

Retailer and Consumer Tips to help make Fair Trade Purchasing Decisions

We can't rely completely on fair trade certification. Fair Trade is about relationships and transforming our global economy so it will always go deeper than check boxes. If you want authentic fair trade, and since there are strong and weak certification systems check out these tips when making your fair trade purchasing decisions:

5 Tips for Retailers Making Purchasing Decisions

1. Trust your relationships.
 - There are lots of examples of small-scale farmers who choose not to pay the high price for organic certification but instead their customers (retailers or end consumers) trust their practices. A similar dynamic is developing in fair trade where many small brands are dropping or de-emphasizing certification and instead building long-term relationships with their customers.
 - Some fair brands offer trips to source for retailers so retailers can also develop relationships with the producers themselves.
2. Look for transparency.
 - This is the natural extension of #1 because a relationship should allow you to learn more about practices of a brand, but even when you do not have a direct relationship, transparency is important.
 - If a brand is not transparent, there is probably a reason
 - transparency doesn't guarantee absence of problems, but allows them to be addressed (no one is perfect)
 1. Patagonia is a perfect example they are auditing their own supply chains and the audits transparent so it can fix problems that exists.
 2. Cooperative Coffees uses fairtradeproof.org. allowing people to trace beans from the farms to the roasters.
3. Look for signs of full company commitment.
 - This can be membership in an organization like FTF or WFTO or in the form of a certification like BCorp or For Life.
 - Conversely, some brands are clearly not committed and are actively contributing to a broken system and should be avoided. Some brands granted fair trade certification for a single product or product line sit on free trade agreement committees, therefore, helping to harm the same farmers they talk about supporting.
4. Look for certifications as a complement to the above, not a substitute.
 - Certifications work best if all of the above are in place and in that case it can be quite meaningful because:
 - A third-party auditor confirms basic criteria are met and that everyone is on the same page when we discuss key topics such as fair price
 - A label allows a movement to be built
 - Be skeptical of certifications without trust, transparency, or full company commitment.
5. Keep asking questions, seeking more information



5 Tips for Consumers Making Purchasing Decisions

1. Look for full company commitment.
 - Membership organizations like FTF or WFTO or Coop Coffees
 - Corporate responsibility certifications like BCorp or For Life
 - Some certifiers of products have higher standards for eligibility (Fair for Life, Small Producer Symbol, WFTO)
 - Usually this information is available on a package, but consumers may need to do some quick research for frequently purchased products.
2. Avoid bad actors. (Don't let the presence of a label supersede common sense.)
 - For example, Dole may sell a small amount of bananas that are fair trade certified, but that does not erase their history of labor abuse.
3. Keep a healthy perspective on certification. Certification can be an added assurance that a third-party auditor agrees with the market claim a brand makes, but it is only one tool. If you know something about how a brand operates in the community or in the communities it purchases from, incorporate that information into your purchasing decisions.
4. Read labels. We read labels for all kinds of information and it's important to read labels to see just how fair they are. If you see a fair trade label, check to see which ingredients are certified and the total percentage of the product that is certified.
5. Be an activist.