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## Wake up to coffee's impact

**By Tom Watson**

*Special to The Seattle Times*

Every sip you take of coffee or tea has global consequences.

But even though it travels thousands of miles to your cup, you can reduce the environmental impact of your coffee and tea. Nearly every grocery store and coffee retailer now offers at least a few eco-friendly and socially responsible choices.

The mass marketing of organic and "fair-trade" tea and coffee has brewed up a notable environmental success story. It also means consumers now have more decisions to make — you don't just choose dark or light roast coffee or green or black tea anymore. Here's a guide to finding the best brew with the smallest footprint, without getting burned.

### **Coffee karma**

The fair-trade movement has grown exponentially over the past 20 years. Fair-trade programs systematically seek to provide farmers with a decent wage, also emphasizing worker safety and environmental protection. Coffee was ripe for this approach, since about 70 percent of world coffee production comes from small farms, according to Fresh Cup, a Portland-based industry journal.



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### **Coffee and tea resources**

**TransFair USA:** [www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org)

**Tony's Coffees & Teas:** [www.tonyscoffee.com](http://www.tonyscoffee.com)

**Equal Exchange:** [www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com)

**Stumptown Coffee:** [www.stumptowncoffee.com](http://www.stumptowncoffee.com)

**Caffé Vita:** [www.caffevita.com](http://www.caffevita.com)

**Choice Organic Teas:** [www.choiceorganict teas.com](http://www.choiceorganict teas.com)

Fair-trade coffee has received a warm reception partly because it often costs about the same as similar types of coffee. These programs achieve this primarily by using farmers' cooperatives to reduce the role and profits of the middle man, passing on profits to farmers instead.

The global group Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) coordinates certification of coffee, tea and several other products. Look for the official black-and-white "Fair Trade Certified" logo used by the nonprofit TransFair USA, which is the U.S. member of FLO.

Fair-trade coffee brands available at Puget Sound-area stores include Seattle-based Tony's Coffees & Teas and Equal Exchange, a worker-owned company with a Northwest base in Hood River, Ore. Major coffee retailers such as Starbucks and Tully's also offer one or more types of fair-trade coffee.

### **New green kid in town**

Some critics of fair-trade coffee say its cooperative production system does not encourage farmers to produce exceptional coffee. As a result, a competing concept has recently emerged, known as direct trade.

Roasters of direct-trade coffee deal with the farmers themselves, paying them a higher rate for top-quality, sustainably grown coffee — often more than 40 percent above the fair-trade price. The roasters may then charge considerably more for that coffee, but some coffee connoisseurs seem willing to pay it.

Only a few area coffee retailers currently sell direct-trade coffee, usually in bulk as well as by the cup. These include Portland-based roaster Stumptown, with two locations on Capitol Hill, and local roaster Caffé Vita, with shops in Fremont, Queen Anne, Capitol Hill, Seward Park and Olympia.

### **Go for the triple crown**

If you've made the decision to go fair trade or direct trade, you should also consider organic and shade-grown coffee. Organic coffee, grown without chemical pesticides and fertilizers, helps wildlife and farmers. Shade-grown coffee farming, a traditional method, provides bird habitat and supports biodiversity.

Tony's offers 10 different three-way coffees — fair trade, organic and shade-grown — sold at QFC and PCC grocery stores and other locations. Most Equal Exchange fair-trade coffees are also organic and shade grown.

## **Eco-tea party**

The market for organic and fair-trade teas has also been heating up, with the West Seattle company Granum, Inc., quietly leading the way. Granum says its brand, Choice Organic Teas, is the top-selling exclusively organic tea line in North America.

More than 50 Choice teas are also Fair Trade Certified. Equal Exchange offers a number of organic, fair-trade teas as well, and many of those Choice and Equal Exchange teas can be found at stores throughout the region.

Since most tea comes from large plantations and not small farms, fair trade works a bit differently for tea than for coffee. The Fair Trade Certified program supports community development projects that benefit tea-estate workers.

## **Green to the last drop**

Make your coffee and tea even greener in your own kitchen. Invest in reusable mesh coffee filters or a permanent tea infuser or "tea ball" device. If you do use paper coffee filters and tea bags, seek out unbleached, biodegradable products.

Use lemon juice or white vinegar to clean your equipment, rather than chemicals.

And always compost your old coffee grounds or tea leaves — your plants will get a kick out of it.

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