

# ethical consumer

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Eco-Homemaker, Ethical Job, Investing Ethically, Mercy Corps, Practical Action, The Path.

## What to do about Russia?

Just as many people were hoping that we might be emerging into some kind of post-pandemic normality, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has thrown everything off balance again. Unlike some other recent invasions, and indeed some other 'forgotten wars' playing out around the globe, Russia's move has prompted a rush for the exit by western brands and companies that is unprecedented in modern times.

We are providing some more details of these exits on our Boycott news page on page 48 and on our website too.

Although some consumer boycott hashtags (#boycottcocacola) have briefly flared into existence companies have, by and large, chosen to leave long before any direct consumer economic impact has had time to make itself felt. Concerted pressure by mainstream western news outlets, combined with daily assaults on social media, has left few companies wanting to publicly debate the merits of staying behind. Those that have tried to do this (Uniqlo originally tried to argue that its clothing was 'a necessity') have soon backed down.

All this means that consumers have not had much of a role to play to date in all this. As citizens though, there is much encouraging engagement to be observed in the process of helping mobilise around the millions of refugees who are 'collateral damage' in this Russian adventure.

Whether or not all this company activity has economic impact for a major oil and gas exporter is not the clinching argument as to its usefulness. Like the sports and academic boycotts that have also sprung up, they have an important expressive quality which says: this behaviour is so beyond the pale that we just can't keep pretending that nothing has happened.

As mentioned above, western institutions have

not exactly covered themselves in glory in applying this kind of disapproval consistently elsewhere, but that does not make this response wrong in itself. Indeed, it will now be much more difficult in future for companies to argue – in the face of the next war or invasion – that shutting down and heading for the exit is technically impossible. A useful precedent has been set.

## In the longer term

One of the oldest elements in Ethical Consumer's ratings system is that companies lose marks for operations in 'oppressive regimes'. Russia has been on the list since 2003, and indeed some of the companies in our tea and coffee guides in this issue are losing marks for exactly this.

It is a rather old-style approach to trying to address human rights issues and was copied from ethical investors who had created this logic in the face of the South Africa boycott over apartheid in the 1970s. Within it though lies an argument that says, for human rights to flourish, western capital should not be rewarding the worst dictators with economic engagement that gives them both funds and legitimacy.

It is quite clear from the hundreds of brands now exiting that pretty much no-one was applying this kind of sense-check to their business decisions. And the importance of this support, and the blind-eye turned by governments and other institutions too, in both facilitating and failing to check the Russian government's increasingly alarming behaviours, is now coming into the open.

Until people are able to build an economic system that is capable of asking serious ethical questions about who it does business with, within some kind of logical framework, we are likely to find ourselves being knocked off balance again and again. Consumers will hopefully continue to play an important role in this debate, as they have done around South Africa, Israel/Palestine and Myanmar.

**ROB HARRISON**  
EDITOR



## WHAT IS ETHICAL CONSUMER?

We are an independent, not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder co-operative founded in 1989 and based in Manchester. Our primary goal is making global businesses more sustainable through consumer pressure. Our mission is to:

**1** Help consumers to challenge corporate power by using their economic vote every time they go shopping.

**2** Democratise the market by enabling consumers to assert their own ethical values by using our shopping guides.

**3** Have a fully transparent ranking system. All our data is available to subscribers.

**4** Engage with companies by telling them why we are buying or not buying their products. We also send them detailed questions about their policy and practice on ethical issues.

**5** Push for wider political action and legislative change. Ethical consumerism is not a replacement for other forms of political action. But it is an important additional way for people to exert their influence.

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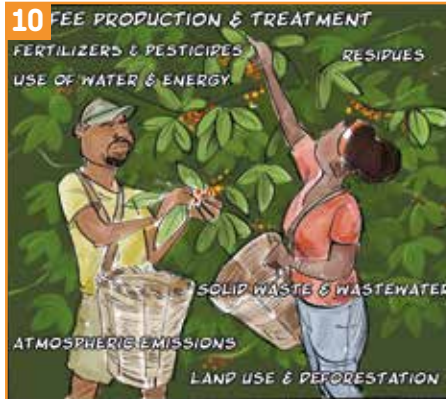
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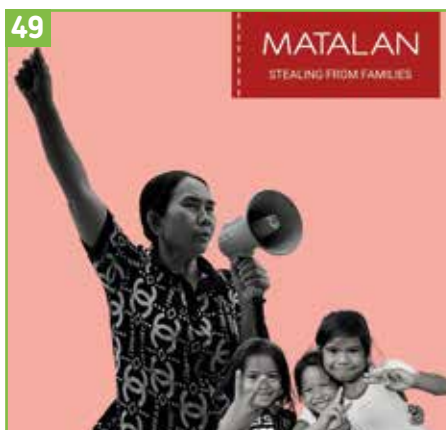


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# Food and home

## VIVA! TV AD

On Valentine's Day, Channel 4 broadcast Viva!'s first ever pro-vegan TV ad 'Takeaway the Meat'. The costs were covered by a crowdfund campaign. The ad was shown 220 times over a couple of weeks.

Viva!'s new advert encourages viewers to make the connection between the animals they choose to keep as companions and the ones that are destined for their dinner table.

Viva! described the ad: "The TV advert follows the journey of an everyday meat-eating couple as they decide which takeaway meal to order. Snuggled up on their sofa, with their beloved dog, they choose pulled pork from the food delivery app 'Just Meat'.

"Hungry in anticipation of their meaty meal, the couple race to the door when the delivery driver rings the bell. Upon opening the door, the couple are shocked to find an adorable little piglet on their doorstep and the delivery driver brandishing a butcher's knife announcing: 'Just Meat, delivered fresh to your door.'"

Watch the advert - <https://youtu.be/OdknF59dh1c>



## Veganuary 2022 campaign success

In March, Veganuary's campaign review found that more than 629,000 people had signed-up from 228 countries and territories which included every country in the world except Tajikistan and North Korea (where the internet is banned). According to the Vegan Society: "Together they spared more than 2.16 million animals from suffering in just one month". And at least 1,561 new vegan products and menu options were launched globally during January.

This year – for the first time – more people signed up in the US than any other country, with the UK a close second.

A participant survey revealed that half of people signed up because of animal rights and half of people were meat and/or fish eaters. 83% of participants who were not already vegan when they signed up said they will permanently change their diet either by staying vegan or at least halving their intake of animal products, including 36% who plan to stay fully vegan.

Veganuary isn't just for January! People can sign-up any time of the year at <https://veganuary.com> to receive 31 daily emails with nutritional info, recipes, easy meal plans and advice.

## Government backtracking on animal welfare

No surprises, but the Government has started backtracking on its promise in the Queen's Speech last year to be a global leader on animal welfare. It is shelving its Animals Abroad Bill which would have banned the import of foie gras, fur, hunting trophies and the live exports of livestock, amongst other measures.

Conservatives are blaming a "handful of very wealthy peers" who make up the shooting and hunting lobby. A senior government source said: "A handful of crusties have managed to seize control. A handful of very wealthy peers are pressing for all the animal welfare measures to be dropped because they fear eventually it might mean their weekends could be affected."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Brexit Opportunities minister Jacob Rees-Mogg said that people ought to have the choice to buy foie gras and fur. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has also raised concerns about banning the Canadian black bear fur used to make the Grenadier Guards' bearskin hats.

Meanwhile the Animal Sentience Bill is going through the stages before



PETA's ad van circled Westminster, visiting the Houses of Parliament, the Cabinet Office, and Downing Street with an important message: "Get stuffed, Jacob Rees-Mogg, and abandon this outrageous idea of a U-turn."

becoming law. It will require that the UK government consider the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings when making and implementing policies. Sentient animals were previously protected in Britain under EU law. This was lost after the 2016 Referendum when MPs voted against including animal sentience in the EU Withdrawal Bill the following year.

An amendment to the new Bill from a Conservative backbencher in the Cotswolds has been introduced which would recognise "local customs, religious rights, cultural conditions and regional heritage". Many fear that this may be an attempt to overturn the hunting ban.

References: 1 [www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/14/proposed-law-banning-import-of-hunting-trophies-to-be-scrapped](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/14/proposed-law-banning-import-of-hunting-trophies-to-be-scrapped)

# Food and home

## No free-range or organic eggs

In our recent guide to eggs, we recommended that if you were buying eggs, only buy organic eggs because they have the highest welfare standards.

But since November, organic and free-range hens have been in 'lockdown' because of the largest ever outbreak of avian flu in the UK. That means there have been no organic eggs available since March 21st – they had to be marketed as barn eggs because the hens had spent more than 16 weeks indoors.

The indoor housing order was expected to be lifted in April, but with organic eggs off the shopping list it's a perfect time to try out some of the egg replacers that we also rated in that guide – [www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/eggs](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/eggs)

## ROYAL MINT JOINS THE FIGHT AGAINST E-WASTE

The Royal Mint wants to take the gold from discarded circuit boards in phones, TVs and computers and turn it into commemorative coins. It is building a plant now which will become operational in 2023 and process up to 90 tonnes of UK circuit boards a week. The metals will be recovered at room temperature using chemistry technology, rather than being sent overseas to be processed in high temperature smelters.

## More dangers from PFA waterproofing

Following on from discussion in our Outdoor Clothing guide in the last magazine about the 'forever chemicals' – PFAS, used as waterproofing – studies have shown that they might hinder the body's ability to fight Covid.<sup>3</sup> PFAS are known to be immunotoxic because they interfere with the body's ability to create cells that turn into plasma cells, the cells that generate antibodies to fight infection.

There is little that anyone with high levels of PFAS can do aside from getting vaccinated but as a consumer, you can avoid products and companies that use these chemicals.

Our outdoor gear guide listed four companies that did not use these chemicals on principle – Paramo, Alpkit, Vaude and FjallRaven. Disappointingly, we found that most of the outdoor gear companies were still using these highly toxic chemicals and over half of them didn't even have a phase-out date for stopping their use.

[www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/shopping-guide/ethical-outdoor-clothing](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/shopping-guide/ethical-outdoor-clothing)

## Lentils for climate action!

A new direct-action group has started deflating the tyres of SUVs in the name of climate action. Tyre Extinguishers provides instructions on how to deflate SUV tyres, offers guidance on who to target and collates reports of actions across the country. They have gauged the campaign's reach by angry emails from SUV owners.

The activists work autonomously under the cover of darkness by placing a lentil inside the tyre valve and replacing the dust cap which slowly lets the air out until the tyre is flat. A leaflet is left on the windscreen explaining why it was done.

The group says they deflated at least a thousand tyres in a two-week period in March but it's hard to judge because no-one knows the numbers of people involved or who they are.

SUVs were the second largest contributor to the increase in global carbon emissions from 2010 to 2018, eclipsing the increase from all shipping, aviation, heavy industry and even trucks. Each year, SUVs worldwide belch out 700 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, about the entire output of the UK and Netherlands combined. If all SUV drivers banded together to form their own country, it would rank as the seventh largest emitter in the world.<sup>2</sup>



**ATTENTION – your gas guzzler kills.**  
We have deflated one or more of your tyres.

You'll be angry, but don't take it personally. It's not you, it's your car.

