

## 08-25-05 Social Justice Flavored Coffee: The scoop on Fair Trade

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“When you drink a cup of fairly traded coffee... you are supporting one or two or three small-scale farmers on the other side of the world, so they can have a better life and education for their children.” –Gabriel Ulomi of the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union (in *Java Jive*, Winter/Spring 2002).

Maybe you’ve heard the buzz about it, or maybe you haven’t, but you like the idea of helping to make the world more fair. **So what is Fair Trade about?**

Fair Trade is a certification process, monitored by an outside agency, which guarantees that farmers get paid a certain amount, that they are organized and able to advocate for themselves, and they use environmentally sustainable farming techniques.

At its very core, Fair Trade certification indicates that the farmer who grew the product got paid a standard price which is not tied to the (often devastating) fluctuations of the market. In the case of coffee, which underwent a crisis in the late 1990s due to a flooding of beans on the international market, Fair Trade provides stability and a means to develop infrastructure. Since 70% of the world’s coffee is grown by small scale farmers, the organization of farmer co-ops and democratically run collectives has increased the resources available to families. Cocoa is also grown on small scale farms (mostly in West Africa), and has gained attention recently for the working conditions on those farms. Boys between the ages of 12 and 16 are in essence being sold into slavery to pick cocoa beans in countries such as Cote d’Ivoire. Fair Trade prohibits child labor, guarantees growers the right to organize, and requires fair treatment of workers in order to gain certification. Another feature of Fair Trade is the increased availability of credit for farmers to take out small loans, and to gain technical assistance. On Fair Trade tea plantations workers vote on how to use profits that accrue to an account to benefit the entire community.

Fair Trade certification also requires sustainable growing practices; many Fair Trade farmers also go for organic certification, as well as Shade Grown (meaning there was no deforestation, or animal habitat destruction on the farm), Song Bird (meaning that the songbirds of the ecosystems where coffee grows are protected on the farm), etc. On large scale banana plantations which have historically altered the tropical ecosystems through deforestation, single-crop planting, and chemical usage, the shift to Fair Trade farming has led to organic certification or yearly progress toward environmentally sound growing practices. Since so many coffee farmers work on small areas of land, and most cannot afford expensive chemicals, the transition to certified organic has been made with relative ease by many (2/3 of Fair Trade farmers are certified organic as well).

Fair Trade’s popularity has grown tremendously over the past several years; it is now the top growing market in the specialty coffee world, and new products are gaining approval all the time (see side bar). Farmers across the globe are joining the Fair Trade movement: there are Fair Trade producers in Africa, South America, Central America, and the South Pacific.

From a more broad perspective, Community Supported Agriculture projects in the U.S. can be considered domestic Fair Trade endeavors. Although there is no independent certification process in CSAs, the human contact, lack of profiteering middlemen or big business conglomerates, the

support of small scale, sustainable work and the high quality goods produced are the same for Fair Trade farmers and CSA farmers.

Now is the time to get involved in this movement! On June 23<sup>rd</sup> the NYC Council passed a resolution in support of Fair Trade, with a provision to encourage city institutions and agencies to purchase Fair Trade products when possible. Sponsored by Councilwoman Gail Brewer, the resolution was largely the work of the NYC Fair Trade Coalition, a group of activists from a number of organizations, with a common goal of increasing access to, as well as awareness about Fair Trade. Unfortunately, as with many social justice movements, for every two steps forward, one step goes backward: in July, CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement—not Fair Trade!) was passed by Congress, signaling a dangerous time for farmers in both Central and North America.

In light of both of these developments, as well as the overlapping purposes of CSAs and Fair Trade, a movement is afoot to make FT products available in the NYC CSAs.

On September 7th at 6pm at the Just Food office, 210 East 51<sup>st</sup> Street, there will be a meeting for coordinators and/or any CSA members who are interested in advancing the causes of social justice and access to great foods- **bringing Fair Trade to your CSA!**

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**Fair Trade Certified Products:**

Coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, bananas, rice, mangos, sugar

