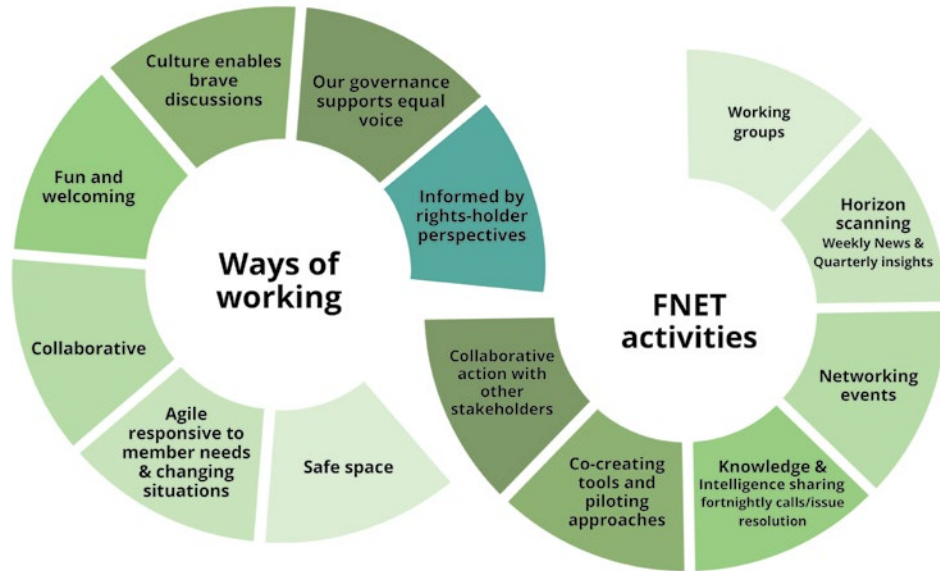


A photograph of a person in a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants pouring a large quantity of dark blue grapes from a white bucket into a white container. The person is leaning over the container, and the grapes are falling in a thick stream. The background shows a lush green vineyard under bright sunlight. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Catalysing Food Sector Collaborative Action

CELEBRATING
10 YEARS OF FNET

The Food Network for Ethical Trade is a member-led initiative which is committed to improving the lives and livelihoods of workers in global food supply chains. FNET uses the collective leverage of suppliers and retailers to bring about positive change in working conditions.



The Theory of Change



The Food Network for Ethical Trade (FNET) was established in 2016 by several major UK food companies to improve human rights in global food supply chains through a common approach to managing ethical trade. FNET aims to support members to identify, manage and respond to global food supply chain ethical trade risks, to improve the food industry's understanding of human rights and ethical trade, to identify and facilitate collaboration opportunities, to promote trust and to build a forum for sharing issues and best-practice.



A decade of connection – building the Food Network for Ethical Trade

I am delighted to introduce this report celebrating ten years of the Food Network for Ethical Trade (FNET).

As a founding member, I have seen FNET evolve from a handful of committed individuals on a conference call into a respected alliance of more than 80 members, spanning retailers, suppliers, producers, and service providers across the food supply chain.

FNET was established because the challenges inherent in food supply chains are too complex for any single organisation to solve alone. Our founding aim was to create a trusted, non-competitive environment where businesses could tackle ethical trade issues with honesty and transparency. In food supply chains, companies often act as customers, competitors, and suppliers simultaneously, so FNET recognised that real progress required spaces built on trust, openness, and mutual responsibility.

Our founding principles – honesty, safety, and a commitment to collective learning – remain central. FNET deliberately sets aside job titles and hierarchies, encouraging open discussion, challenging assumptions, and developing practical solutions grounded in real supply chain experience.

Over the past decade, perspectives on ethical trade have shifted significantly: from compliance-based approaches to risk-based

human rights due diligence, and from isolated audits to valuing worker voice and meaningful stakeholder engagement. Complex challenges such as climate change, heat stress, gender inequality, and migration are now recognised as interconnected with human rights. Our members' businesses are now expected to demonstrate credible, impactful action, not just set policies.

FNET's role has been to help members address these complexities with confidence. We have fostered shared understanding, developed practical tools, and highlighted emerging risks – such as responsible recruitment, living wage, and heat stress – often before they became mainstream concerns. Our work is informed by ongoing engagement with NGOs, trade unions, investors, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and regional supplier groups, ensuring relevance and practicality.