We did this because driving around urban areas in your massive vehicle has huge consequences for others.

Car companies try to convince us we need massive cars. But SUVs and 4x4s are a disaster for our climate. SUVs are the second-largest cause of the global rise in carbon dioxide emissions over the past decade - more than the entire aviation industry.

The world is facing a climate emergency. According to the UN, millions of people are already dying from climate change-related causes - drought, hurricanes, floods, forced migration, starvation. So far, the impacts on you have probably been minimal. We need emergency action to reduce emissions immediately. We're taking actions into our own hands because our governments and politicians will not.

Even if you don't care about the impacts on people far away from you, there's also consequences for your neighbours. SUVs cause more air pollution than smaller cars. SUVs are more likely to kill people than normal cars in collisions. Psychological studies show SUV drivers are more likely to take risks on the road. SUVs are unnecessary, and pure vanity.

That's why we have taken this action. You will have no difficulty getting around without your gas guzzler, with walking, cycling or public transport.

(Driving a hybrid or electric? These are still polluting, dangerous and cause congestion. See more on our website)



**The Tyre Extinguishers**

[www.tyreextinguishers.com](http://www.tyreextinguishers.com)



## Red Tractor weak on pesticides

Red Tractor – the UK's largest farm and food assurance scheme – is seen by many as guaranteeing that food is grown in an environmentally friendly way. But a new report finds that its standards are not encouraging farmers to reduce their pesticide use and need to be updated.

At the moment Red Tractor is a baseline standard which only confirms that farmers are sticking to national pesticide laws and regulations, but it has the potential to be a key player in establishing a UK farming system that is less reliant on pesticides.

The report found that the standard had some key omissions including:

- No goals or targets to reduce pesticide use.
- No requirement to select less toxic pesticide products.
- No clear requirements to limit pesticide use.

The scheme is owned and funded by the British farming and food industry. Animal welfare groups have long been critical of its minimal standards including allowing the close confinement of mother pigs in metal crates for five weeks during pregnancy.

Read the PAN, RSPB and The Nature Friendly Farming Network report – [www.pan-uk.org/red-tractor](http://www.pan-uk.org/red-tractor)

Ask Red Tractor to improve its standards – <https://pan-uk.eaction.org.uk/red-tractor-consumers>

<sup>2</sup> [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/01/suv-conquered-america-climate-change-emissions](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/01/suv-conquered-america-climate-change-emissions)

<sup>3</sup> [www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/10/pfas-covid-infection-forever-chemicals-studies](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/10/pfas-covid-infection-forever-chemicals-studies)

# Climate

## BP's 30-year sponsorship of National Portrait Gallery to end

In a major win for the campaign against fossil fuel sponsorship, the National Portrait Gallery announced in February 2022 that it was ending its partnership with BP after 30+ years of the oil and gas company sponsoring the BP Portrait Award.

Bayryam Bayryamali, from BP or not BP?, said: "There is no way that our national cultural institutions should be legitimising oil companies in the midst of a climate crisis. This is the latest huge win for the movement against fossil fuel sponsorship and leaves the British Museum and Science Museum looking isolated and out of touch."

Jess Worth, Co-director of Culture Unstained, said: "We're seeing an unstoppable rejection of fossil fuel funding from our museums and galleries. But the pressure is now on the British Museum, which is currently deciding whether to renew its own BP sponsorship deal, to get on the right side of history."

To learn more about the wider campaign visit: [cultureunstained.org/sciencemuseum](http://cultureunstained.org/sciencemuseum)



Entrances to National Portrait Gallery blocked by performance activists to disrupt the BP Portrait Award. In the foreground, a specially-painted portrait of Cheri Foytlin, Indigenous journalist and a tireless campaigner for justice for all those affected by BP's catastrophic Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010.



BP or not BP? set up a new exhibit in 2017 at the National Portrait Gallery, bringing a portrait of exiled West Papuan independence leader Benny Wenda into the Gallery. BP supported Indonesia's controversial occupation of West Papua.

## Take the jump!

March 2022 saw the launch of a new climate campaign to support 'relatively well-off people' to make "The Jump" and sign up to six key pledges:

- 1. Eat green** – a largely plant-based diet, with healthy portions and no waste.
- 2. Dress Retro** – buy no more than three new items of clothing per year.
- 3. End clutter** – keep electronic products, like mobiles, for at least seven years.
- 4. Holiday local** – take no more than one short haul flight (<1500km/932 miles) every three years and one long haul flight every eight years.
- 5. Travel fresh** – get rid of personal motor vehicles if you can. If this is not an option for you, keep hold of your existing vehicle for longer.
- 6. Change the system** – make at least one life shift to nudge the system, e.g. insulating your home, changing your pension or bank, using energy at home more efficiently, getting involved in a political campaign.

According to research at Leeds University and analysed by experts, these pledges could account for a quarter of the emissions reductions required to keep global heating to 1.5 degrees C.

Visit [takethejump.org](http://takethejump.org) for more information.



## New Scientist Live ends fossil fuel ties

After recent criticism over partnerships with Shell and then BP, this year's New Scientist Live festival in Manchester had no fossil fuel sponsors or exhibitors. BP was also dropped as sponsor and speaker from a New Scientist Live online climate event last September, after several scientists due to speak withdrew in protest.

The arms company BAE Systems had also previously been a lead sponsor of the festival but was not listed this time. However, another arms company, Thales, was allowed to exhibit.

Andrew Simms, Coordinator of the Rapid Transition Alliance and Co-founder of the 'Badvertising' campaign said: "The connections between conflict, fossil fuels and the climate emergency become ever clearer. Every public endorsement of arms and fossil fuel companies through accepting their sponsorship protects those companies and is like a wave of support for the chaos that both create. No media or public institutions should be taking money from the profits of war or lethal pollution."

New Scientist Live is connected to New Scientist magazine, which has previously run a series of BP-funded articles.



## Ukrainian climate activists lead call for end to fossil fuel funds for war

An open letter<sup>1</sup> signed by more than 610 organisations from 57 countries has called on world governments to reject Russian oil and gas, and rapidly phase out all fossil fuels in the name of peace.

The letter – initiated by a dozen Ukrainian climate organisations – recognises that this war is fuelled by the oil and gas money that powers Putin’s war machine. 40% of Russia’s federal budget<sup>2</sup> comes from oil and gas, which also make up 60% of Russia’s exports.

The call includes ending all financial services for Russian energy companies operating in the coal, oil and gas sectors – Gazprom, Rosneft, Transneft, Surgutneftegas, LukOil, Russian Coal and others.

Svitlana Romanko, Ukraine-based climate activist and strategist, said: “This horrific war in Ukraine that sees people dying every day is the result of governments and oil giants having blindly tolerated Russian acts of violence and oppression for many years to maintain the status quo of the fossil fuel economy. We call for justice and peace. We call to overcome this. We want no more wars. Nations worldwide must commit to the rapid and just transition away from all fossil fuels.”

The signatories urge the world not to simply replace Russian-produced fossil fuels (in particular gas) with fossil fuels from elsewhere (e.g. liquefied natural gas) and demand that fossil fuel expansion be immediately halted.

However, there is currently no international mechanism for governments to negotiate transition pathways – leading many of the signatories to also call for a global Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty,<sup>3</sup> and support the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance.<sup>4</sup>

## Shell directors sued over mismanagement of climate risk

In perhaps the first case seeking to hold company directors personally liable for failing to properly prepare for the energy transition, the environmental law organisation Client Earth has started legal action against Shell’s Board.

Under the UK Companies Act, Shell’s Board is legally required to promote the company’s success, and to exercise reasonable care, skill and diligence.

Paul Benson, ClientEarth lawyer, said: “Shell is seriously exposed to the physical and transitional risks of climate change, yet its climate plan is fundamentally flawed. If, as we claim, the company’s plan is being held up to be Paris-aligned when it is not, then there is a risk of misleading investors and the market at large”.

ClientEarth says it is acting in Shell’s best interests, to ensure near-term profit does not come at the expense of enduring commercial viability for all stakeholders, including shareholders and employees.

For more information see: [www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/news/we-re-taking-legal-action-against-shell-s-board-for-mismanaging-climate-risk](http://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/news/we-re-taking-legal-action-against-shell-s-board-for-mismanaging-climate-risk)

## IN THE SMART HOME... AM I ‘HEAT PUMP READY’?

MATT FAWCETT of Carbon Coop raises a few considerations for designing an efficient system.

With a new grant for heat pumps – the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, launching in April – many people are asking whether they need to make significant investments in insulation to make their homes ‘heat pump ready’. Whilst some say your home needs to meet PassivHaus standards, others say you can just go ahead, so what does ‘heat pump ready’ actually mean?

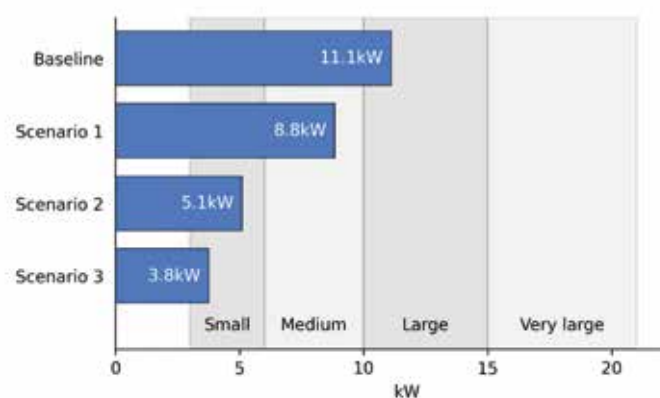
The reality is that without taking a look at your house as a system, a new heat pump won’t work efficiently. If you don’t make any changes you are likely to end up with a heat pump which is either oversized, too expensive, or not adequate to heat your home.

Getting an overly large heat pump might seem like a good way to avoid extra work, but it will cost more and take up more space. With installations costing several thousand pounds, making general improvements to your home can make a significant difference to the price of the pump and the running costs over its lifetime.

With an oversized heat pump and no other changes, you may still cut your carbon emissions (by eliminating gas) and have an efficiency broadly comparable to a gas boiler, but, to see lower bills, a more comfortable home and a radically reduced carbon footprint you need to do more.

Improving your home’s insulation, draught proofing, replacing some radiators, etc. means that you will be able to install a heat pump which is smaller both in size and in terms of energy consumption, quieter and overall simpler to run.

Figure 4. Peak heat load



This graph is a very rough demonstration generated from People Powered Retrofit’s home assessment tool, of a low (Scenario 1), medium (Scenario 2) and high impact (Scenario 3) retrofit and the size of heat pump that could then be used i.e. small, medium and large. Any kind of retrofit reduces the size of the heat pump required – but deep retrofit has a significant impact. So, whilst you don’t have to go for a deep retrofit before you install a heat pump, the more you can do the better.

# A bittersweet guide to coffee



**ANOUSHKA CARTER** investigates the relationship between coffee and climate change, coffee cooperatives and companies doing things differently.

**B**etween 65-80% of the world's coffee consumption takes place at home. In the UK, instant coffee remains the most popular for home drinking in terms of sales, but coffee pods and ground coffee are gaining popularity. The rise in the latter is said to be driven by younger generations, who are increasingly interested in higher-quality coffees like 'single origin' and 'speciality' coffees. Some believe that a change in the industry is brewing, as the provenance and production processes behind a cup of coffee are becoming more valued. In fact, in 2020, sustainability concerns were the most important consumer trend affecting the British coffee sector.

