Growers League, agrees that the consumer is key to any labeling campaign.

"If consumers want to support something like this, that's great," he said. "Social marketing can be good because it differentiates your product."

Nevertheless, he said it's important to be realistic.

"Consumers have to perceive value," he said. "Some will. But it's a tough area to work in."