

# SUSTAINABLE COFFEE AND TEA

## Sip Responsibly!



### THE PROBLEM

While sipping your morning cup, consider these sustainability risks related to coffee and tea:

#### Key Impact Areas



ENVIRONMENTAL



ETHICAL



SOCIAL



INDIGENOUS

**Worker Health and Human Rights:** The production of coffee and tea poses an array of worker's rights and health concerns. Agrochemicals - like methylene chloride - that are used for decaffeination can be cancer-causing agents. Working conditions can also be suboptimal when farms use forced and child labour.

**Environmental Degradation:** Monoculture - meaning a single crop cultivated within an area - destroys the biodiversity of the region, leading to irreversible environmental degradation.

**Water Quality and Overconsumption:** Runoff containing synthetic herbicides, pesticides, dyes, and GMO can cause eutrophication, depleting aquatic ecosystems of oxygen. Additionally, coffee and tea production use around 136 and 27 litres per cup brewed, respectively. Fermentation and washing comprises the majority of the products' water footprint.

**Unequal Wealth Distribution:** Suppliers in coffee and tea supply chains can carve a significant slice of producers' profits. This means the producers see very little income, resulting in low wages, widespread poverty, and unemployment.

**Environmental Footprint:** coffee and tea can have a sizeable environmental footprint from waste generation (packaging and pulp) and carbon emissions (transport, processing).

#### Did you know?

You can reduce waste by using your coffee grounds or used tea leaves as fertilizer for your garden!

### CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE COFFEE AND TEA

Here is what distinguishes sustainable coffee and tea from traditional products:

**Fair Trade:** Sustainable coffee and tea do not come from supply chains that exploit the producers. Fair trade products ensure that the trade relationships are equitable for producers, and can help increase economic prosperity in their region.

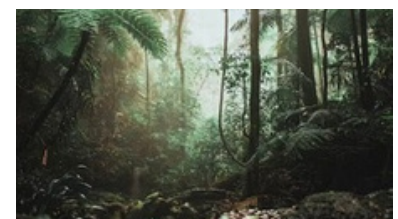
**Eco Labels:** These are voluntary third party certifications that ensure products meet minimum standards for environmental, social and ethical practices. They are designed to focus on a product's design, supply chain, use, and end-of-life management.

**No genetically modified (GMO) or synthetics:** Sustainable crops are not genetically modified in order to protect native species from non-native, GMO organisms. They also do not use artificial herbicides, pesticides, and dyes, instead substituting naturally-based substances like acetic acid or citrus oil. This protects nearby ecosystems from being harmed by agricultural runoff.

**Appropriate shade coverage from a diverse range of trees:** Shaded crops help prevent drought and foster biodiversity in the ecosystem. This canopy is home to a myriad of native bird, bat, and other species, as well as flora, that help sequester carbon and maintain genetic diversity. Shaded crops also act as a natural means of controlling pests!

**Before you purchase tea or coffee, ask these questions:**

- Are there any eco-labels on this product?
- Is this product fair trade?
- Is there an organic alternative for this product?
- Is the information about the supplier's and/or wholesaler's supply chain practices publicly available?
- How, and with what, is this product packaged?



## ECO-LABELS

Here are a few eco-labels to look out for when purchasing coffee and tea:



**Certified B-Corp** indicates that a business has met rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency.



**Fairtrade** is a certification that signifies that people are put first, ensuring that workers are paid a fair price for their agricultural commodities.



**UTZ Certified** program enables farmers to use better farming methods, grow better crops, and generate more income. They learn how to improve working conditions, adapt to climate change, and protect the environment.



**Rainforest Alliance Certification** identifies products that come from farm or forest operations that protect the environment and promote the rights and well-being of workers.

## TOP TIPS

**Look for fair trade wholesalers and roasters:** Purchase from suppliers and roasters that are committed to fair trade practices so that an equitable share of the profits will go towards the farmers and their workers. Find fair trade producers by visiting the wholesaler/roaster's website, checking for the fair trade eco-label listed above, or using the member pages of third parties like the World Fair Trade Organization or Fairtrade International.

**Look for third party eco-certifications:** Products with eco-certifications, like the ones above, are a good way of identifying the total costs of use (meaning all environmental, social and ethical costs as well as monetary cost).

**Look for products with water, CO2, or natural decaffeination:** When purchasing decaffeinated tea and coffee, choose products that advertise decaffeination through water or CO2 based processes, which don't use the typical chemicals that can affect environmental and human health. Alternatively, buy "naturally caffeine free" tea products like certain herbal teas, or low caffeine coffee alternatives like Coffee Arabica.

**Find shade-grown coffee products:** At the bottom of coffee products (where the eco-labels should be), products may list that they are "shade-grown". Be careful with this label, as it is not regulated and thus does not necessarily encompass all sustainable farming practices. In order to ensure coffee is farmed sustainably, look for the Rainforest Alliance eco-label listed above, or the [Smithsonian Bird Friendly Coffee](#) label.

**Choose products with minimal or recyclable packaging:** Choosing products that are bulk-packaged and not single-serving can significantly reduce the amount of waste ending up in the landfill. Look for loose leaf teas and coffee beans packaged in biodegradable or paper bags.



## SOURCES AND RESOURCES

- World Economic Forum: [weforum.org](http://weforum.org)
- Ecologo: [ecologo.org](http://ecologo.org)
- SPLC: [sustainablepurchasing.org](http://sustainablepurchasing.org)
- Smithsonian Institution: [naturalzoo.si.edu](http://naturalzoo.si.edu)
- University of Saskatchewan resource: [Smart Purchases, Big Impact](#)

**Contact Reeve Consulting**  
Email [info@reeveconsulting.com](mailto:info@reeveconsulting.com) to learn more about how you can make even more impact in your supply chain.