



GREEN DAY

As our Grand Slam hopes have already been dashed, it's important to let our National Patron Saint St. Patrick know that he has no need to sweat, we are GREEN for the whole month of March and this month we are sharing our Green Vocabulary for Green people together with a few tips on buying local versus fair-trade: An ethical shoppers dilemma!

Everyone today is passionate about wanting to protect our planet from the destruction of pollution and to care for our natural resources for future generations.

There is international support by political parties, consumer organisations and celebrities, you can hear discussions about the environment taking place between consumers in super markets and shopping centres almost as often as these same discussions are taking place in corporate boardrooms and legislative hearings.

How can we fully understand environmental concerns and energy implications without a working knowledge of basic green vocabulary?

How can we compare properly the organic and non organic products that we decide to eat or indeed wear every day?

So just what do we need think and live green, it's easy... you need to speak and understand green!

Understanding some key green terms and their implications can help us evaluate alternatives between our planet and changing aspects our personal lifestyle.

It can help us decide how we cast our vote; spend our money or how we live our life. A green vocabulary can help us reduce our "carbon footprint".

This short list represents what is best described as a green vocabulary of definitions and commentary to help environmentally interested consumers make informed green decisions.

A Green Vocabulary for Green People

"Organic"

Identifies products made under the authority of the Organic Foods Production Act. Organic production guidelines are to use organic materials and practices that improve ecological balance. Organic production incorporates agricultural system components to enhance natural biological systems.

"Organic Agriculture"

Is an ecological farming system that promotes natural chemical and biological cycles that improve soil fertility and maintains a balanced and productive farming system. Any products introduced to this system for fertility or pest protection, are of natural composition. It eliminates the use of harmful, synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, growth stimulants or antibiotics. These essential restrictions can reduce contamination or pollution to our air, water or food supply.

"Natural Fibres"

Are "certified" organic fibres derived from organic agriculture such as cotton, bamboo and hemp.

"Certified Organic Cotton"

Derived from organic agriculture, the cotton is grown without artificial pesticides or fertilizers. Conventional cotton (nonorganic) farming ranks about fourth in the use of pesticides in the US. Several of the top pesticides used in nonorganic cotton farming are EPA recognized carcinogens (Organic Trade Association). It takes 1/3 lb. of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers to make one organic T-shirt (Organic Trade Association), disregarding the use of any toxic dyes. A typical organic tee shirt is also about the same weight but without these harmful chemicals. Organic cotton is produced using conservation-minded or "sustainable" approaches to crop production. Such practices help to retain and promote soil fertility and the natural recycling of soil resources.

"Organic Certification"

Is provided by various organizations. The most widely recognized standards are GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) which is the basis for the statement "100% certified organic cotton" used by many green companies.. "Fair Labour Practices" - is not necessarily restricted to agriculture but generally supports fair wages and healthy working conditions.

"Fair Trade Certification"

Guarantees consumers that strict economic, social and environmental criteria were met in the production and trade of an agricultural product"

"Sweatshop-free"

This phrase describes the absence of manufacturing conditions currently existing in many countries, referred to as "sweatshops". They are production facilities or factories where goods are produced cheaply by minimizing workers' salaries, and increasing working hours. Proper environmental health standards are diminished, yet demands for high levels of productivity still remain. These sweatshops may thrive resulting from corporations seeking to increase profits by subcontracting inexpensive labour.

"Sustainable"

Means conserving and preserving limited natural resources and energy supplies. It is connected with the term "recycling" when natural products are re-used like rubber (for tyres, shoes) or paper/trees (for books, business cards, magazines etc.), or wood (for recycled furniture). They are made from or made into recycled, carbon based products. A good example of preserving our resources is Trees for the Future an American organisation dedicated to replacing and planting trees.

Unfortunately, most of our energy production is derived from organic (carbon based) fossil fuels that cannot be recycled (non-renewable) as compared to wind or solar energy. All of this is connected to our lifestyle and our "carbon footprint".

"Carbon Footprint"

This is a descriptor of individual or organisational environmental impact. It describes the consumption of carbon based natural resources or the production of carbon by-products like carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide. It's about lifestyle and the amount of carbon- based resources we consume through transportation, climate control, manufacturing etc. Basically it relates to how much each of us consume in terms of natural resources to meet our needs. In general each of us should be committed to reducing the size of our "footprint" to sustain resources for present and future generations.

"Eco-fashion"

Is a general term implying organic clothing that has addressed the needs of the environment as well as "socially responsible" working conditions.

"Eco-friendly"

This implies a product or process than has a reduced impact on the environment.

"Low Impact Dyes"

This term refers to dyes used in the manufacture of goods that should have minimal impact on the environment. Sometimes the term non-toxic is used here as well.

"Green"

Is a generally positive term referring to the environment, organics or even "a green lifestyle" to be discussed shortly.

"Conscientious Clothing"

Implies the green company that provides this clothing has addressed environmental, ethical and socially responsible standards.

The Green Lifestyle

"Green Lifestyle or Green Living"

Describes a lifestyle reflecting a strong commitment to the environment. In addition, it addresses compassionate and positive thinking. It means choosing a life with charitable deeds and practices, reflecting compassion for the environment and others. Green living is being proactive and incorporates spiritual growth leading to ethical thinking.