Ten years on, FNET's mission is more vital than ever. As the world faces geopolitical uncertainty, climate pressures, and increasing regulation, collaborative and worker-centred approaches are essential.

This report not only celebrates our achievements but also reaffirms our shared commitment to advancing ethical trade, guided by humility, courage, and greater collective action.

What makes FNET unique?

ADDRESSING THE POWER IMBALANCE

"A key motivator for the start of FNET was suppliers receiving multiple conflicting asks from retailers and wanting a more aligned approach to maximise use of resources and time. Supplier leadership and supplier-led agenda and solutions have been fundamental foundations of FNET since then." Retailer member

"There isn't the same power imbalance within FNET. Everyone's voice is the same, grower or retailer, because it's relational as individuals relate to each other. I'm not afraid to say I disagree with a retailer."

Supplier member

ACCESSIBLE

A core value is to keep membership fees low so that it's accessible for companies of different sizes and stages, including small suppliers at the start of their ethical trade journey. There is no 'bar' to climb over in terms of performance to join or to stay. It's not prescriptive, people can be as involved as they like, depending on their resources, interest and capacity. And through the annual survey, FNET monitors members' results and encourages them to make progress.

"It's a welcoming space. New members can talk openly about the challenges, of the role. It's not just for Human Rights professionals but also for technical people." Supplier member

MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE

"This network is a space for emotional and relational support for colleagues and competitors, for reflection and processing what you have seen and experienced. Human rights actually involve great suffering in people's lives and if you aren't deeply disturbed by that, you may be the wrong person in the job. There's a high level of burnout. FNET adds to your well of resilience through mutual support."

Supplier member

"It's a lonely role. There are things that cross your desk that you have no idea what to do with, but there will be someone within FNET you can ask. Most of what we look at is not black and white and how to approach that is where FNET comes into its own."

Supplier member

AGILE, PRAGMATIC AND BASED ON SUPPLY CHAIN REALITIES

"FNET is very pragmatic and agile because of the good relationships and the relatively compact and business-focused membership, enabling us to step into action quickly rather than get stuck in discussion of the theory. This agility and pace means we can be effective in response to crises. Discussions and tools stay practical because of the engagement and leadership of suppliers with 'on the ground' experience." Retailer member

"Imagine it more as a kind of test laboratory, a live test laboratory for human rights approaches. It's a very creative space. Approaches are being tried, challenged, stress-tested, worked with, discarded or improved, live. I genuinely struggle to articulate the huge difference it's made to my work."

Mel Miles, Head of CSR – Europe, Westfalia Fruit UK Ltd and FNET Board member

Working collaboratively with partners

Over the past ten years, the Food Network for Ethical Trade has worked with a wide range of organisations to turn shared intent into practical, collective action. FNET's role has been to create the conditions for collaboration across complex food supply chains – bringing together retailers, suppliers and partners to respond to common challenges in a more coordinated and effective way.

A clear example is the **UK Food Supply Chain Serious Incident Escalation and Management Protocol (SIEP)**. Developed collaboratively and stewarded by FNET, the Protocol has replaced fragmented, reactive responses with aligned action. It enables earlier escalation, reduces duplication, protects confidentiality and ensures serious worker exploitation is addressed consistently and in the best interests of affected workers.

SO WHAT DO FNET'S PARTNERS AND ALLIES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT FNET?

"It has been great working with FNET over the years, collaborating with our shared members to address some of the most challenging systemic issues in food supply chains. By sharing insights and coordinating actions through the Serious Incident

RELATIONAL, HONEST AND EQUALISING

"There's often a disconnect between all these shiny professional reports that say how wonderful everything is, and the reality on the ground, which is so complex. Human rights is not a branch of marketing. We created a space where we can all talk honestly about the challenges, successes and failures, and that liberates everyone else in the room to do the same."