## A colonial past and troubled present

In February 2022, the Fairtrade Foundation surveyed the British public and found that "1 in 10 (16%) respondents believe damaging trade practices are a thing of the past." As the other 90% would presumably agree, this is far from the truth. Whilst coffee is native to tropical Africa, today Brazil is the world's largest coffee-producing country – a status that historically relied on black and indigenous slave labour. However, labour abuses persist today. In 2019, a Thomson Reuters Foundation investigation uncovered extensive modern slave labour throughout Brazil's billion-dollar coffee industry, some of which was found in the supply chains of Nespresso and Starbucks. Another investigation found child labour in the coffee supply chains of these same multinationals.

Coffee, like other commodity crops, gained popularity in the Global North through colonialism. Plantations were established by European colonial powers in the late 1700s in the Caribbean, Asia, and the Americas. Today, smallholders, not estates, produce most of the world's coffee. However, in many places the legacies of colonialism affect the ability for smallholder farmers to trade their crop fairly. According to Chris Ouloch from Fairtrade Africa, "After colonialism

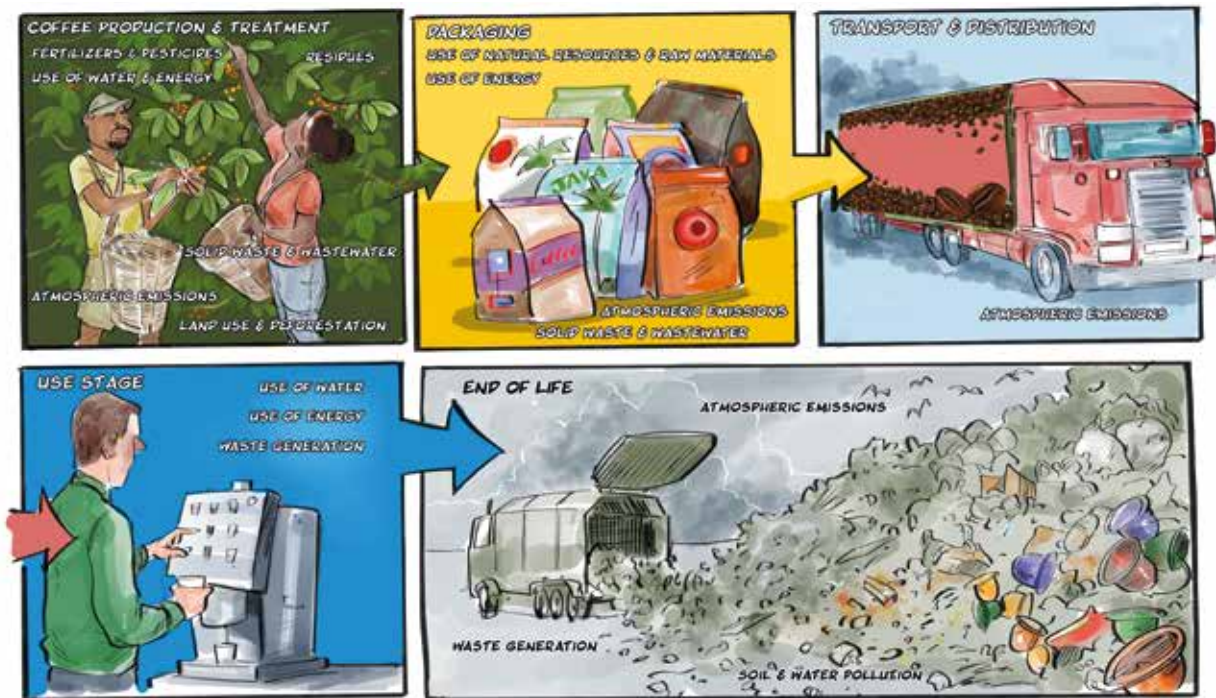
ended and coffee-growing land was returned to native producers, many of them were only left with small parcels of land." Today this means they often have to sell through established multinationals and find it difficult to scale up on their own.

## An unequal and volatile market

Around 80% of the world's coffee comes from smallholder farms, almost all in the Global South. The majority of the profits made in the coffee supply chain, meanwhile, are accumulated in the consuming country – where the coffee is roasted, sold and consumed. Coffee producers mostly export green coffee which has low market value and thus farmers get a fraction of the amount earned in profit by big multinational coffee roasters. The profits earned by Starbucks and Jacob Douwe Egberts were £21 billion and £5 billion respectively in 2022, for example. But what is the true cost of their market power? Coffee is renowned for being a 'boom and bust' commodity as production varies depending on weather conditions, disease and other factors. This makes the coffee market inherently unstable with often fluctuating prices, the burden of which is often placed on the farmers.

A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website

## Coffee supply chain and key environmental impacts



Based on the following paper: Marinello, S., Balugani, E., & Gamberini, R. (2021). Coffee capsule impacts and recovery techniques: A literature review. *Packaging Technology and Science*, 34(11-12), 665-682.

### Coffee co-operatives: Ripe for change?

The United Kingdom is the leading market for Fairtrade-certified coffee, which aims to address the issues of market volatility and secure worker's rights. In order to address the aforementioned human rights issues in coffee production, organising labour through alternative worker structures can help. Cooperatives can facilitate access to the means of production or supplies for their members unique to their geographic and socioeconomic needs. This includes fertilisers, credit, and information and technology. In Brazil, the country which produces the most coffee, cooperatives have been shown to be an effective way for farmers to organise. For Andreia Foresti, member of Brazilian Minasul coffee cooperative, the cooperative can "put cooperative members' products and services on the market at more advantageous terms than we could achieve by ourselves". The cooperative's success depends on the success of each producer member. However, the ability for farmer cooperatives to bargain against retailers and large companies further downstream is still weak.

### Spilling the beans on 'locally roasted'

The term 'locally roasted' is often marketed and perceived in a positive light. On the one hand, it ensures that the coffee you buy has supported local – often smaller – businesses. However, a common issue in the coffee industry is that the price paid to producers is a fraction of that earned when it is sold as a roasted product to consumers. Therefore, when labels like 'locally roasted' are used, this rarely benefits the producer. It is commonly argued that due to factors concerning product freshness, quality and logistics, coffee sold in ground or whole bean form needs to be roasted closer to the point of sale which largely happens in the Global North. However, this is not necessarily true and there are several benefits to roasting coffee beans

in their country of origin. One is that it makes them lighter to transport which means less fuel is burnt to transport the same amount of coffee. Another is that keeping coffee roasting in the country of origin can help lift coffee prices and create more value at origin. As green coffee prices are at a 15-year low, this could help generate vital income for coffee producers.

Additionally, if buying locally roasted coffee, make sure that the coffee has been sourced ethically and carries some certifications of how it was grown. ●



**USING THE TABLES**

**Ethicscore:** the higher the score, the better the company. Scored out of 14. Plus up to 1 extra point for Company Ethos and up to 5 extra points for Product Sustainability.

**Green (good)** = 12+

**Amber (average)** = 11.5-5

**Red (poor)** = 4.5-0

- = worst rating
- = middle rating
- = best rating/no criticisms found

**USING THE TABLES**

**Positive ratings (+ve):**

**Company Ethos:**

★ = full mark

☆ = half mark

**Product Sustainability:**

Various positive marks available depending on sector.



Best Buys are highlighted in blue

BRAND	Ethicscore (out of 14 + 6 extras)	Environment					Animals			People				Politics				+ve		COMPANY GROUP		
		Environmental Reporting	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Palm Oil	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Management	Irresponsible Marketing	Arms & Military Supply	Controversial Technologies	Boycott Call	Political Activity	Anti-Social Finance	Tax Conduct		Company Ethos	Product Sustainability
Bird & Wild [F,O,S]	17.5		○																★	3	Magic Beans Trading Limited	
Cafeology [F,O,S]	16.5		○																		3	Cafeology
Revolver [F,O]	16.5		○																★	2	Revolver World	
Cafedirect [F,O]	15.5	●	○																★	2	Cafédirect	
Cafeology [F,O]	15.5		○																		2	Cafeology
Revolver [F]	15.5		○																★	1	Revolver World	
Source Climate Change [O]	15.5		○																★	1	Source Sust. Supply Chains	
Cafe Rebelde Zapatista [F,O]	15	○	●																★	1.5	Cafe Libertad, Essential Trading	
Equal Exchange [F,O]	15	●	○					○											★	2	Equal Exchange Inc	
Traidcraft [F,O]	15	●						●											★	2	Traidcraft Foundation	
Cafedirect [F]	14.5	●	○																★	1	Cafédirect	
Cafeology [F]	14.5		○																		1	Cafeology
Union Hand Roasted [O,DT]	14.5	○	○																		1.5	Lunar Ventures Ltd
Traidcraft [F]	14	●						●											★	1	Traidcraft Foundation	
Cafeology	13.5		○																			Cafeology
Union Hand Roasted [DT]	13.5	○	○																		0.5	Lunar Ventures Ltd
Suma [F,O]	13	●	●		○	○	○		○		○								★	2	Triangle Wholefoods Collective	
Taylor's of Harrogate Fika [F,O]	9.5	●	●		●	●	●	●					○								2	Bettys & Taylors Group Ltd
Grumpy Mule [F,O]	9	●	●		●	●	●	○	●				○								2	Bewley's Limited
Clipper [F,O]	8.5	○	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○					○	●	☆	2	Charles Jobson/PAI Partners		
Taylor's of Harrogate [RA]	8	●	●		●	●	●	●					○								0.5	Bettys & Taylors Group Ltd
Orang Utan [S]	7.5	●	●	●	●				●	●							●				0.5	UCC Holdings Co Limited
Caffe Nero [RA]	7	●	●		○	●	●	●	○				○				●				0.5	The Nero Company
Grumpy Mule	7	●	●		●	●	●	○	●				○									Bewley's Limited
Lyons ground coffee bags	7	●	●	●	●				●	●							●					UCC Holdings Co Limited
Illy	6.5	●		●	●		○	○	●	●	○		○		○	○		☆				Gruppo Illy spa
Lavazza Tierra [RA,O]	5.5	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●		○	●							1.5	Finlav SpA
Whittard	5.5	●	●	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	●		○				●					EPE Special Opportunities plc
Lavazza [RA]	4.5	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●		○	●							0.5	Finlav SpA
Carte Noire	4	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●		○	●								Finlav SpA
Lavazza	4	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	●		○	●								Finlav SpA
Pret (not from Pret shops) [O]	4	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	●			●	●	○				1	Acorn Holdings, JAB Holding
L'Or [UTZ]	3.5	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	○			●	●	●				0.5	Acorn Holdings, JAB Holding
Costa [RA]	3	●	○	●	○	●		●	○	●	○		○	○	●	○	●				0.5	Coca-Cola, The Taro III Ltd
Douwe Egberts	3	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	○			●	●	●					Acorn Holdings, JAB Holding
Kenco	3	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	○			●	●	●					Acorn Holdings, JAB Holding
Tassimo pods	3	○	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	○			●	●	●					Acorn Holdings, JAB Holding
Starbucks (from Starbucks)	2	○			●	●		●	●	●	●	●		○	●	●	●					Starbucks Corporation
Tassimo Costa pods	1.5	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○		○	○	●	●	●					Coca-Cola, Acorn, JAB Holding
Nespresso pods [O]	1	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	●	●				1	Nestlé SA
Nescafé Dairy Alternative [V]	0.5	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	●	●				0.5	Nestlé SA
Twinings	0.5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	☆				Associated British Foods
Nescafé	0	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	●	●					Nestlé SA
Nespresso pods	0	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	●	●					Nestlé SA
Starbucks (from supermarkets)	0	○	○		●	●	●	●	●	○	○		○	●	●	●	●					Starbucks Corporation, Nestlé SA

All the research behind these ratings is available for subscribers to see on the score tables on [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)

Definitions of all the categories are at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings)

[O] = organic [F] = Fairtrade certified [RA] = Rainforest Alliance certified [S] = bird or orang utan friendly [DT] = direct trade [V] = vegan

# Coffee

## WHAT TO BUY

- **Fairly traded certifications:** 125 million farmers around the world depend on coffee for an income. Buying Fairtrade or directly traded coffee helps to ensure that these growers receive a fair wage.
- **Is it shade grown or bird-friendly?** Most coffee is sun-grown which may provide higher yields, but is connected to deforestation, soil erosion and reduced biodiversity.

## WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Is it in a pod?** Coffee pods use unnecessary resources and produce waste (unless biodegradable). See the Coffee Machines guide on page 36 for more on pods.
- **Is it grown using pesticides?** For agricultural workers and the communities surrounding farms, the health impacts of extensive agrochemical use are numerous, not to mention the environmental issues. Opt for organic coffee.

## Supermarket own brands

We have not included supermarket own-brand coffee on the table because we did a separate guide to supermarkets two magazines ago (EC 194).

They only account for 19% of the instant coffee market which is dominated by Nescafé (with 50%), and Douwe Egbert brands (Kenco, Douwe Egberts, L'Or) with 27%.

However, supermarket own brands account for nearly half of the ground coffee market by volume, whilst individually, Taylors and Lavazza lead with 21% and 18% followed by Cafédirect with 5%.

Check out our recent guide to supermarkets in Issue 194 or on our website. In that guide, Co-op and Waitrose were our two recommended supermarkets:

- Co-op (Ethicscore 4) – all own brand coffee is Fairtrade.
- Waitrose (Ethicscore 4.5) – all own brand coffee is Fairtrade.

## The cost of a cup of coffee

We reviewed the prices of our Best Buys and recognise that coffees at the top of the score table tend to be the priciest. These prices more accurately reflect the true cost and value of making a more ethical coffee.

However, we also recognise that a 200g bag of Bird & Wild coffee for £6, for example, is not accessible to everyone. Still a Best Buy, but perhaps more affordable, is Cafédirect's Machu Picchu organic and Fairtrade ground coffee which can be found for around £3.75 in most supermarkets. For instant coffee, a 100g jar of Cafédirect is around £3.75 in supermarkets.

## Table highlights

### Workers' Rights

Meagre pay for coffee farm workers, alongside incidents of child labour as recent as 2021 in the coffee supply chains of Starbucks and Nestlé (Nespresso and Nescafé), shows that there is much to be desired in the supply chain management processes of coffee companies.

Fortunately, several companies received a best rating for Supply Chain Management. These were Bird & Wild, Cafe Libertad, Source, Cafédirect, Revolver, Taylors of Harrogate, Cafeology, Traidcraft, and Twinings.

Companies which scored worst included Grumpy Mule, Orang Utan, Lyons, Carte Noir, Lavazza, Whittard and Starbucks.

### Company Ethos

The following companies received a positive Company Ethos mark:

**Only sell Fairtrade certified products** – Bird & Wild, Equal Exchange, Cafédirect and Traidcraft.

**Cooperatives** – Revolver, Cafe Rebelde, Equal Exchange and Suma.

**B Corps** – Illy, Cafédirect and Clipper.

**All coffee triple certified as Fairtrade, organic and 'bird-friendly' (shade grown)** – Bird & Wild.

**All products organic** – Source Climate Change.

### Product Sustainability

Companies selling some Fairtrade, UTZ or Rainforest Alliance-certified products were awarded product sustainability marks for their certified products



The following Best Buys scored well and sell varieties that are both organic and Fairtrade and/or direct trade).

**Instant** – Bird & Wild, Traidcraft.  
**Ground & beans** – Bird & Wild, Cafeology, Revolver, Cafédirect, Cafe Rebelde Zapatista, Equal Exchange, Traidcraft, Union Hand Roasted, Suma. Bird & Wild are triple certified as Fairtrade, organic and 'bird-friendly'. Cafeology sells a shade-grown variety.



Also Best Buys are single certified (either Fairtrade or organic) varieties:

**Instant** – Cafédirect and Cafeology (500g tubs and single sticks only) are both Fairtrade certified.

**Ground, beans and pods** – Source Climate Change is 100% organic and its pods are fully home and industrially compostable.

## RECOMMENDED

**Instant** – Clipper (Fairtrade & organic).

**Ground & beans** – Grumpy Mule (Fairtrade & organic varieties), Taylors of Harrogate Fika variety (Fairtrade & organic).

## BRANDS TO AVOID

**Costa** was bought in 2019 by Coca-Cola, known for its poor ethical track record. Costa now comes at the bottom of our coffee shops score table.

**Nespresso** and **Nescafé** are brands owned by Nestlé which is the focus of a long-running ongoing boycott by Baby Milk Action for the way it promotes and sells milk powder for babies around the world. More information on this boycott can be found on our website.

## SHOPPING GUIDE

# Coffee

only. These included: Suma, Taylors of Harrogate, Revolver, Nespresso, Grumpy Mule, Caffè Nero, Costa, L'Or, Cafeology, Clipper, and Twinings.

### Electronics and conflict minerals

Several of the coffee companies examined in this guide also sold coffee machines, or their UHC owned subsidiaries selling electronics. Therefore, these were rated on their conflict minerals policies. Companies which lost marks for a lack of policies were Carte Noir, Lavazza, Orang Utan, Lyons, Whittard, Starbucks, Nestlé, Douwe Egberts, Kenco, Tassimo and Illy.

### An absence of good environmental policy

Whether it's instant, ground or whole, the coffee you buy will have had to go through a long journey to get from the farm where the coffee was cultivated to rest on a shelf where it will be bought and then prepared at home. Unfortunately, approaches to manage the environmental impacts of the coffee supply chain are generally still poor and haven't changed much since the last coffee guide.

Companies which received the best rating for Environmental Reporting were Cafeology, Source Climate Change, Bird & Wild, Cafe Libertad, and Revolver, with all five small companies seen as offering environmental alternatives to the mainstream coffee market. Some companies only sold certified organic coffee: Bird & Wild, Equal Exchange, Source Climate Change, and Suma. These companies received product sustainability marks for this.

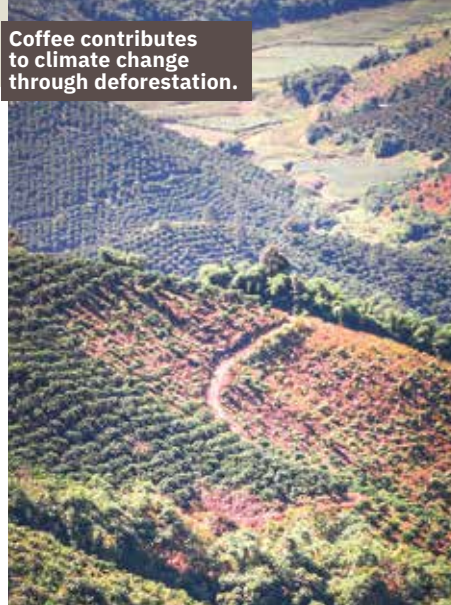
For failing to adequately discuss environmental impacts or to have future quantified targets, the following companies scored worst in this category: Equal Exchange, Grumpy Mule, Cafédirect, Orang Utan, Lyons, Whittard, Illy, Carte Noir, Costa, Caffè Nero, Lavazza, Suma, Taylors of Harrogate, Traidcraft, and Twinings.

Nescafé, Nespresso, Illy, Carte Noir, and Lavazza all sold coffee machines and were marked down for lack of policies on common pollution and toxics issues in electronics supply chains. Additionally, Whittard, Orang Utan and Lyons lost marks as their parent companies owned subsidiaries which sold electronics without these policies too.

### Responding to the climate crisis?

Climate breakdown is affecting coffee production, whilst coffee production

Coffee contributes to climate change through deforestation.



itself is contributing to climate change largely through deforestation. It was therefore disappointing that not many companies scored well in this area. Starbucks was one company that scored a best rating for its Carbon Management and Reporting – which was an improvement from the last guide – as it had more rigorous future carbon emission reduction targets in line with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. Only two other companies scored best in this category which were Traidcraft and Illy.

Agricultural production is one of the most significant areas of ecological impact for most coffee companies, but only a few are committed to procuring coffee that is shade-grown (see page opposite). These included Bird & Wild, Cafe Libertad, Cafeology and Union Hand Roasted. These companies also received a middle rating in this category.

See the Coffee Shops guide for details of the carbon footprint of a cup of coffee.

### Coffee packaging: a separation issue

Coffee capsules have been discussed on page 41 in the coffee machine guide, whilst instant coffee widely comes in recyclable glass jars. However, the packaging in which whole bean and ground coffee are sold in shops have layers of problems. The non-porous laminated structure of a typical coffee pack extends the shelf life of coffee but is composed of two or more different materials, foil and plastic, making it hard to separate and process for recycling. Terracycle recycle these type of coffee bags but not your local authority – [www.terracycle.com](http://www.terracycle.com)

To address this, many companies have started to offer coffee in packaging with reduced plastic content by making the outer layer from tree bark or wood pulp. However, since the inner layer is usually still made from plastic to protect the beans, recycling is still difficult, and so we are not listing them here as a better option.

Bird & Wild and Equal Exchange sell coffee in LDPE (PE4) plastic which is recycled by many UK local authorities along with bread bags, though still not all. Additionally, if you want to ditch the plastic entirely, many specialist and zero-waste stores sell loose coffee beans. This option is most useful to those who have the means to grind the beans at home.

