



Photo: Green Mountain Coffee Roasters



GMCR's fair trade organic coffee and the Peruvian farmer who picked it.

GREEN MOUNTAIN COFFEE ROASTERS

Strong Communities Make Great Coffee

In the mad rush of everyday, it's easy to down that morning cup of coffee without giving much thought to what's in the cup. Once you're past the caffeine hit and the vagaries of strength and flavor, what's to consider? Try: every bean that gave birth to your joe traveled through 150 pairs of hands on its journey from farmer to roaster to barista to you. There's an awareness hit for you. You are an integral part of a global community: the coffee community.

"It's really pretty profound, what's behind that cup of coffee," says Rick Peyser, Director of Social Advocacy and Public Relations at Green Mountain Coffee Roasters in Waterbury, Vermont. "There's a direct link between the quality of coffee that we purchase and the quality of life in the communities that grow coffee," says Peyser. Happy, financially stable farmers, it turns out, grow superior coffee. That's why Green Mountain's mission is to build strong relationships with coffee growers and support socially and environmentally responsible coffee. And it's paying off; Fair Trade and organic coffee are its fastest growing business segments—a clear sign that doing good for the world is good for business.

Coffee is big business. Unfortunately, very little of the \$ 4.25 paid for a caramel macchiato makes it back to the world's 25 million coffee growers—mostly small-scale farmers working family farms and relying on your love of coffee to survive. When farmers don't receive fair prices for their beans, they don't have the money necessary to support their families and send their children to school, let alone reinvest in the quality of their crop. As a result, coffee communities, and coffee quality, suffer.

Green Mountain is adamant about paying fair prices for coffee and building healthy coffee communities. It's an investment that yields exceptional returns—for coffee, for the environment and for the farmers. Twenty-three percent of Green Mountain's yearly coffee purchase consists of Fair Trade certified coffee—sustainable, shade-grown and mostly organic beans whose certification ensures farmers a livable wage. Increasing consumer awareness is driving the boom in Fair Trade coffee—not only do consumers want a good cup of coffee, they want to feel good about their coffee too.

Green Mountain's respect for the people of the global coffee community doesn't end in far-off countries, it inspires every business decision. The company was named one of the "Best Medium Companies to work for in America" by the Great Places to Work Institute for two years running. It contributes at least 5% of yearly pre-tax profits to support socially responsible initiatives. For the last three years, it has held down one of the top ten spots in the "100 Best Corporate Citizens" list compiled by *Business Ethics* magazine. And, through renewable energy purchases, it runs a 100% carbon-neutral operation.

Peyser admits that these enlightened practices attract employees who want to be a part of a company that's making a difference. One strong draw is their Community Action for Employees (CAFE) program, which enables employees to work one hour per week at a non-profit organization of their choice. Employees work on volunteer fire-fighting teams, build Habitat for Humanity houses and join projects in coffee-producing countries.

Last May, 76 employees participated in National River Cleanup Week by caretaking a 10-mile stretch of the Winooski River running through Waterbury. After spending 420 hours on the river, they retrieved 3.1 tons of trash, including 110 tires, a Chevy truck and two snowmobiles.

Interesting how respect for coffee growers' quality of life in places like Peru and Guatemala can create awareness ripples that lead to cleaner rivers and affordable housing in America—perhaps coffee really does wake you up.

So, the next time you grab a latte, remember all the lives impacted by your choice of brew and chose wisely, grasshopper. You have the power to change the world, with every cup you drink. ■

Resources:
www.greenmountaincoffee.com
www.transfairusa.org