

## Coffee with a Conscience

### Why we care

Many of us wouldn't dream of starting our day without coffee. Unfortunately, the world's demand for coffee has significant environmental impacts. Monoculture plantations destroy wildlife habitat, cause erosion, and supplant native forests. 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. Even coffee packaging is often 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* coffee. Growing coffee in the forest understory allows for biodiversity of wildlife. But, coffee may be labeled shade grown even if it is grown under a minimal overstory. The Smithsonian's Migratory Bird Center's *Bird Friendly* label has the most stringent standards.
- Seek out the *Fair Trade USA* label. Fair trade links farmer cooperatives directly with U.S. importers and guarantees farmers a minimum price. K&F Select Coffees has both Bird Friendly and Fair Trade certified choices.
- 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 responsible packaging such as unbleached paper lined with cellophane.

**Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at [jeanne@earthleaders.org](mailto:jeanne@earthleaders.org).**