

FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED COFFEE CAMPAIGN

FAIR TRADE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Traditional Farming

Coffee farming originally developed in Ethiopia as a ground crop beneath diverse shade trees that provided habitat for wildlife such as birds, butterflies, insects, and animals. Traditional farmers usually use sustainable agricultural techniques including composting coffee pulp, rotating crops, and not applying expensive chemicals and fertilizers.

In addition, they usually cultivate food alongside cash crops, and intercrop other plants such as banana and nut trees which provide food security as well as additional sources of income.



Biodiversity and Forests

In the 1970s and 80s, as part of the general shift to 'technified agriculture' during the so-called Green Revolution, the US Agency for International Development gave \$80 million dollars for plantations in Central America to replace traditional shade grown farming techniques with 'sun cultivation' techniques in order to increase yields. This resulted in the destruction of vast forests and biodiversity of over 1.1 million hectares. 'Sun cultivated' coffee involves the cutting down of trees, monocropping, and the input of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This type of industrial coffee farming leads to severe environmental problems, such as pesticide pollution, deforestation and the extinction of songbirds through habitat destruction. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center has identified industrial coffee production as one of the major threats to songbirds in the hemisphere due to deforestation – the birds no longer have a habitat in which to live.

Pesticide Pollution

Pesticides used in coffee cultivation stay in the regions of origin, poisoning the earth, the local water supplies, and animal populations. In addition to the harmful effects on the environment caused by the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides, workers are also at risk of drinking contaminated water and being poisoned by pesticides. DDT, an insecticide, has been banned for use in the U.S. in 1972 but is still widely available for use in

coffee cultivation in other countries. Long term exposure can effect the nervous system, liver and kidney.

Genetic Modification

A recent report by Action Aid in the UK revealed industry research to develop a GMO coffee that can be ripened all at once, thus increasing yield and decreasing labor costs. Industrial applications of this genetically modified coffee are poised to fundamentally change coffee production at the risk of putting millions of small farmers out of business.

Shade Grown Coffee

For these reasons, many bird, tree, and biodiversity conservationists have developed standards for promoting "shade-grown" or "bird-friendly" certified coffee – that is, coffee grown under a canopy of diverse trees that provide habitat to birds and other native species. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, as well as Rainforest Alliance and the Seattle Audubon Society, all promote various labels of coffee that promote tree and bird conserving farming practices. Look for one of these labels when you purchase coffee and you'll know that the coffee was grown sustainably.

Organic Coffee

In addition, many consumers are committed to purchasing organic coffee in order to promote sustainable farming techniques in poor countries. While most pesticide residues are burned off in the roasting process, organic coffee is important for coffee farmers, workers, and the environment.

Fair Trade

Typically, small farmers have never had the money to cut down forests or purchase large amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Small farmers have traditionally passed on sustainable farming techniques to their children. About 85% of Fair Trade Certified coffee is shade grown and either passive or certified organic. Over half of certified organic coffee is produced by Fair Trade cooperatives, but unless the coffee is Fair

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FAIR TRADE AND THE ENVIRONMENT CONTINUED

Trade Certified, there is no guarantee that the farmer received the benefit. Certified organic coffee in the Fair Trade market receive a \$.15 premium per pound.

Small farmers are the best stewards of the land, with the most at stake in living in and passing on healthy land to their children. Paying farmers a fair wage with incentives for ecological practices is the best way to encourage sustainable farming. Fair Trade guarantees that the benefits of organic farming techniques reach the farmer as well as the consumer and the environment.

Certification

Organic, Shade Grown, and Bird-Friendly certification labels have contributed important and valuable efforts to promoting sustainable agriculture techniques that benefit farmers, the environment, and consumers. However, they do not carry the encompassing attributes of the Fair Trade Certification process.

Organic coffee is certified according to strict legal criteria. There are a number of different certifying agencies (QAI, OCIA) that all certify according to the California Organic Foods Act in accordance with the standards of the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM). Shade coffee (bird-friendly) is currently certified by several groups (Rainforest Alliance, Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center) but they work with slightly differing criteria. Fair Trade Certification works with a ten year old comprehensive system of monitoring according to international standards.

Notably, unlike organic certification, all Fair Trade coffee monitoring and certification costs are paid in the consuming countries, not by the farmers in poor producing countries.

In sum, we believe Fair Trade, Shade/Bird Friendly and Organic labeling initiatives to be symbiotic, because what is good for the workers is good for trees, birds, and our shared environment. Many consumers are looking for coffee that is multiply certified; labor and ecological standards overlap and are mutually beneficial.

Resources on Coffee and the Environment

Consumer's Choice Council

Chad Dobson www.consumerscouncil.org
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Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

Bob Rice www.si.edu/smbc
202-673-4908 rarice@igc.org

Seattle Audubon Society

Helen Ross www.seattleaudubon.org
206-523-8243 coffee@seattleaudubon.org

The Songbird Foundation

Danny O'Keefe www.songbird.org
206-463-3019 info@songbird.org

Organic Consumers Association

Ronnie Cummins www.organicconsumers.org
218-226-4164 starbucks@organicconsumers.org

Proceedings of the First Sustainable Coffee Congress.

Edited by Rice, R. A., A. M. Harris, and J. McLean. Washington DC: Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, 1997.

Perfecto, Ivette, Robert Rice, R Greenberg, and M. E. Van der Voort. *Shade Coffee: A Disappearing Refuge for Biodiversity.* *Bioscience* 46(8) 598-608, 1996.

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Robbing Coffee's Cradle - GM coffee and its threat to poor farmers. ActionAid UK. May 2001.