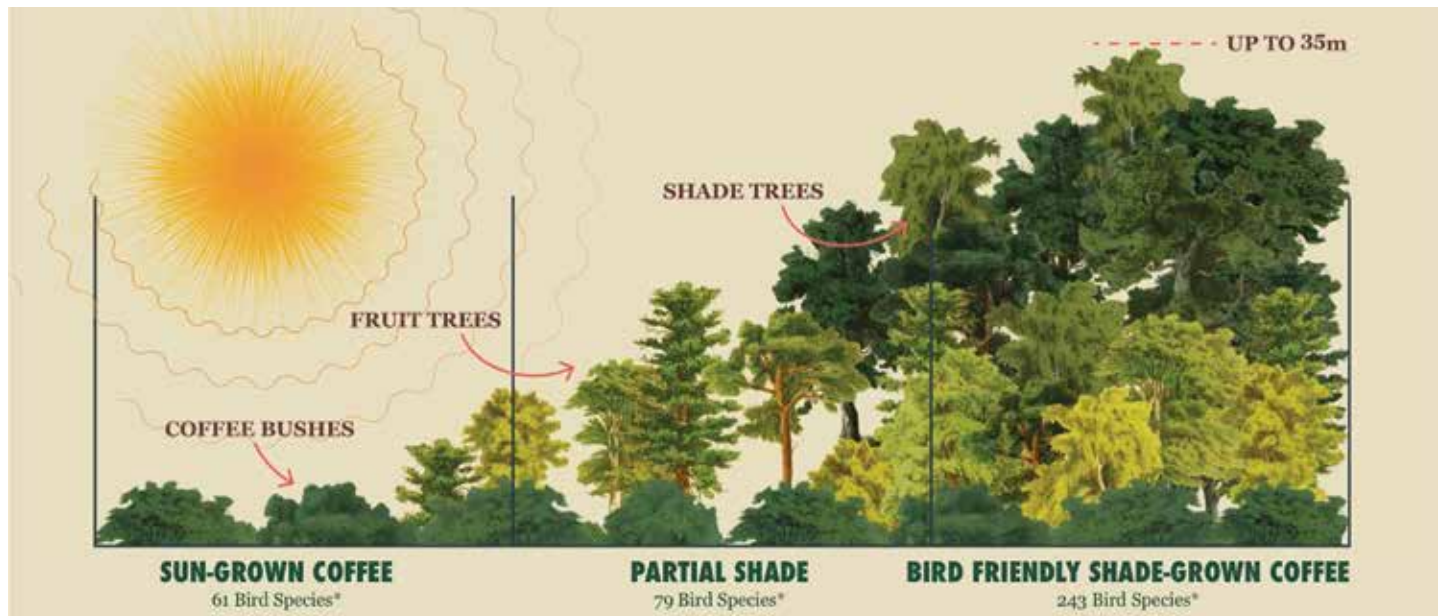
## CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE BEAN BELT

According to the Fairtrade Foundation, in 2022 “over 60% of the British public are unaware of the threats that climate change poses to UK supplies of coffee”. However, the reality is that as much as 88% of the suitable land for coffee growing in Latin America alone could be lost due to the climate crisis by 2050.

There are 124 species of coffee in the world, but just two of them dominate 99% of global coffee consumption; Arabica and Robusta. Arabica is grown in mountainous regions and accounts for over 60% of the world's coffee production. However, it is not very resilient to climatic change, and elevated temperatures combined with low or erratic rainfall make it vulnerable to crop failure as climate breakdown intensifies. It is expected that large swathes of coffee-growing land will become unsuitable for cultivation over coming years, particularly for Arabica. The effects of this are largely shouldered by the farmers producing it.

Recognising the threats to its profits by climate change, Starbucks implemented a 10-year, \$500 million investment fund which includes adaptation training for farmers. Meanwhile, growing coffee in a lab has been posed as one solution to the vulnerability of coffee cultivation, whilst scientists at Kew Gardens are developing ways to work with farmers to commercially cultivate threatened wild coffee species which are naturally resistant to climatic changes.

## Shade-grown coffee and its ecological benefits for bird diversity



© Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

## Ethical claims

The coffee industry is awash with certification schemes – some of which are shared with the tea industry and are discussed on page 26. These include fair trade, organic and direct trade and some coffee-specific ones: shade-grown or bird-friendly.

Some companies have their own certification schemes, like Starbucks. The multinational ended its Fairtrade Foundation UK partnership in February 2022, meaning that coffee purchased at its shops across the country will no longer be Fairtrade assured. Instead, it continues its own C.A.F.E. verification scheme, launched in 2004.

### Shade-grown coffee

Widely thought to have originated in Kaffa, Ethiopia, coffee bushes were historically an understory plant. They require shade from trees to protect the bushes' leaves from browning in the sun. Since the 1970s, though, selective breeding has led to the widespread production of 'sun-grown' coffee. This shift might have maximised production in the short term, and helped to deliver cheaper coffee, but has come at great social and ecological cost.

The gradual domination of coffee monoculture plantations has contributed to deforestation, soil erosion, water overconsumption, biodiversity loss and meagre workers' rights and pay. In contrast, shade-grown coffee producers demonstrate how the conventional way of growing coffee needs to, and can, change. Growing coffee using agroforestry, a traditional practice involving coffee growing amongst trees can help sequester soil carbon, reduce soil erosion, and provide habitat. Purchasing 'bird friendly' and 'shade-grown' coffee, like Bird & Wild and Cafeology, is a way to support these ecological practices and limit the impact of coffee cultivation on the climate.

### 'Grown by women'

In the coffee agricultural labour force worldwide, it is estimated that between 20% and 30% of coffee farms are managed by women, and up to 70% of labour in coffee production is provided by women. Despite this, it is not as common for women working

in coffee production to be members of co-operatives, to own the land that they farm, or to receive training. In Guatemala, the Red de Mujeres (network of women) responded to this issue in the coffee industry by self-organising an association which brought women producers together to find international buyers and organise training in organic farming.

At the buyers end, EqualExchange, a company rated in this guide, developed a 'Grown by Women' range in response to issues brought to its attention by some coffee cooperatives it worked with. The coffee in this range is sourced directly from the women members of the co-operatives which they claim is fully traceable. This also addresses the reality that in many places it is largely men who receive payment for green coffee beans.

From a marketing perspective, Kimberly Easson, founder of The Partnership for Gender Equity, states that "when you buy something labelled as "women's coffee", you need to examine the flow of money and how the co-operative is structured" to understand the power relations within the business. Coffee traders like Girls that Grind in Bristol exclusively sells coffee produced by women, but remains cautious of exploiting imagery around women's 'empowerment'. They argue that using producers' names and stories on packaging ultimately helps sell the company's products which means companies must take extra care to avoid this becoming an exploitative relationship.



# Coffee

## Companies behind the brands

**Cafédirect** was the UK's first Fairtrade hot drinks brand. It began in response to the 1989 global collapse in coffee prices and, today, invests 50% of its profits directly back into Producers Direct, a UK charity that works directly with growers around the world. As a 100% Fairtrade company, it pays the Fairtrade minimum purchase price of \$1.40 per pound, plus an additional Fairtrade Premium of \$0.20 per pound for coffee.

The **Café Libertad Kollektiv** is a cooperative based in Hamburg, Germany and produces a coffee brand called Cafe Rebelde Zapatista which is distributed to the UK by Essential Trading and can be bought at independent local food stores around the country.

The cooperative works directly with small farmers who form cooperatives and collectively organise their own production and export the Cafe Rebelde Zapatista blend of organic-certified highland Arabica coffee.

The Zapatistas came to world attention in 1994 with their uprising against hundreds of years of poverty, discrimination and repression of indigenous communities. The uprising coincided with the launch of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement which brought with it the threat of Mexico being flooded with cheap products which threatened people's livelihoods and ways of life. With this, the Zapatista argued that "With NAFTA they will kill us without bullets."

**Orang Utan Coffee** is a company owned by the large coffee corporation UCC Holdings, the company that invented the first canned coffee. The brand works with coffee farming communities to protect orangutans and their rainforest. It claims "For every kilo of green bean coffee purchased, €0.50 goes to coffee farmers and a further €0.50 goes to the Sumatran Orangutan Conversation Programme". Despite this, it scored worst across environmental, climate and supply chain categories.

**Revolver** is a cooperative that was founded by Paul Birch in 2008. The company only purchases from cooperatives, and more than half of its coffee is certified organic. Revolver, commendably, is also certified by both the Fair Tax Mark and the Living Wage Foundation.

**Union Hand Roasted** was founded in 2001 and was one of the first roasters in the UK to trade directly with coffee farmers. It calls itself Union because of the importance it places on the farmers that grow the coffee it sells, who Union refers to as 'partners'. It works in 14 countries with over 42 producer partners.

## Who sells what?

Since the last guide, several brands have begun offering coffee pods compatible with popular coffee machines, whilst others now offer organic coffee across more of their range. Some high street coffee shops now sell their branded coffee in supermarkets, including Pret a Manger, which announced a partnership in 2020 with Waitrose and Amazon to sell its branded coffee.

Brand	Instant	Ground	Whole bean	Coffee pods	Coffee bags
Bird & Wild	✓	✓	✓		
Cafédirect	✓	✓	✓		
Caffe Nero		✓	✓	✓	
Cafeology	✓	✓	✓		
Cafe Rebelde		✓	✓		
Carte Noir	✓	✓			
Clipper	✓	✓			
Costa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Douwe Egberts	✓				
Equal Exchange		✓	✓		
Grumpy Mule		✓	✓		
Illy	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Kenco	✓			✓	
Lavazza	✓	✓	✓	✓	
L'Or	✓	✓		✓	
Lyons					✓
Nescafé	✓			✓	
Nespresso					✓
Orang Utan		✓	✓		✓
Pret a Manger		✓	✓		
Revolver		✓	✓	✓	✓
Source Climate Change		✓	✓	✓	
Starbucks		✓	✓	✓	
Suma		✓	✓		
Tassimo				✓	
Taylor's of Harrogate		✓	✓		✓
Traidcraft	✓	✓	✓		
Twinings		✓			
Union Hand Roasters		✓	✓		
Whittard		✓	✓		✓





# A nice cup of tea?

**SHANTA BHAVNANI** considers the ethics of Britain's favourite drink.

In the UK, to express a preference for a drink other than tea is an act of treason. Okay, that's not quite true but we do spend around £500 million a year on the stuff and drink 36 billion cups of it.

Our love of tea connects us to millions of workers and smallholders in tea gardens around the world. Many of these were first established in British colonies, such as India and East Africa, to meet the demand of the British market and undermine China's dominance of the trade. The colonial regimes have gone but many of the brutal working practices from that period continue, particularly in Assam in India. Despite the fact that tea provides an income for some of the world's poorest people, the industry remains beset by labour and human rights abuses.

## Who's in the guide

This guide covers black tea and green tea. The table and Best Buys also feature herbal brands. A more detailed guide to herbal tea is on our website – [www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/herbal-teas](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/herbal-teas).

In the UK, four brands – Yorkshire, Twinings, PG Tips and Tetley – account for nearly 70% of black tea sales.

Twinings, PG Tips and Tetley are all owned by multinational companies with turnovers in the billions and together account for about 17% of the global tea market. Most of the other brands in the guide are small by comparison with a tiny market

share and many of them only sell tea. We haven't included supermarkets here as they were covered in their own guide in issue 194. But own-brand supermarket tea is a significant part of the market, accounting for nearly 20% of sales, so we do discuss some of their practices below.

## Indian tea plantations

Only about 10% of our tea comes from India but the appalling treatment of tea plantation workers, particularly in the north-eastern state of Assam, deserves our attention. All of the big brands and supermarkets sell some Indian tea, either as part of their blends, where it may not be obvious, or on its own, when its provenance from Assam or Darjeeling is often used as a selling point.

