

# GEPA®



## The GEPA Chronicle

- 1970* Discontent with the official development policy caused the youth associations of the Protestant and Catholic churches – aej and BDKJ – in 1970 to organize hunger marches in 70 places of Germany, mobilizing 30'000 participants.
- 1971* This led to the „Aktion Dritte Welt Handel“ movement (A3WH – Third World action) in 1971. The goods offered were a means of political learning, „Lernen durch Handel“ (learning by doing).
- 1972* The „Gesellschaft für Handel mit der Dritten Welt“ was founded in Würselen near Aachen – a 100 per cent subsidiary of S.O.S. (The Netherlands) and GEPA's predecessor with the purpose of facilitating distribution of the goods, which had, until then, to be bought in the Netherlands. Erwin Mock, head of the Misereor department „Bildung und Pastoralarbeit“ (education and pastoral work) until 1997, was then shareholder of this trading company, together with an S.O.S. representative.
- 1973* The „Aktion Indio-Kaffee aus Guatemala“ (Indio coffee from Guatemala) under the motto „Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe“ (help for self-help) was quite successful.
- 1974* GEPA's predecessor, the „Gesellschaft für Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt (GFP3.Welt) (society for partnership with the Third World) was founded in Wuppertal.
- 1975* The foundation of GEPA: On May 14th, 1975, the company agreement, creating GEPA as „economic arm“ of the movement, was signed by A3WH, Kirchlicher Entwicklungsdienst (KED – the Protestant development service), Misereor and the newly founded Arbeitsgemeinschaft Dritte Welt Läden (association of world shops). The turnover of the initial year was 1.33 million EUR and there were about 40 world shops in Germany.
- 1976* The first criteria for the selection of partners and projects were adopted.
- 1978* Learning and trading were regarded as equally important: „Wandel durch Handel“ (change through trade). Jute bags from Bangladesh with the „Jute statt Plastik“ (jute not plastic) slogan became the symbol of the movement for an alternative life style.
- 1980* In 1980 followed the era of Nicaragua coffee „Solidarität mit Nicaragua“ (solidarity with Nicaragua), which turned out to be an equally strong symbol.
- 1985* 10 years after the beginning, there were some 200 world shops; GEPA had a turnover of 8.2 million EUR and a staff of 39 persons.
- 1986* GEPA did real pioneer work, launching the first fairly traded organic coffee worldwide, imported from the Mexican cooperative of small producers UCIRI!
- 1987* The first organic tea project worldwide followed, in cooperation with the committed tea company Stassen Natural Foods from Sri Lanka.
- 1988* Sales stagnated between 1986 and 1988 at a level of 9.2 million EUR. Due to the failure of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, world market prices fell below 60 USD by the early nineties. Our coffee partners increasingly

asked for additional marketing possibilities.

