



A brighter future for dark roasts?

For many of us in the world today, a cup of coffee is considered to be an essential daily 'need', be it for taste or concentration – or both.

At a time where coffee (in all its forms) is ubiquitous in the UK, it is worth recalling how this came to be. Like tea, coffee consumption only became prevalent in many richer countries due to colonial exploits elsewhere. Our dark roasts have a dark history, including contributing to the forced removal and exploitation of indigenous peoples from their land in Central America in order to make way for the coffee plantations that would serve the rising demand in richer consumer countries.

Production has since rapidly expanded, to the point where there are now millions of farmers in the Global South who we are reliant on for our imported

brew. Through more ethical supply chains, despite the unjust origins, there is an opportunity to help partly redress the balance through trade, at a time when millions of producers are still not paid a fair wage and/or experience poor working conditions.

The impact on the environment has also been significant: mass deforestation to create room for sun-grown plantations; loss of other species and soil health due to heavy use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers; and increased greenhouse gas emissions and waste through production, processing, packaging and transport.

The above issues are of course

not just limited to the coffee industry and so making certain ethical buying principles the norm (such as fair trade and organic production) could positively impact other areas too.

At NUS Services we recognise the work some trailblazing businesses have been doing to use coffee production for better purposes. Thanks in part to member feedback, we brought on four more ethical coffee suppliers last year. Within our range (see bottom of article), as well as the well-known product certifications, we now provide coffee sold by social enterprises, Fairtrade pioneers, and those that lead on the 'direct trade' model, which emphasises single-origin, small-scale coffee traded directly with producers for greater transparency.

High-ethics ranges do often come at a slightly higher price (though not always) but we believe it is more sustainable to pay a little more wherever possible if it guarantees better outcomes for people and planet.

Our research shows that student consumers could support this too e.g. 74% of students bought Fairtrade products in 2019 compared to 66% in 2018, and over 50% said they would pay more for them.

Communicating the ethics and stories behind the brand can also be powerful to engage consumers and raise awareness about issues such as trade justice, which can link to other potential SU campaigns. This could include use of POS material and other marketing, which could also help obtain an advantage over competitor venues. For example, the two social enterprises we list (Cafedirect and Change Please) could fit nicely with the not-for-profit SU ethos.

Potential actions to consider:

1. Only purchasing coffee that is 'double-certified' i.e. 100% Fairtrade and organic as a minimum standard. This applies to both catering and retail products i.e. beans, ground or instant.
2. In addition to point 1 above, contact the Trading Support team who can help you source suppliers of shade-grown coffee beans. Shade-grown coffee production, as opposed to sun-grown, seeks to grow coffee in a way that prevents deforestation, promotes biodiversity and is more

climate-friendly.

3. Going beyond just certification to choose a more ethical supplier in terms of values and approach. Consider the benefits of promoting the work they do across the supply chain to students e.g. through POS material or other mediums
4. Consider what packaging the coffee is sold in to students, for example promoting reusable cup initiatives instead of disposables (see our piece on reducing waste [here](#))
5. Avoid coffee pods due to the unnecessary resource use and subsequent plastic waste (which isn't widely recyclable)

More ethical suppliers we list:

- Cafédirect
- Cafeology
- Change Please
- Matthew Algie
- Union Hand-Roasted Coffee

