

Title:

Certified Organic vs Fair Trade Certified

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Summary:

The title of this article is disturbing. The concepts of Organic and Fair Trade are very important to building (rebuilding) a sustainable society. The good news is that the certifications are not mutually exclusive and actually complement each other nicely.

First, a word about certification. In our current market, third party certification is essential to both organic and fair trade. As the market for both fair trade and organic grows many businesses would rather change th...

Keywords:

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Article Body:

The title of this article is disturbing. The concepts of Organic and Fair Trade are very important to building (rebuilding) a sustainable society. The good news is that the certifications are not mutually exclusive and actually complement each other nicely.

First, a word about certification. In our current market, third party certification is essential to both organic and fair trade. As the market for both fair trade and organic grows many businesses would rather change the definition than to change their practices. We are seeing this now in the fair trade coffee market place. As time goes on a search for fair trade coffee is more and more likely to turn up non-certified "fair trade" coffee, which is most likely just a marketing rouse to attract ethical customers. In a recent search of ebay for fair trade coffee 90% of the results were not third party certified, and upon further examination most looked very suspect. We have seen this already in the organic market. How many products marketed to organic consumers are actually certified? Companies have greened their names but not their practices. Without non-biased third party certification of organic or fair trade we are left to trust self interested parties who will only profit from that trust. So look at the labels a product carries, look into the requirements of that certification and make an informed decision. Know what labels you trust and know the ones that you feel are deceptions. With fair trade Transfair is currently

the only certification agency, so look for the fair trade label.

The concept of growing organic is essential to the preservation of our environment. Herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers seep into the ground polluting our groundwater and it also runs off the fields and into local water resources. When forest are cleared for the planting of fields much of the topsoil is eroded and transported in nearby streams to the nearest lake where it deposits the sediment, filling up the lake. Working with the environment to prevent this erosion, organic coffee farmers preserve the fertility of the land by growing coffee in the shade, where coffee was meant to grow. This shade grown coffee provides the migratory birds with habitat and is thus called bird friendly. The concept of organic goes beyond protecting the environment and extends to protecting the the people who work in the fields. Many of the chemicals used in farming have been shown to cause cancer as well as many other health concerns. These concerns are multiplied when a person is repeatedly exposed to the sprays, like the farmers. How many lifelong farmers labored to provide our society with food and are now suffering from cancer (my grandfather is one of them)? Some studies have shown that organic methods even protect those who eat the fruits(even after they are washed), and also protect locals who drink the water.

Fair trade certified works in the opposite direction. First it ensures that the people are being paid and treated fairly. When it comes to fair trade coffee certification, "fair" has an objective definition through the certification requirements of Transfair. The coffee farmers are paid a fair trade premium (currently \$1.26/lb) to ensure that they have money to invest in their community infrastructure. The money supports the families through health care, education, and through providing the needed capital to improve equipment and methods of harvest so that they can compete in the open market. Fair trade goes beyond community and family support and extends to protecting the environment. One of the requirements of fair trade certification it that a premium is paid for organic coffee, currently a full 15 cents more per pound than just regular fair trade. Many fair trade farmers have switched to organic methods and are now actively restoring the rain forest in order to receive this premium. They are not doing so grudgingly either, they understand that the rain forest is their heritage and want it to be restored. They don't want to expose themselves and their families to toxic sprays when they can make a living otherwise. This explains why more than 80% of coffee certified as fair trade is also certified organic.

So why ask the question which is better when you can have both? Well there is plenty of coffee out there labeled as organic but not fair trade. The environment is being destroyed by some farmers out of what is seen as economic

necessity. Organic is great, but by itself it is not sustainable, we must ensure that the people who grow it are properly compensated otherwise they are put in an economic position which lends itself to decisions with negative environmental consequences. Families that provide us with quality organic products deserve financial security. Fair trade does not compete with organic but it does make sure it is fiscally sustainable for the producers, thus ensuring future supply in our current economy..

This is why the fair trade model works. First it ensures the financial security of the farmers through fair prices, access to non-predatory loans and capital needed to market and sell their goods. Then it guarantees them a premium for environmentally friendly practices, which many times leads to conversion of conventional fields to organic. This model has been working for coffee and has now expanded to tea, chocolate and even some tropical fruits.

The results of fair trade have been amazing:

- * Organic methods are being used and taught
- * Community infrastructure is being built/rebuilt
- * Clean water
- * Erosion control
- * Children in school
- * Quality products through quality methods
- * Adult education
- * Secure families
- * and sustainability

Next time you buy organic coffee or tea make sure it is also fair trade certified by Transfair. Request that your local grocer carry fair trade fruits when they are available.