- 1989** GEPA coffee was successfully tested in supermarkets. The first mail order catalogue was published and the regional Fair Trade centres in Berlin and Dresden opened.
- 1992** The labelling organization TransFair was set up in order to support the expansion of Fair Trade. In the same year, the GEPA department for large-scale consumers was initiated. The traditional trade channels grew as well: meanwhile, over 600 world shops offered Fair Trade products.
- 1993** The Bundestag enjoyed GEPA coffee and the food retail department was set up. Turnover increased enormously from 14.3 EUR in 1991/92 to 19.43 million EUR in 1992/93 and 25.6 million EUR in 1993/94.
- 1994-1996** Restructuring process: The years of enormous growth resulted in losses (costs grew faster than proceeds). Surprisingly, in 1995/96 sales declined for the first time since 1990. Due to comprehensive and consequent restructuring in the years 1994 to 1996, GEPA could be made economically sustainable – an important step, which shows that Fair Trade can also be an economic benefit for all stakeholders and that a Fair Trade company is not a subsidized undertaking.
- 1995** The Fair Trade Beteiligungsgesellschaft (equity investment company), a 100 per cent GEPA daughter, originated with the purpose of offering loans for GEPA's capital intensive trading activities. The GEPA shareholders founded the Fair Trade Verein (Fair Trade association) as a GEPA sister company. Later, the Fair Trade Verein was commissioned to do educational work and offer assistance to trading partners.
- 1996-97** New ways – more growth:  
In 1996, a comprehensive restructuring process with cost cutting measures was initiated, such as reduction in personnel, the closing of regional Fair Trade centres and of the mail order business. Additionally, the shareholders increased GEPA's capital base.
- GEPA followed sustainable new ways. A field service assisted the world shops. Innovative Fair Trade food products were developed, such as instant cappuccino or nougat cream. A new chocolate line was the basis of a growing range of sweets. Small-scale industry products were integrated within Fair Trade, later other products like balls and household articles made of high-grade steel followed. On the one hand, the assortment was streamlined, on the other hand, steps were taken to offer the world shops an attractive non-food range.
- 1997** The change of residence to a central-placed domicile in Wuppertal with a space of 5'000 m<sup>2</sup> (warehouse) plus 1'400 m<sup>2</sup> (office) helped improve coordination and communication for the sales and administration sections that had been separated. GEPA managed to set up a successful mail order cooperation with Misereor-Vertriebsgesellschaft (MVG) and Otto-Versand. GEPA started the professionalization campaign for world shops. GEPA's main coffee packages won the European package silver award for innovation, design and environmental compatibility.
- 1998** Fair Pay – Fair Play: With this campaign, GEPA called the public attention to low wages and child labour in the Pakistani soccerball industry. Over 600'000 fairly traded balls were sold within one year.
- GEPA launched its first „Partnerschaftskaffee“ (partnership coffee), „Münster-Kaffee“, with its own design. Numerous agenda and regional coffees followed.
- 1999** Also the Federal Minister of the Environment, Mr Jürgen Trittin, supported the fair balls of GEPA. A complete ball requires ca. 650 stitches. On a yearly special promotion campaign of Karstadt, TransFair and GEPA, fairly traded products were (and still are) given special space and advertising for two weeks.
- In spite of the intensive competition on the coffee market, GEPA managed to match the record turnover of the year before.
- With a special campaign focussed on rice, GEPA called the public attention to the problematic issues of genetic engineering and the patenting of seeds.
- „www.gepa3.de“ – with its homepage and online shop, GEPA entered the world wide web.
- 2000-2005** Forward-looking into the new millenium: Sales increased continuously from ca. 31 million EUR in 2000/01 to 35 million EUR in 2002/03.

On May 14th, 2000, GEPA completed 25 years!

2001

„Unfair trade“? On May 16th, 2000, the Fair Trade movement was upset by a critical TV broadcast in the then ZDF (second channel) magazine „Frontal“. Through intensive information work, GEPA, together with TransFair and all dedicated stakeholders, could clarify and absorb the major part of the negative effects.

The study „Entwicklungspolitische Wirkungen des Fairen Handels“ (development impact of Fair Trade) commissioned by organizations associated with Fair Trade Misereor, Bread for the World, Friedrich Ebert Foundation) relaunched the discussion on the political impact of Fair Trade. In September, 2001, the „Faire Woche“ (fair week) was organized for the first time – a cooperation of all Fair Trade activists, supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ).

Late in 2001, the international four Fair Trade networks cooperating under the synonym of FINE (FLO – Fair Trade Labelling Organization; IFAT – The International Fair Trade Association; NEWS! – Network of European World Shops; FTA – European Fair Trade Association) published a joint document called „Grundlagen für eine verbesserte Zusammenarbeit im Fairen Handel“ (basic principles for a better cooperation in Fair Trade), which can be seen as the basis of the Fair Trade movement’s growing together. Being a member of IFAT and a licensee of the worldwide FLO seal, GEPA has taken an active part in the networking process of Fair Trade. A comprehensive internal study checked compliance with the IFAT standards within the organization of GEPA.