"Social Responsibility"

Can be defined as accepting responsibility for others and taking action against social injustice. It includes meeting the needs of others through charitable giving.

"Charitable Giving"

This describes a sense of genuine compassion and reacting to it with charitable practices towards others.

In summary, a green lifestyle represents caring for the environment combined with positive thinking about yourself and others.

Ultimately, it is your deeds that represent these positive thoughts in action. The result is a better environment and better quality of life for yourself and others.

If you've learned some more about green vocabulary, be sure to use it to make decisions and set priorities in your life.

Think about adopting a greener lifestyle!

BUY LOCAL VERSUS FAIR-TRADE: AN ETHICAL SHOPPER'S DILEMMA

As we face into a further gift buying season, St Patrick's Day, Mother's day, Easter...it's time to decide on a shopping strategy.

In one ear we are encouraged to shop locally, in the other ear you hear about the benefits of choosing Fair Trade gifts!

So which strategy is best, and is one better than the other? To answer a question with a question, who says you have to choose? The 'Buy Local' and Fair Trade movements both have their benefits.

One way to honour the car bumper sticker mantra "Think Globally Act Locally" is to support your local businesses.

Why buy cheese from Europe when there's a dairy farm down the road producing double creamy Gouda that will knock your socks off?

Buying local refers to choosing locally made products and soliciting locally owned businesses, which have

environmental and social benefits. Products made locally have a smaller carbon footprint than products shipped from overseas, and thus are less of a strain on the environment.

Shoppers who buy locally travel less distances to shop, which also reduces the carbon footprint. Local businesses produce more income and jobs for local communities than large retail chains do, and are more likely to utilise local services, such as advertising and banking. Supporting local businesses preserves the economic diversity of our communities and the unique character of our neighbourhoods.

Sounds great, right? But what about choosing Fair Trade, another moral purchasing strategy?

Fair Trade is an economic model that ensures products are made by producers who receive a living wage, work in healthy, safe conditions and in many cases, employ environmentally sustainable processes. Fair Trade also tackles the issue of child slavery by guaranteeing that there is no abuse of child labour.

In a world economy where globalization is king and profits are queen, small-scale producers are left without resources or hope for their future. Children are forced to work instead of receiving an education and local environments suffer from the 'profits now' mentality that damage environments for future generations.

Fair Trade helps exploited producers escape from this vicious cycle of poverty. The Fair Trade system benefits over 800,000 Farmers organised into cooperatives and unions in 48 countries.

Revenue from Fair Trade cooperatives is used on a variety of community projects, including training of producers in organic and sustainable farming techniques, building houses, schools and clinics and guaranteeing health care for the whole community. So now it's time to decide...buy local or Fair Trade?

It's important to note that choosing Fair Trade products can actually help your local merchants survive in this sluggish economy. Prices for cheap imports made in sweatshop factories outside of Europe are usually so low that local merchants have difficulty competing on price. So during a time when consumers are looking to cut costs wherever possible, cheap knock offs made in sweatshops often outsell locally made products, even though the quality is drastically lower.

Whichever you decide, the good news is that the 'Buy Local' and Fair Trade movements both have tremendous benefits. They support environmentally sustainable solutions, and layers of middlemen are left out of each economic model, helping to ensure that a fair percentage of profits actually reach the producers. Fair Trade and locally made products are often handcrafted with care, resulting in a higher quality product than the mass-produced sweatshop products available in big box stores, and in both cases, the preservation of cultural heritage is a by-product of doing business.

If you're married to the idea of buying locally, remember that some items are not grown locally, like cocoa. Cocoa trees are only grown in tropical regions of Africa, Asia, South and Central America. So if you're looking for socially conscious chocolate in the US, consider chocolate made locally with Fair Trade Certified cocoa. That way, you can support your local chocolate maker AND Fair Trade cocoa producers around the world.

Beyond chocolate, there are lots of other instances where products from the Fair Trade and Buy Local movements are harmoniously combined to create special products all their own. One example in America is from Handmade Expressions, a sourcing partner for socially and environmentally responsible products based in Austin, Texas. They sell their handmade copper alloy bells to local artists who incorporate the ethically produced crafts into their artwork that is then sold locally.

Some supporters of the buy local movement consider choosing Fair Trade products an ethical challenge because products imported to the country have a bigger carbon footprint than locally produced products.

In an op-ed piece for Western M, Steve Brooks, the acting head of Oxfam Cymru points out that "if everyone in the United Kingdom switched one 100W light bulb to a low energy equivalent, CO² emissions would be reduced in one year by 4.7 times the amount saved by boycotting fresh fruit and vegetables from sub-Saharan Africa."

If this is true, then perhaps the carbon footprint issue is not such a big deal after all. If you're not buying that, and you're shopping for a coffee lover, consider Java Republic the first carbon neutral coffee roastery in Ireland.

When you are out shopping whether you choose local or Fair Trade products or a combination of the two,

what's most important is to shift your spending from mass produced products made in sweatshops to ethically produced products.