Supplier member

Escalation Protocol, we have fostered deeper collaboration among members and leveraged FNET's expertise to make a real, meaningful impact." Sophie DeSalis, British Retail Consortium

"Our organisations share a closely aligned vision of promoting improved working conditions and more environmentally sustainable practices within the agri-food sector. Generating a dialogue based on true trust has always been our key to success. We have shared goals honestly, and we have learned with and from FNET, to listen and to build alliances and strategies around common objectives... I believe that we have managed to find in them one of the best travel companions, someone you can always rely on."

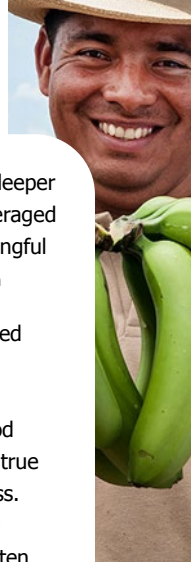
Sergio Barbera, Asociación Foros de Comercio Ético

"The partnership with FNET is at the heart of our strategy. By aligning these 'safe, brave, and non-competitive' platforms, we are transforming ethical risk management into a shared competitive advantage. This alignment makes the Egyptian supply chain more agile, allowing us to fix systemic issues faster and build deeper trust between buyers and producers."

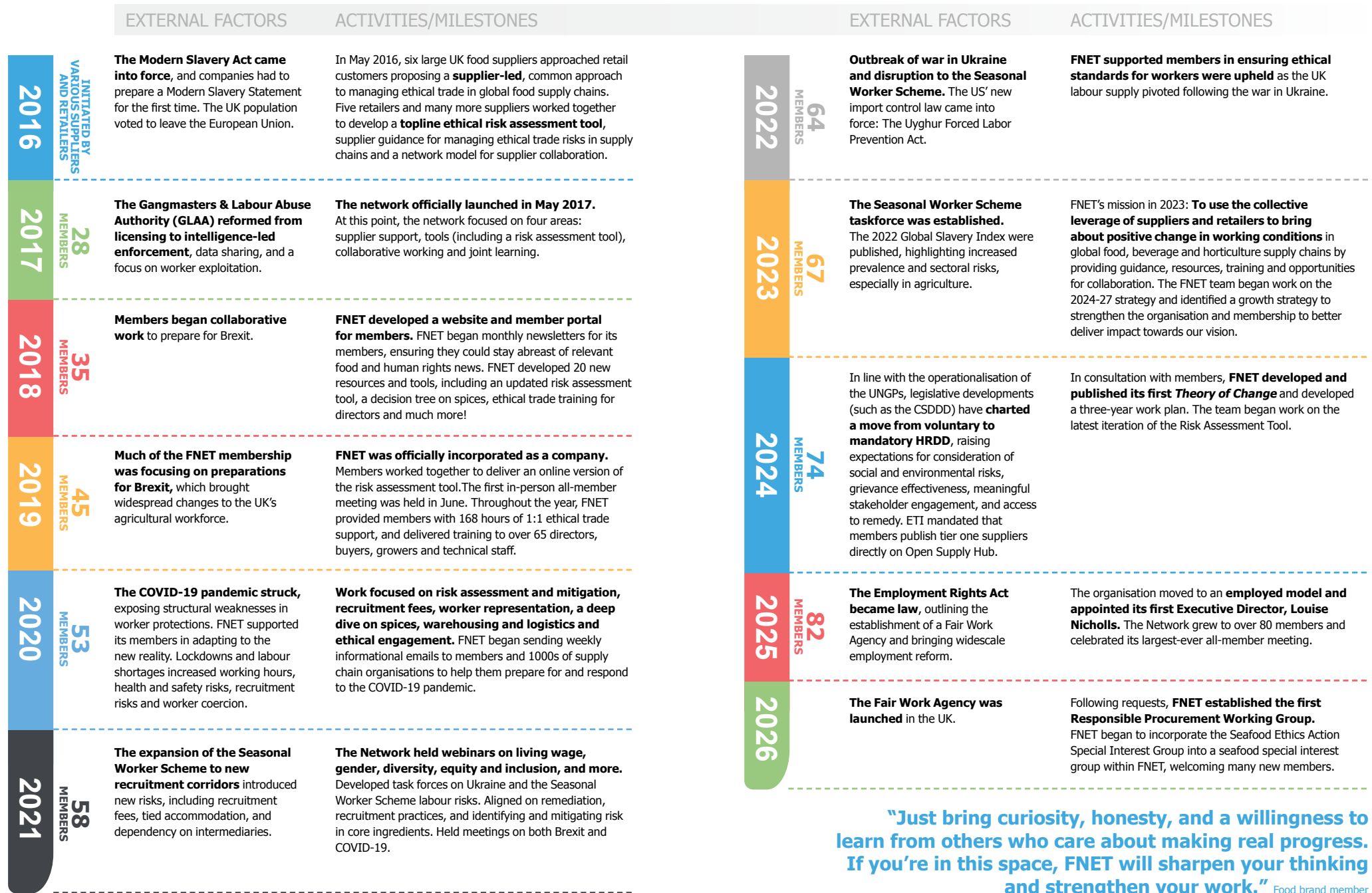
Manal Saleh, Egyptian Suppliers Ethical Trade Forum

