

*Sustainability Tip #8:*

Double Espresso. Mocha Latte. Decaf Cappuccino. Our coffee choices have become quite daunting in recent years. While it might feel as though you need a Ph.D. to figure out a Starbucks menu these days, the environmentally conscious coffee connoisseur actually needs to know only three terms: shade grown, organic, and fair trade.

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Traditionally, coffee crops were grown under the forest canopy because the light-sensitive plants needed protection from the sun. As tropical forests are cleared at record rates to make room for ranching, farming and other development, these traditional "shade-grown" coffee farms offer vital habitat for the rich range of species that inhabit tropical forests.

In recent decades new sun-tolerant coffee varieties were developed that produced higher yields for a few years. At the same time, market price of coffee has plummeted—70% during the past five years alone. As a result, more and more coffee farmers are clearing land for sun-tolerant varieties. However, in order to grow this coffee, massive amount of chemical pesticides and fertilizers are used. This not only destroys habitat, but also creates new costs to small-scale farmers already squeezed by falling prices.

**LOOK FOR THE LOGO**

An estimated 25 million farm families worldwide are struggling in hunger and poverty because of this crisis. Many are abandoning coffee altogether, and more often than not, their farms are cleared for logging, ranching or other development. Fair-trade coffee can offer these farmers a way to keep their land, feed their families and promote sustainable agriculture. Fair-trade coffee certifies that farmers are getting a fair price (currently about \$1.25/lb.) for the coffee they grow. Fair trade organizations work directly with small farmers to cut out the cost of the middleman and keep prices reasonable for consumers.

So the next time you choose your coffee, remember the three terms that really matter: "shade-grown," "organic," and "fair trade." They mean environmental stewardship, education, healthcare, and community development—not to mention a great cup o' joe.