Although the number of smallholder growers has increased in recent decades, most Indian tea is still grown on large plantations, which employ around a million permanent workers and many more casual labourers. The conditions on the plantations have been documented by academic and NGO research studies over many years. These have consistently shown that the lives of tea workers have barely improved since the colonial era.

Many of today's workers are descendants of indentured labourers who were taken by the British from other

parts of India to live and work on the plantations. Because of this history they remain relatively isolated and with few options beyond tea plantation work.

### Poverty pay

Assam tea workers are paid an extraordinarily low wage. Oxfam research published in 2019 found that permanent plantation workers are paid £1-2 a day, well below the legal minimum wage for agricultural workers which is closer to £3 a day. The study also found that half of the households researched had government "below poverty line" cards entitling them to monthly food rations – official acknowledgement that tea plantation workers cannot survive on what they earn without government subsidy.

### Plantations Labour Act

One of the reasons for the low pay is that plantations are obliged by a 1951 law called the Plantations Labour Act (PLA) to provide a range of services to their workers including housing, health care, educational facilities and crèches. The requirement to provide these in-kind benefits means that plantations are exempted from minimum wage law. However, plantations routinely fail to provide even the most basic services to their workers who live in cramped, dilapidated housing with poor sanitation and limited access to free, clean drinking water. School facilities are poor and lack sufficient numbers of teachers, crèches are often non-existent, and while clinics exist, many lack doctors. The PLA, which is meant to regulate plantation labour and provide for worker welfare, is therefore seen by many as an excuse to pay poverty wages and keep workers in penury. ●

A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website

# Tea

## Restricted Freedoms

Freedom of association and collective bargaining are weak on the plantations. Unions exist but they are often dominated by senior employees who are close to management and act against the interests of workers. Workers' houses are meant to be freely accessible by anyone, but in reality the management requires visitors to seek permission and monitors their activities. This makes it difficult for unions or NGOs, whose remit is to support tea workers, to get access.

## Women workers bear the brunt

It is mainly women workers who carry out the most labour-intensive and back-breaking work of harvesting tea, while work in the tea processing factories – which is more prestigious and better paid – tends to be done by men. Harvesting work often involves walking long distances over rough and steep ground in temperatures of up to 38 degrees or in torrential monsoon rain and carrying up to 30 kg of tea leaves. As men work in the factories they have access to facilities such as canteens and toilets which are not provided in the fields. Because of the lack of toilets, some women stay at home when they are menstruating, which means that they miss out on wages. The lack of crèches causes many women to carry newborns on their backs while working. Women also do most of the unpaid domestic work in their households meaning that they can do around 13 hours of physical work a day.

## A TYPICAL DAY FOR A WOMAN TEA WORKER IN ASSAM

- 4am–4:30am: Wake up and clean the house and courtyard (some also need to collect water)
- 5am–6am: Prepare food for the day
- 6am–7am: Get ready and leave for work, walking 8–9 km to reach the plot
- 8am–4pm: Work in the garden (if even one minute late she could lose an entire day's wages)
- 4pm–5pm: Weigh the plucked leaves (assuming manager arrives on time – if not, much later), sometimes collect firewood on way home
- 5pm–8pm: Home, freshen up and prepare dinner
- 8pm–9pm: Eat dinner
- 10pm: Go to bed



© Traidcraft

## Kenyan tea farmers

Kenya supplies around 40% of the UK's tea. Much of Kenya's tea is grown on large plantations but around 60% is produced by smallholders. Smallholders rely on family labour which means that it is common for children to work, and there are estimates that between 15% and 30% of tea farm labour is done by children. Casual labour is also common on small farms. Casual labourers have no guarantee of work and no benefits such as sick pay, maternity pay or pensions. As with Indian tea, the price paid to farmers for their tea is low compared to the retail price. The market for tea is dominated by a small number of large buyers whose market position gives them the power to push down prices paid to farmers. The low prices paid make it difficult for both smallholder families and hired labourers to earn enough for a decent living.

## Serious human rights abuses on East African tea plantations

In recent years, a number of legal cases have been brought in the UK courts and internationally against companies that supply tea to major brands and supermarkets. Tea workers in Kenya and Malawi have made allegations of serious human rights abuses and are seeking redress for the harms they have suffered. The three cases are ongoing, but the claims made by the workers give an indication of the brutal and exploitative conditions experienced by tea plantation workers.

● In one case, Malawian women workers have made a claim in the High Court in London against Lujeri and its parent PGI, a UK-headquartered multinational, which has supplied brands including Tesco, Sainsbury's, Typhoo, Unilever (PG

Tips), and Betty's & Taylors (Yorkshire Tea). The workers claim that the company failed to protect them from rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, coercion and discrimination by male workers. The lawyers who represent the women say there is a systemic problem of male workers at plantations abusing their positions of power in relation to the women working under their supervision, and that the claimants often submit to the sexual harassment for fear of losing their employment.

● The Scottish firm Finlays, which doesn't sell directly to consumers but supplies tea to brands and supermarkets including Morrisons, Twinings, and Tetley, is being sued in the Scottish courts by Kenyan tea pickers for injuries

sustained as a result of their work. Hundreds of workers have claimed that they worked up to 12 hours a day, six days a week and were expected to carry up to two stones of tea leaves on their back for over half a mile on rough ground and hills. The workers claim that it was routine practice for company representatives to give painkillers to employees who requested them without asking why they needed them. The workers claim that as a result of their conditions they have suffered permanent damage to their spines.

- In a second Kenyan case, 218 tea plantation workers filed a complaint with the UN in July 2020 against Unilever which, at that time, owned the PG Tips and Pukka brands, alleging that the company failed to protect them from ethnic violence which broke out following a disputed election in 2007. At least seven workers were killed and 56 women raped on Unilever's Kericho plantation. The workers claim they raised their concerns about violence with management but were ignored and simply told to hide in the tea bushes. They lost their belongings during the attacks and say Unilever stopped their wages for six months. Only those who returned to the plantation received compensation of one month's wages. The claimants are seeking compensation from Unilever for the long-term physical and psychiatric injuries which have left many unable to work more than a decade after the attacks.

## How much of the price you pay for your tea goes to workers?

Brands and supermarkets take a large cut of the retail price of tea with only a very small amount going to workers. According to Oxfam's estimates, supermarkets and tea brands in the UK receive 66% of the final consumer price for bagged black tea, while labour costs to pay workers represent just 4% of the final price. Oxfam also calculated that in order for workers to receive a living wage – one on which they can achieve a basic but decent standard of living – they would need to receive 10% of the retail price. In the example given in the graphic to the right, this would be just over seven pence. Brands and supermarkets could achieve this by increasing the price per pack or taking a slightly smaller cut. ●

## What about certifications?

Many of the teas in this guide use one or more types of certification, either Fairtrade, organic or Rainforest Alliance. But do they work?

Low incomes and poverty wages are still widespread in the production of tea. Fairtrade has been shown to be largely ineffective (see 'Should I buy Fairtrade tea?' below) in improving workers conditions on Indian tea plantations and there have been allegations of serious human rights abuses on Rainforest Alliance-certified plantations, for example the Malawian Lujeri plantation mentioned above. Certification is therefore not, on its own, a reliable indicator of good working conditions, particularly in the tea sector. Our feature on page 26 looks at these issues in more detail.

### SHOULD I BUY FAIRTRADE TEA?

#### Sabita Banerji, CEO of The International Roundtable on Sustainable Tea, gives her view.

The question inevitably comes up after I've shared some uncomfortable truths about conditions for tea workers around the world. I wish my answer could be a resounding "yes" because I'm a strong believer in the principles of fair trade. But the reality is a bit more complicated.

Fairtrade was initially established to strengthen smallholder coffee farmers' bargaining power, with a floor price to protect them from price fluctuations, and an additional premium to spend on the community.

My hesitation around tea is because much of Fairtrade-certified tea comes from plantations designed by 19th century British colonialists; they involve low-paid workers, mostly women, carrying out heavy labour under male supervisors – making them vulnerable to sexual abuse. They are tied to plantations by low wages and free housing, but without the security of land ownership.

An Oxfam study found that workers on Fairtrade plantations were paid

no more than on other plantations. Plantation housing, healthcare, sanitation, etc are often poor quality, yet Fairtrade rules prevent the premium being used on them because the company is already legally obliged to provide them. What the premium can buy is also constrained by how little tea is actually sold on Fairtrade terms.

But my answer to the question is a qualified "yes". It may not be perfect, but it may still be the best option for continuous improvement (certification doesn't mean fairness is guaranteed). It's the only certifier that has a standard on price. Fairtrade committees can improve worker-management communication. Fairtrade is working to improve its hired labour standards and certification brings greater transparency. And the more tea that is sold on Fairtrade terms, the more the premium can buy.

The tea sector needs a radical overhaul to make it genuinely fairer throughout, with fair prices paid for all tea so that all workers get living wages. In the meantime do buy Fairtrade tea, but ideally try to make sure it is from smallholder farms.

### Amount of retail price going to each supply chain actor



Data taken from Addressing the Human Cost of Assam Tea, Oxfam, and Study of Assam Tea Value Chains, BASIC, 2019.

**USING THE TABLES**

**Ethicscore:** the higher the score, the better the company. Scored out of 14. Plus up to 1 extra point for Company Ethos and up to 5 extra points for Product Sustainability.

- Green (good) = 12+
- Amber (average) = 11.5-5
- Red (poor) = 4.5-0

- = worst rating
- = middle rating
- = best rating/no criticisms found

**USING THE TABLES**

**Positive ratings (+ve):**

**Company Ethos:**

- ★ = full mark
- ☆ = half mark

**Product Sustainability:**

Various positive marks available depending on sector.