"FNET has become highly influential within the UK food industry's approach to ethical trade. By bringing together retailers, brands and suppliers in a collaborative environment, it has enabled practical and consistent responses by companies to a diverse range of events. ETI sees FNET as an important partner across a wide range of issues and we look forward to strengthening that relationship further. Happy birthday to FNET!"

Giles Bolton, Executive Director, ETI



A timeline of FNET over the years



"Just bring curiosity, honesty, and a willingness to learn from others who care about making real progress. If you're in this space, FNET will sharpen your thinking and strengthen your work." Food brand member

What has FNET been working on over the past ten years?

WORKING GROUPS

Working groups are at the heart of FNET, and they strive to create practical tools and approaches that will materially improve workers' lives and working experiences.



"The agenda is set entirely bottom up. Members vote live by turning up to the sessions on the issues that are important to them." Supplier member

EMPOWERING WORK

Aims to support HR professionals to implement Responsible Business Practices, so that workers are more aware of, and better able to exercise, their rights at work. The group has developed a worker engagement maturity framework, working towards closing the living wage gap and a skills framework for ethical trade practitioners.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As one of the newer working groups with a growing membership, this group is increasingly helping members address salient issues and advance responsible business practices.

"The FNET climate tools, especially the heat and water stress guidance, have been key to how we've developed our internal and supplier-facing support documents and action plans. The group has helped us identify practical tools for a diverse and extended supply base and has significantly contributed to our approach to climate risk assessment. It's been a really helpful foundation for turning complex climate challenges into clear, actionable guidance."

Sarah Wadelin, Senior Technical Manager, Minor, Weir and Willis Limited

DEVELOPING COMMON DUE DILIGENCE TOOLS

Members developed and continue to update the risk assessment tool, explore "beyond audit" mitigation approaches and effective remediation, and produce resources as needed.

"Greencore have an extensive, multi-tiered global supply chain, sourcing ingredients from around the world. The FNET risk assessment tool has enabled us to evaluate this supply chain at all levels and identify the key risk areas and opportunities for enhanced supplier engagement. In addition to using the tool for a full periodic supply chain risk assessment exercise, the data within it is also used to perform live evaluation of new suppliers, informing the human rights due diligence aspect of our supplier approval process."

Rick Fletcher, Head of Human Rights, Greencore Group

RAW MATERIALS AND SERVICES

This group dives into member-identified high-priority raw materials and services to identify practical tools to support companies conduct effective human rights due diligence. The group developed a haulage checklist to make sure that logistics workers' rights are understood and upheld.

"We piloted the checklist with our internal logistics provider and it opened up exactly the kind of honest, constructive conversation we'd been hoping for – it felt less like an audit (by design) and more like a shared starting point, and that's made all the difference in building a genuinely meaningful dialogue on worker rights."

Pete Fletcher, Indirects Procurement Manager, Yeo Valley Farms and FNET Board member

RESPONSIBLE RECRUITMENT

Supporting suppliers to navigate the challenges of responsible recruitment and employment of temporary and migrant workers in rapidly changing geopolitical and legal contexts.

"Responsible recruitment can be a daunting topic for practitioners navigating complex recruitment pathways in high-risk geographies, and there are strong and differing opinions on the best approach. In light of all these challenges, I am proud that the FNET working group has, and continues to, serve as a safe space to explore ideas, challenge one another positively and find areas of alignment to move members that one step forward."