2002

The „Forum Fairer Handel“ (Fair Trade forum) was established. Members of the Forum are either organizations which are exclusively committed to Fair Trade, such as GEPA, as well as players who consider the promotion of Fair Trade to be one of the most important aspects of their work, such as the GEPA shareholders Misereor and EED (Protestant Church development service). Members ratified a declaration of principles as common basis of their strategic goals and their activities.

GEPA played a decisive role in the first nationwide fair week, organizing the successful campaign „Deutschland frühstückt fair“ (Germany has a fair breakfast).

Cologne’s actors from the popular TV thriller „Tatort“ supported GEPA with a fair breakfast.

Under the motto „bio & fair“, GEPA is particularly successful in supermarkets. There is a special shelf exclusively dedicated to fairly traded organic products.

2003

The distribution system for world shops and action groups was optimized: There are now 15 Regionale Fair Handelszentren (RFZs – regional Fair Trade centres) nationwide offering services to the customers in their respective region. On the international trade fair for organic food and natural products „BioFach“, the GEPA organic chocolate bar „Fairena Noir Orange“ was appointed „product of the year 2002“. GEPA’s quality policy of the years before proved successful in all product groups: In tests of „Ökotest“ (eco test) and „Stiftung Warentest“ (consumer goods test foundation), GEPA products repeatedly came out good and best. The successful assortment of espressos and coffee specialities established itself well. In blind product tests in the large-scale consumer sector, GEPA products often came out best.

Together with other European Fair Trade organizations, the first organic tea project celebrated its jubilee in Sri Lanka in summer, 2002: 15 years of organic tea in summer, 2002.

In mid-year, GEPA became co-supporter of the „Jecke Fairsuchung“ (crazy and fair temptation) campaign: for the first time, carnival revelers distributed fair sweets.

With GMO-free GEPA chocolate, Santa Clauses from the organization BUND (association for environment and nature protection in Germany) protested against the genetic contamination of food.

Accompanied by big PR efforts, KDFB (German catholic women’s association) presented its first partnership coffee, which had been developed by GEPA as coffee „from women for women“. More than 50 per cent of the raw coffee came from the coffee cooperative RAOS in Honduras, an organization of woman producers.

In November, 2002, GEPA successfully launched the first advent calendar, filled with Fair Trade organic chocolate: a fourth-form primary pupil had won the cover picture contest. Actress Liz Baffoe promoted the calendar. Late in 2002, GEPA co-founded the „Forum Fairer Handel“ (Fair Trade forum) for the promotion of Fair Trade.

2003

In order to promote Fair Trade, the Federal Government adopted the „fair feels good“ campaign, which was put into practice by the Verbraucherinitiative (consumers’ initiative) and backed by GEPA.

- 2004 Against the general trend, GEPA managed to increase sales in the business year 2003/04. In the food retail sector, sales increased by over 10 per cent. The total turnover was 36.8 million EUR. GEPA takes an active part in the „Weltladen 2006“ (world shop 2006) campaign of the Weltladen-Dachverband (as sociation of world shops). World shops are offered modules for a homogenous presentation as well as professionalization advice.
- 2005 The first GEPA-owned world shop opens in Wuppertal early in 2005. The GEPA equity investment company celebrates its 10th anniversary. Individuals and organizations have granted loans of 3.5 million EUR to GEPA's Fair Trade.
- GEPA celebrates its 30th anniversary all over Germany under the motto „fair forever“. Highlight is the jubilee festival in Wuppertal on May 21st, 2005.
- 2006 GEPA gets a new look: on the world organic trade fair BioFach 2006 in Nuremberg, the interested professionals are the first ones to be presented the new GEPA corporate design! A new logo, a modernized and attractive packing design, and a modernized, more comfortable and informative internet presentation are to show the way to a successful future of GEPA's Fair Trade.