Best Buys are highlighted in blue

BRAND	Ethicscore (out of 14 + 6 extras)	Environment					Animals			People				Politics				+ve		COMPANY GROUP	
		Environmental Reporting	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Palm Oil	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Management	Irresponsible Marketing	Arms & Military Supply	Controversial Technologies	Boycott Call	Political Activity	Anti-Social Finance	Tax Conduct		Company Ethos
Hampstead Tea [F,O]	16.5	○																	★	2	Hampstead Tea & Coffee Co Ltd
Revolver Coop Tea [F,O]	16.5	○																	★	2	Revolver World
Hambleden Herbs [O]	16																		★	1	Hambleden Herbs
Qi [F,O]	16																			2	Universal Village Int'l
Steenbergs Christmas tea [F,O]	16																			2	Steenbergs
Hampstead Tea [O]	15.5	○																	★	1	Hampstead Tea & Coffee Co Ltd
London Tea Co green tea [F,O]	15.5	●	○																★	2	Cafédirect
Eleven O'Clock rooibos [O,RA]	15	○																		1.5	Tea Times Holding Ltd
Qi [O]	15																			1	Universal Village Int'l
Steenbergs [O]	15																			1	Steenbergs
Cafédirect [F]	14.5	●	○																★	1	Cafédirect
Clearspring Japanese tea [O]	14.5	○	○							○									★	1	Clearspring Ltd
Dragonfly [O]	14.5	○																		1	Tea Times Holding Ltd
Morningtown [S]	14.5	○																	☆	0.5	Postcard Teas Limited
London Tea Company [F]	14.5	●	○																★	1	Cafédirect
Tick Tock rooibos [O]	14.5	○																		1	Tea Times Holding Ltd
Postcard Teas	14	○																	☆		Postcard Teas Limited
Qi	14																				Universal Village Int'l
Steenbergs	14																				Steenbergs
Traidcraft [F]	14	●						●											★	1	Traidcraft Foundation
Dragonfly	13.5	○																			Tea Times Holding Ltd
Higher Living, Dr Stuarts [O]	13.5	○								●										1	Only Natural Products Ltd
Essential herbal teas [O]	13	●	●					○		○									★	1	Essential Trading Co-operative
Greenypeeps [O, F]	12.5	●	○							●										1	Milly Green Designs, Eswaran
Thompson's [O]	12.5	●	●							○										1	Punjana Ltd
Floradix herbal [O]	11.5	○	○		○	○	○	○		●										1	Salus-Haus
Thompson's	11.5	●	●							○											Punjana Ltd
Yogi Tea [O]	11	●	●						○	○	●		●						★	1	Sikh Dharma International
Clipper [F,O]	8.5	○	●	○		○	○	●	●	○	○	○				○	●	☆	2	Charles Jobson, PAI Partners	
Taylor's of Harrogate [RA]	8	●	●		●	●	●	●					○							0.5	Bettys & Taylors Group Ltd
Yorkshire Tea [RA]	8	●	●		●	●	●	●					○							0.5	Bettys & Taylors Group Ltd
Clipper Classic Everyday [F]	7.5	○	●	○		○	○	●	●	○	○	○				○	●	☆	1	Charles Jobson, PAI Partners	
Clipper [O]	7.5	○	●	○		○	○	●	●	○	○	○				○	●	☆	1	Charles Jobson, PAI Partners	
Heath & Heather [O]	7.5	●	●		○			●	●	○	○	●					●			1	Zetland Capital Partners LLP
Ridgways [F or O]	7.5	●	●		○			●	●	○	○	●					●			1	Zetland Capital Partners LLP
Fresh Brew, Glengettie, Lift	6.5	●	●		○			●	●	○	○	●					●				Zetland Capital Partners LLP
Typhoo	6.5	●	●		○			●	●	○	○	●					●				Zetland Capital Partners LLP
Good Earth [RA]	5.5	●	●	○		●		○	○	○	○	○	●	○		○	●	○		0.5	Tata Consumer Products
Teapigs Everyday Brew [RA]	5.5	●	●	○		●		○	○	○	○	○	●	○		○	●	○		0.5	Tata Consumer Products
Tetley [RA]	5.5	●	●	○		●		○	○	○	○	○	●	○		○	●	○		0.5	Tata Consumer Products
Teapigs	5	●	●	○		●		○	○	○	○	○	●	○		○	●	○			Tata Consumer Products
Pukka Herbs [O,FL]	2.5	○		●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●		1.5	Unilever PLC
Twinings Breakfast [O,F]	2.5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	☆	2	Associated British Foods
Jacksons of Piccadilly [F]	1.5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	☆	1	Associated British Foods
PG Tips [RA]	1.5	○		●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●		0.5	Unilever PLC
Twinings	0.5	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	●	●	☆		Associated British Foods

All the research behind these ratings is available for subscribers to see on the score tables on [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)

Definitions of all the categories are at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings)

[O] = organic [F] = Fairtrade certified [RA] = Rainforest Alliance certified [FL] = Fair for Life [S] = transparency of farmer wages

# Tea

## Score table highlights Price comparison

### Environmental Reporting

Tea is mostly grown on plantations which are intensive monocultures where pesticides, insecticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilisers are often used. This reduces biodiversity, erodes the soil and can generate chemical runoff into nearby bodies of water.

Many of the small companies in this guide are mostly or wholly organic and therefore avoid these practices. Qi, Hampstead Tea, Hambleton Herbs, Steenberg, Dragonfly, Higher Living, Tick Tock, Dr Stuarts, Eleven O'Clock, Morningtown, Floradix, Postcard and Revolver World Coop Tea, all got best ratings in our Environmental Reporting category for this reason.

Our Best Buys Qi and Postcard stated that their tea didn't come from plantations but grew in polycultures amongst other native flora or crops.

Of the four market leaders, Tata (Tetley, Teapigs) and Associated British Foods (Twinings, Jacksons of Piccadilly) and Yorkshire Tea got worst ratings and Unilever (PG Tips, Pukka) got a middle rating.

### Carbon Management and Reporting

The carbon rating is new since the last time we did this guide, so this is the first time the tea companies have been rated for what they're doing to reduce their emissions.

To get a best rating, small companies have to discuss their carbon impacts and plausible ways they have reduced them in the past and will reduce them in the future. Hambleton Herbs, Qi, Steenberg, Traidcraft, did this and got best ratings. Other small companies discussed their emissions only very briefly or not at all and so got a middle rating.

Large companies also have to report their emissions figures annually and have a target to reduce them by at least 2.5% a year without offsetting. Unilever (PG Tips, Pukka) got a best rating. The other larger companies got worst ratings.

**See the Coffee Shops guide on page 29 for the carbon footprint of a cup of tea.**

We compared the prices of our Best Buys and the big companies. We looked at the price of a teabag of the companies' 'everyday,' 'family' or 'breakfast' teas.

There was a wide range of prices and most of the companies with high Ethiscores were at the more expensive end but Traidcraft and Cafédirect cost under 5p – similar to big brand and supermarket prices – and Qi and Postcard cost less than 10p.

### WHAT TO BUY

- **Is it a small company sourcing from a small farmer?** Big companies dominate the tea market and can use their power to suppress prices. The best way to undermine their dominance is to buy from a small company that buys from named smallholder farmers.
- **Is it organic?** Tea plantations often use large quantities of chemical pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers which have negative environmental impacts. Buy organic.
- **Does the company publish its full list of suppliers?** There's no excuse for them not to, and conditions for workers won't improve until companies take this step.

### WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Do the teabags contain plastic?** There are lots of teabags available now (see page 23) which don't, so it's easy to avoid. Better still, buy loose leaf. ●

### BRANDS TO AVOID

**Tata** (Tetley, Teapigs, Good Earth) owns arms and chemical manufacturers, and part owns Indian tea plantations criticised for appalling worker conditions.

**Twinings and Jacksons of Piccadilly** owner, Associated British Foods lost marks in all categories and was bottom of the table with an Ethiscore of 0.5.



### Black & Green tea

Our Best Buys are all small companies taking steps to improve farmer and worker livelihoods.

**Hampstead Tea, Revolver Coop Tea, Hambleton Herbs, Qi, Steenberg, London Tea Company, Cafédirect, Clearspring, Dragonfly, Morningtown, Postcard, Traidcraft** are all Best Buys.

Apart from Postcard, all our Best Buys are either fully organic-certified or mostly sell organic-certified teas. Most also sell Fairtrade tea.



### Herbal tea

We recommend looking for small-scale projects that sustainably grow or harvest herbs for teas, or growing or gathering your own.

Best Buys for shop-bought are loose teas from **Postcard** and **Steenberg** and double certified teabags (Fairtrade and organic) from **Hampstead Teas**.

Or buy organic herbals from **Essential** (mostly fair trade too), **Hambleton Herbs** or **Dragonfly**, organic rooibos from **Eleven O'Clock** or **Tick Tock**, or the Fairtrade herbals from the **London Tea Company**.



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has. 9 times out of 10 this will be the brand (or brands) that are top of the table but sometimes an ethical company which is truly innovative scores less well on our rigid scoring system and we use the Best Buy and Recommended section to acknowledge this. A company cannot be a Best Buy if it scores worst for Supply Chain Management but it can be a Recommended brand.

# Tea

## Supply chain transparency

When we last published this guide in 2018, we highlighted Traidcraft's Who Picked My Tea campaign which encouraged consumers to write to tea brands asking them to publish a full list of their tea suppliers. Before then, tea brands rarely published data on where they bought their tea. This made it difficult to hold them or the tea estates to account for worker conditions as no one knew where company standards were supposed to apply. As a result of the campaign, eight UK brands and buyers of tea published supplier lists.

Building on this campaign, in 2021, the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) approached 65 companies, 26 of which were UK-based, and asked them to disclose their tea supplier lists and to provide information about their human rights and sourcing policies.

Ten companies fully disclosed their supply chains and three of them are in this guide: Twinings, Yogi Tea and Yorkshire Tea.

Three supermarkets, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons and Tesco, were also among the ten.

Clipper, Tetley, Typhoo, Unilever (PG Tips, Pukka) partially disclosed their supplier lists.

Some companies did not reply at all, including Sainsbury's and Lidl.

BHRRC points out that, as some



companies were able to fully disclose, including those with large complex supply chains, disclosure isn't difficult. The determining factor is a company's willingness to do so. It concludes that transparency in supply chains is an essential first step to making labour rights abuses – from forced labour and gender based-violence to wage violations – discoverable and, therefore, for these abuses to be addressed.

### Is tea vegan?

Yes. But some of the companies which sell tea also sell animal products and lost marks for animal rights or factory

farming. Vegans may want to avoid them.

- Associated British Foods, which owns **Twinings** and **Jacksons of Piccadilly**, owns pig farms and sells pork which isn't organic so lost marks for animal rights and factory farming.
  - Ecotone Group, which owns **Clipper**, owns a brand which sells organic ham and sausages, so it lost marks for animal rights but not factory farming.
  - **Traidcraft** sells honey, silk and fish so lost marks for animal rights.
  - Bettys and Taylors, which owns **Yorkshire Tea** and **Taylor's of Harrogate**, owns tea rooms which sell non-organic meat and dairy products so lost marks for factory farming and animal rights.
  - Zetland Capital, which owns **Typhoo**, **Ridgways**, **Heath & Heather**, **Fresh Brew**, **Glengettie and Lift**, has hotels in its portfolio which sell non-organic meat, fish, dairy products and eggs so also lost marks for factory farming and animal rights.
  - Unilever, which owns **PG Tips** and **Pukka**, uses eggs from caged hens and does not prohibit zero-grazing practices in its dairy supply chain and so lost marks for animal rights and factory farming.
- Associated British Foods and Unilever also lost marks for animal testing as they did not have policies which fully prohibited its use.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Conditions in tea supply chains have been so bad for so long, it's easy to feel defeated and powerless. But given that we drink so much of the stuff, we do still have some influence.

Big companies aren't doing enough to increase workers' wages. Our Best Buys are all small companies taking steps to improve farmer and worker livelihoods. For example:

- As well as selling Fairtrade tea, Qi and Cafédirect/London Tea state that they source from smallholder growers.
- Postcard also sources from small farmers.
- Hambleden Herbs, Clearspring and Dragonfly mentioned developing long-term relationships with their suppliers.

Not many of the Best Buy companies publish full supplier lists and that's an area where they could improve but buying from companies like these helps to take power away from the big brands.

If you're really addicted to a big company's particular house blend, contact them and ask them to publish their full supplier list if they don't already do so, ask them how much of the price you pay goes to workers, and tell them that it matters to you that all supply chain workers are paid a living wage. Twitter, or publicly on other social media, is a great way of doing this.