Courtenay Forbes, Human Rights Manager, Tesco and FNET Board member

RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT WORKING GROUP

This brand-new working group reviews companies' own purchasing practices to ensure they address negative and promote positive working conditions in the supply chain.



60% of members reported that the FNET Risk assessment tool helps identify risks (2025).

And nearly a quarter of members' 2024-25 Modern Slavery Statements mentioned FNET's support with risk assessment.

What has FNET been working on over the past ten years?

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS – delivering consistent and coordinated sector change

“Suppliers are being asked to do so many different things from different customers...which can distract resources from actually making a difference in people’s lives in the supply chain. So, aligning the ‘asks’ from retailers is essential to free up resources to implement real improvements.” *Supplier member*

Special Interest Groups provide targeted spaces for consistent collaboration where alignment and collective action can deliver the greatest impact. These groups demonstrate how focused collaboration can reduce fragmentation, build trust between competitors, and deliver practical improvements across complex food supply chains.

The Retailer Alignment Group established in 2024 has helped shift retailers to act with greater consistency on shared human rights risks, building confidence even in fast-moving or politically sensitive contexts. By providing a confidential, FNET-facilitated forum, the group has reduced duplication and conflicting demands on suppliers. A core outcome of this collaboration has been improved coordination on serious worker exploitation cases affecting shared

supply chains. Through regular alignment calls, retailers have been able to agree on approaches and manage confidentiality appropriately. This practice directly informed the development and effective use of the **UK Food Supply Chain Serious Incident Escalation and Management Protocol**. The Protocol has strengthened sector confidence that serious incidents can be escalated earlier and managed consistently, prioritising worker protection.

FNET is currently integrating the **Seafood Ethics Action Alliance** into the SEA Special Interest Group, embedding seafood-specific human rights expertise within the wider network. The group brings together retailers, processors and importers to address acute and systemic risks in global seafood supply chains through shared analysis, aligned approaches and targeted collective action.

COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE AND ACTION

Collaboration makes FNET the successful network it is, enabling members to find shared solutions. This approach means FNET can respond to situations that impact multiple members.

For example, in 2022, FNET held joint sessions with the Spanish Ethical Trade Forum and their growers to learn about how to support efforts to address the impact of floods in Valencia, Spain.

FNET also facilitates regular calls with Sedex to help members interpret and align around changes to Sedex and SMETA in a consistent, food-sector-relevant way, rather than responding individually and inconsistently. This reduced supplier burden, improves feedback into Sedex, and ensures platform updates are translated into clearer expectations and better outcomes for workers.

“I handle supplier issues differently now. In a recent case, I could’ve jumped straight to corrective actions but instead, I paused. I asked more questions, we explored the root causes together and ended up co-designing a solution. That more collaborative approach of less box-ticking and more relationship-building came directly from insights I picked up through FNET.”

Food brand member

“FNET’s membership network and resources enabled me to learn quickly, grow professionally, and develop plans to strengthen our business’s contribution to human rights protections across our supply chain. I’m profoundly grateful to FNET for providing not only excellent technical guidance but also fostering incredible relationships and a lifelong network of committed experts.”

Fiona Wheatley, former FNET board member



How has FNET supported its members?

BUILDING CAPACITY AMONG THE MEMBERSHIP



“Involvement in FNET has built the capacity of both suppliers and retailers, and there has been a distinct growth in the maturity and professionalism of human rights teams over the years. This has a catalytic impact as each of these individuals can do their jobs better and have a positive impact in their own supply chains.”

Aisha Aswani, Senior Human Rights & Ethical Trade Manager at Co-op and FNET Board member

NEW MEMBER SUPPORT

As the membership continues to grow, it is clear that FNET needs to support new members as they join the network. New members have varying levels of experience with human rights, and FNET provides tailored support and an onboarding journey to ensure they are supported and can translate the benefits of FNET membership throughout their supply chain.



When new members join -

they get a year of intensive support to help them understand the tools and learning library. They can be assigned a 'mentor' from another company, often a competitor.



FNET supports new members -

in completing a personalised human rights due diligence framework, from which the technical team provides a confidential evaluation of the company's approach to human rights and the core areas for improvement.



