

Coffee with a Conscience

Why we care

Many of us wouldn't dream of starting our day without coffee. Unfortunately, because of the large demand, nowadays most of the coffee we drink comes from plantations where it is grown in full sun without competition from other crops. The result has been widespread deforestation across the tropics and a resulting devastation to biodiversity. Field workers and their families are exposed to high levels of pesticides, which are often misused. Pesticides also pollute rivers and drinking water. Many small-scale farmers lack access to credit. As a result, they are vulnerable to middlemen who offer cash for coffee at a fraction of its value. And coffee packaging is frequently made of non-recyclable mixed materials.

Simple, positive change

- Buy *certified organic* coffee. This means trees are grown without synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and in a way that preserves soil nutrients and prevents erosion.
- Choose *shade-grown*, *Rainforest Alliance certified*, or *bird friendly* coffee. Growing coffee in the forest understory preserves wildlife habitat and reduces use of chemicals. The Smithsonian's Migratory Bird Center's label also certifies the coffee as organic and fair trade.
- Seek out the *Fair Trade USA* label. Fair trade links farmer cooperatives directly with U.S. importers and guarantees farmers a minimum price.
- Certification programs are expensive and may not be an option for small growers. You may choose to rely on a responsible local, independent coffee roaster who has links to the growers. Its coffee may be labeled "Direct Trade."
- Purchase coffee that comes in the less harmful packaging such as unbleached paper lined with cellophane.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.