



SPILLING THE BEANS

The benefits and drawbacks of the fair trade coffee movement



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It's a time-honoured ritual: each morning, bleary-eyed Canadians guzzle down their d coffee. In the kitchen or at a café, they wait a their beloved caffeine fix to brew.

But these days, the fair trade movement has helped of the black brew realize that each sip has political i. It's now common knowledge that conventional c are grown on large-scale plantations in the tropica the world, that coffee workers are exploited and pa subsistence wages, and that profits rarely end up in of local farmers.

Fair trade coffee appears to be a perfect alternative entious caffeine addicts—high quality coffee that is o more ethical option and costs roughly the same as a beverage. Often touted as an important social justice fair trade attempts to reconcile producers' needs wi ests of consumers and corporations. This is done by f prices for coffee beans and cutting out the middle directly from small cooperatives.

Undeniably, fair trade is one way to put your m your mouth is. Yet as multi-national corporations s movement to polish up their tarnished images and tions of market-based social justice solutions be evident, fair traders have started to question the di re-evaluate the goals of their movement.

EARLY BREWINGS

The birth of fair trade is often traced to 1942, wh of British Quakers founded the Oxford Committee Relief, or Oxfam for short. Their initial goal was to for wartime relief of impoverished people in Europ

By the 1960s, however, the organization had m tant changes. Oxfam began to reorient its focus to se produced by cooperatives in the global South, refle from providing charity to offering economic assista

Unlike traditional forms of international aid giv nations to poorer ones, which are mostly unilater with self-interested conditions attached, fair trad attractive alternative. It shares similar attributes wi of ethical certification schemes, such as organic, sw forest stewardship labels. With fair trade, buyers pay mium of \$1.26 per pound of green coffee, and a \$0.15 per pound premium for organic fair trade co

"With fair trade, you get something in exchange more equitable than some charitable donations," s Firl, producer relations manager of Cooperative Coff American green coffee-importing cooperative. "It's that a lot of people can relate to."

Equal Exchange, the first fair trade coffee co founded in 1986, in Canton, Massachusetts; today, est alternative trade organization in the United State

Two years later, in 1988, Max Havelaar was laun Netherlands, becoming the first fair trade coffee label. The name was taken from a fictional charact literature who had supported the plight of Javanese

The label was a small but significant step in the e fair trade, as it allowed existing large coffee roaste