The team follow up -

with 6-month and 12-month reviews to support progress and maximise impact.

“No one understands your stress as well as the person who's doing the same role in a competitive business, so your competitor can be your best support.”

Supplier member

“I was the only person in my business working on human rights, with a ton of questions and nowhere to take them. I didn't need more theory, I needed real people, real examples, and a space to sense-check what I was doing. FNET gave me exactly that: a place to learn, ask questions, and not feel like I was figuring it out alone.”

Ashleigh Horn, Head of Sustainable Food at Cook, and FNET Board member

COVID-19 RESPONSE – PRACTICAL SUPPORT



Before the outbreak of COVID-19, FNET had begun working increasingly collaboratively as the network prepared for the changes that Brexit would bring. FNET was able to quickly galvanise a flexible and supportive space when the pandemic began. Many members feel that this was the time FNET had been most helpful, through their hardest time as a business. The pace and pragmatic nature of the support demonstrated the power and value of such a network in times of crisis.

- At the outset of the pandemic, a few key retailers and suppliers came together to discuss responses, and within a week, this had widened throughout FNET. Within 2-3 weeks, there was a kick-off call with 1,000 attendees to launch efforts to provide information and support for suppliers.
- AllianceHR, FNET and nGaje ran eight supplier capability webinars throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching nearly 4,000 participants across 56 countries, sponsored by ten UK supermarkets. Topics included recruiting and protecting workers during periods of restricted movement, how to carry out due diligence when external visitors (such as auditors) couldn't go on-site, accommodation and transport,

responsible furloughing, and emotional/mental wellbeing.

- FNET launched the “Food Farm Help” website, supported by ESC International, nGaje and many FNET members. The site shared information and advice for suppliers and growers, with over 1,000 registered users from nearly 700 organisations. FNET sent email updates and held weekly calls, which helped members ensure their operations were safe and that workers were supported as they continued working throughout the pandemic.
- Resources and guidelines developed by particular members, such as Pilgrims, BerryWorld, G's and Fresca Group, were adapted and shared as templates with the whole membership. This totalled 30-40 guides, produced in 2 months, focusing on worker welfare and risks for vulnerable workers, especially temporary workers. The guidelines helped suppliers to support and improve their workers' wellbeing.
- Members reported that FNET played a key role in ensuring that Modern Slavery incidents and risks during the pandemic were addressed in a survivor-centric, professional manner in a very challenging context.

“I'm very proud of the way we responded in the COVID-19 pandemic, where we gave free guidance out to as many people as possible. It really showed the industry coming together and working together to try and crack issues.”

Andy York, Social Sustainability Manager, Pilgrims Europe and former FNET board member

As FNET reaches this milestone, it is important to reflect on the lessons the network and team has learned over the past decade. This experience and learning will form the solid foundations that FNET needs to remain focused and resilient over the next ten years and beyond.

1 CONTINUED LEARNING FOR FNET AS AN ORGANISATION

As members share their core priorities, FNET must continue to balance the needs of members with tackling challenging systemic issues, making sure the network doesn't just focus on the obvious and "low-hanging fruit".

- For continued success and impact, FNET must heighten its focus on being worker-centric and increasingly work collaboratively with regional supplier forums to stay as close as possible to practical action.
- As the network grows, FNET must be strategic in inviting new voices while retaining the quality, agility, focus, and trust that have been built so far.
- FNET needs to remain open to change and be nimble. FNET demonstrated its strength in responding to crises throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This wisdom will be key as we face the geopolitical challenges of the future.

2 LEARNINGS FOR COMPANIES

"If a company doesn't put resources & budget into supply chain human rights, it's empty words." Member

- Progress doesn't just happen: Member companies' hard work and willingness to collaborate are integral to FNET's success. This type of network would not be possible without members contributing their time, expertise and resources for the collective good.
- Being strategic and worker-centric: Companies need to focus on making real change in workers' lives through good practice, remediation, and collaborative efforts to address systemic issues in specific supply chains.
- Risk to workers or to reputation? With a shift towards legally mandatory HRDD (e.g. CSDDD), companies must distinguish between human rights and other areas of due diligence. Work must be managed by people who focus on workers and have experience in human rights.

3 LEARNINGS FOR OTHER COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

- Prioritising the food industry has enabled FNET to prepare for the most salient issues and develop deep expertise in sector-specific challenges, such as supporting best practice in seasonal work in agriculture.
- The membership and governance have maintained a healthy balance among different types of food companies, ensuring a strong supplier voice.

It is key to provide balanced platforms for different actors to ensure that no voices overpower others.

- There is strength in sharing problems honestly and working collaboratively to refine solutions across the supply chain, but trust-building is key. The FNET team and members create the atmosphere, leading by example, so new members feel open and brave enough to share.

Where we want to get to...

If you've read all the way through this report, I hope you'll feel inspired by everything FNET has achieved over the past ten years. The members, Board, and team have created a phenomenal environment for practitioners to come together and learn from one another through practical action. Looking across our membership, I see and hear directly how much impact this network has had in tackling human rights challenges and making food supply chains safer and healthier for workers from fields to production lines.

And while it's important to celebrate our history and how far we have come, this is also a crucial opportunity to look ahead, ensuring our history informs the organisation we want to be in the future. By working with our members and listening to the opportunities and challenges that they identify, FNET can continue to improve the lives and livelihoods of workers, staying relevant in an ever-changing landscape. Whether it's spotting new supply chain risks, or preparing for new regulations, we all work better when we work in partnership. We know we have a strong track record of bringing our membership together in times of international crisis. And we will need to continue honing this skill as we navigate the stormy waters ahead.

In recent months, we've listened to our members and launched a sixth working group focused on responsible procurement, as we know that procurement is key to the success of much of our human rights work. We have also been working behind the scenes to integrate the Seafood Ethics Action Alliance into FNET, strengthening our work on fish and seafood and bringing together companies committed to improving human

rights standards in fishing. We will soon be releasing collaboratively developed guidance on Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement.



Looking ahead to our next strategy period of 2027-2030, we'll need to build on what we do well and face into where we can do better. This will mean keeping our eyes on key priorities, and holding ourselves accountable to the workers around the world whose rights we are committed to upholding so that we can have the greatest impact. All the while retaining space for the honest, brave, collaborative and agile problem-solving for which we're known. I want to say thank you to all of our members and to the partners who have generously helped create common approaches with us over the last decade. We look forward to working together over the next one!



Firstly, we want to thank the member companies that sponsored FNET's 10th anniversary celebration and the development of this report.

We want to thank: Barfoots, Co-op, Dole, DPS, Fresca Group, Greencore, LIDL GB, M&S, MWW, Ocado, PDM, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, Westbridge Foods and Worldwide Fruit. We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to Tesco for generously hosting our anniversary event. Thank you to Pilgrim's and Cook whose photos appear in this report.

We also want to thank the people who made this report possible, including [Hilary Murdoch](#) (view LinkedIn profile) for playing an integral role in developing this report, and [Bronwen Moys](#) (view LinkedIn profile) for designing the report.

We are grateful to all the staff and members who generously shared their time to reflect and share memories for this report. On behalf of the network, we want to thank our current and previous board members and staff who have made this work possible over the years.

This includes current staff and board members: Aisha Aswani, Julia Black, Pins Brown, Peter Fletcher, Courtenay Forbes, Bliss Gibbons, Ashleigh Horn, Mel Miles, Rachel Munns, Louise Nicholls, Anna Pike, Chris Sutton, Surmaya Talyarkhan, and Jessica Turner. And former colleagues and board members: Linda Beresford, Deborah Carlin, Sharon Cross, Vicky Dodman, Louise Herring, Helen Moulinos, Suzanne Natelson, Margaret Nderitu, Dr Steve New, Leonie Schmid, Ben Summers, Sam Ludlow Taylor, Shayne Tyler, Fiona Wheatley, Paul Williams, and Andy York.

We also want to thank the team at Cognition, who supported FNET as the network's Secretariat until 2025.

Celebrating 10 years of FNET



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Food Network for Ethical Trade

Company number: 11882463

Address: 168 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 2DL

Find out more about FNET here:

www.foodnetworkforethicaltrade.com and contact us via email at admin@foodnetworkforethicaltrade.com