## Plastic in teabags

The plastic, polypropylene, has commonly been used to seal teabags. On contact with hot water these bags release billions of micro and nanoplastic particles which are potentially harmful to the environment. Many people dispose of teabags in their home or local authority compost bins which means they are likely to end up in the soil where, if they contain plastic, they will remain.

As a result of increased public awareness and concern, many companies have taken action on the issue and most companies reviewed for this guide provided information on their websites about what their teabags are made of.

### Oil or plant-based plastic?

As a replacement for plastic, some companies have switched to using PLA (Polylactic Acid) which is also a plastic but is made from plant sources, often corn. PLA will not break down in your home compost but can be disposed of in your council food waste bin.

### Which teabags are plastic-free?

The best way to avoid tea bags which contain plastic is to drink loose leaf tea. On the table on the right, you can see which companies sell loose leaf and whether their teabags are plastic-free, use PLA, or are still using some plastic. Some companies have made changes to their teabags quite recently. If you've got some old packets in your cupboard, check what the packet says.



#### Best: plastic free\*

**Clearspring** – loose leaf and teabags

**Essential** – teabags

**Hambleden Herbs** – loose leaf and teabags are mostly plastic-free, switching to fully plastic-free as stocks run out

**Hampstead Tea** – loose leaf and teabags

**Heath and Heather** – teabags

**Higher Living and Dr Stuart's** – loose leaf and teabags

**Postcard** – only sell loose leaf

**Pukka** – teabags

**Qi** – loose leaf and teabags. The company told us that its previous supply of plastic-free teabags was interrupted but that it will start using them again by July 2022

**Teapigs** – loose leaf and teabags

**Yogj Tea** – loose leaf and teabags

#### Middle: using some PLA\*

**Clipper** – teabags. Also sells loose leaf.

**Dragonfly** – organic range is plastic-free, tea pyramids contain PLA. Also sells loose leaf.

**Eleven O'clock** – teabags

**Good Earth** – teabags. Also sells loose leaf.

**Greenypeeps** – teabags are plastic-free and tea pyramids contain PLA

**London Tea Company** – teabags are plastic-free and tea pyramids contain PLA. Also sells loose leaf.

**PG Tips** – teabags contain PLA. Also sells loose leaf.

**Revolver World Coop Tea** – pyramid teabags contain PLA

**Tick Tock** – teabags contain PLA. Also sells loose leaf.

**Typhoo, Fresh Brew, Glengettie, Ridgways** – teabags contain plastic, switching to all PLA by April 2022. Also sells loose leaf.

#### Worst: still using some plastic or no/unclear information

**Floradix** – teabags which according to the company website “are sealed using natural products, and are made from paper and string”

**Steenbergs** – mostly sell loose leaf but sells small number of pyramid tea bags which contain plastic

**Tetley** – teabags contain plastic, currently switching to PLA teabags starting with the Tetley Original brand

**Thompsons** – teabags, no information about plastic. Also sells loose leaf.

**Traidcraft** – teabags are not plastic-free, moving to PLA teabags for bulk (1000 teabag) box. Also sells loose leaf.

**Twinings/Jacksons** – teabags contain plastic. Also sells loose leaf.

**Yorkshire Tea** – some teabags use PLA (Yorkshire Tea, Yorkshire Gold, Yorkshire Tea Decaf and Yorkshire Tea for Hard Water), and some still use plastic (Biscuit Brew, Toast & Jam Brew, Bedtime Brew). Also sells loose leaf.

\* Or in process of switching or with clear, dated plans to switch.

## Companies behind the brands

PG Tips and Pukka are currently owned by **Unilever**, the formerly Anglo-Dutch company which is now headquartered in the UK. However, at the end of 2021 Unilever agreed to sell its whole tea business, which buys 10% of the world's tea, to private equity firm CVC Capital Partners. The sale is due to complete later this year. Unite the union, which represents workers at Unilever's PG Tips factory in Manchester, has expressed concern about the sale to private equity. According to Unite, CVC Capital was involved in the takeover of Debenhams in 2006 following which, investment in stores stopped, the company's balance

sheets were loaded with debt, and staff were made redundant. Under Unilever's ownership, PG Tips and Pukka get Ethiscores of less than 3. CVC's approach to ethics across its portfolio appears less well developed than Unilever's so the transfer of ownership looks unlikely to improve their score.

The Indian multinational **Tata Group** owns Tetley, which has a market share of about 15% in the UK. It also owns Teapigs and Good Earth, neither of which are the independent, artisanal brands that their appearance and marketing would want us to think. ●

## SHOPPING GUIDE

# Tea

The company has expanded to become a global giant in the last 20 years, acquiring Jaguar Land Rover and Corus Steel in the UK, as well as owning Asian airlines, and arms and chemicals manufacturers in India. The company is one of the largest owners of tea plantations in the world and despite selling some of these off in recent years it still owns over 40% of Amalgamated Plantations which has been repeatedly criticised for labour rights abuses. The company received our worst ratings for likely tax avoidance and operating in oppressive regimes, and lost marks for the sale of pesticides which are banned in Europe.

**Postcard Teas** is a new addition to the guide. The company sells loose leaf tea from small producers who farm less

than 15 acres. It does this because on farms of that size, a larger proportion of the price goes directly to the people who produced the tea. On larger farms, the people who are most likely to benefit are the owners rather than the workers. The company is also behind Morningtown Tea which sells a range of three teas. The website gives the names of the farms on which the tea was produced and how much each person in the supply chain was paid.

Private equity firm **Zetland Capital** bought a majority shareholding in Typhoo in 2021 after the company had experienced several years of financial losses. As well as its own brand, Typhoo makes Heath and Heather, Fresh Brew and Glengettie. There haven't been any obvious changes to the business so far,

but the company told us that the new ownership is committed to responsible sourcing and has taken on new staff to address labour rights issues. Zetland got a worst rating for likely use of tax avoidance strategies.

Twinnings and Jacksons of Piccadilly are owned by **Associated British Foods**, a multinational company which also owns Primark, Silver Spoon, and Jordans Dorset Ryvita. It had a turnover of nearly £14 billion in 2021 and gets an Ethiscore of 0.5. It lost marks across almost all our ratings including environmental and carbon reporting, palm oil, cotton, operations in oppressive regimes, excessive director pay and likely use of tax avoidance strategies. ■

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**Travel Booking companies**

- Coming soon...**
- meat-free alternatives
  - plant milks
  - mobile phones
  - laptops
  - email and broadband
  - current accounts
  - savings accounts
  - vegan cheese

**Next issue published mid-June**

# Tea & coffee certifications

## The ethical labels on your tea and coffee

JOSIE WEXLER looks at coffee and tea certification schemes.

At a global level, about 17% of tea is certified Fairtrade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance, or Utz, and about 25% of coffee is certified by these or similar schemes.<sup>1</sup>

### Fairtrade



Fair trade isn't a protected term (unlike e.g. organic) so you have to be careful – those certified by the Fairtrade International standard will be

written as a single capitalised word and carry the symbol that looks a bit like the yin/yang.

This standard is unique for its focus on pricing. Some of the reason for that is historical – it was stepping into the void left by the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989. The agreement had regulated how much coffee each country was allowed to export, stabilising prices and keeping them reasonably high. It was partly a product of the cold war: the US was frightened that Latin American coffee producers would turn to communism if they were too immiserated by low, volatile coffee prices. Its collapse led to a huge drop in coffee prices which threw many coffee farmers into poverty.

Volatile prices are very destructive for poor farmers, as it means they cannot know when planting crops what the price will be at harvest, and they cannot insure themselves against risk like bigger players. Fairtrade thus has a minimum price that must be paid when the market price falls below it, as a safety net. It also has a fixed premium that must be paid on

top of the market price.

To complement this, regulations were added. To get certified, a producer must show that it is meeting certain social and environmental standards. It can then attempt to sell its produce at the Fairtrade price, if it can find a buyer.

That last point is a bit of a snag, however, and a common cause of confusion. Being certified Fairtrade does not mean that producers are selling their produce as Fairtrade. Certified tea producers on average only manage to sell around 7% of their tea on Fairtrade terms. The average across all products is about 40% for small farmer organisations, and 20% for estates. This has generated criticism, because producers need to recoup the certification cost and, in the worst cases, failure to sell much at the Fairtrade price may eliminate any benefit they get from being certified.<sup>2</sup>

Fairtrade certifies both estates and cooperatives of small farmers, although 'cooperatives' does not necessarily mean small. The Fintea Growers Co-operative Union, for example, a tea growing coop in Kenya, has over 12,000 farmer members.<sup>3</sup>

The Fairtrade premiums are currently set at US \$0.50/kg tea, and \$0.20/lb coffee. The market prices, meanwhile, are at around \$2.60/kg tea, and \$2/lb coffee. So currently the tea premium is around an extra fifth on top of the market price, and the coffee premium about a tenth.

The coffee price fluctuates more wildly than the tea one and has much more frequently gone below the Fairtrade minimum price.

The premium is to be spent on community projects and, in the case of coops, how it is spent is supposed to be decided democratically.

### Rainforest Alliance (and UTZ)



Rainforest Alliance is a more modern certification scheme which is now much bigger than Fairtrade and in the last few years has absorbed UTZ, another similar scheme.

Rainforest Alliance is purely focused on policing production and doesn't have any fixed pricing structures, with the single exception of cocoa. However, guaranteeing higher standards, if it works, should naturally cause prices to rise, since the improvements inevitably have to be paid for.

However, any scheme that relies on policing alone is dependent on being able to pull it off. And many studies have cast doubt on how rigorous the policing of all these schemes really is.<sup>4</sup> Thus we consider Rainforest Alliance to be a weaker scheme and reward it with only half a mark, while Fairtrade certification gets a full mark.

### Fair for Life



Fair for Life was launched in Switzerland in 2006. It has received praise for its comprehensive social and environmental

requirements, it certifies the whole company group, rather than single brands, and it also certifies producers and manufacturers in developed countries, which Fairtrade does not. And it is very transparent, publishing a summary of all of its assessments on its website.

However, it is like Rainforest Alliance in that it doesn't have fixed prices. It does have a premium and a minimum price, but they are negotiated between buyer and seller. It says that the premium is typically 10% on top of the market price.

## Organic



For a crop to be marketed as organic in Europe, it must be grown using organic production methods according to

European legislation, which prioritise techniques such as crop rotation, biological crop protection, green manuring and composting, and it cannot use manufactured pesticides or fertilisers. The growing and processing sites are audited at least once a year.

The Soil Association standard does also contain a few lines on workers' rights, saying that the employer should adhere to the core standards of the International Labour Organisation, although this isn't the focus.

While Indian tea tends to be grown with a lot of pesticides, all Kenyan tea is basically pesticide free because the high altitude and the strains used inhibit pests naturally.

## Direct trade

Direct trade is a term used for the purchase of higher quality, specialist produce through long-term relationships with producers, rather than buying indirectly from traders. However, there is no agreed definition. It is rarer in tea than coffee as the variability of the tea crop means that buyers want to vary blends to keep a constant taste.

In order for it to be convincing though, it really should name the producers they trade with.

The arguments in favour of direct trade are that long-term relationships with buyers give producers security, and that producing higher quality crops can benefit the local community through the need to take on extra labourers and to treat them reasonably to get good work.

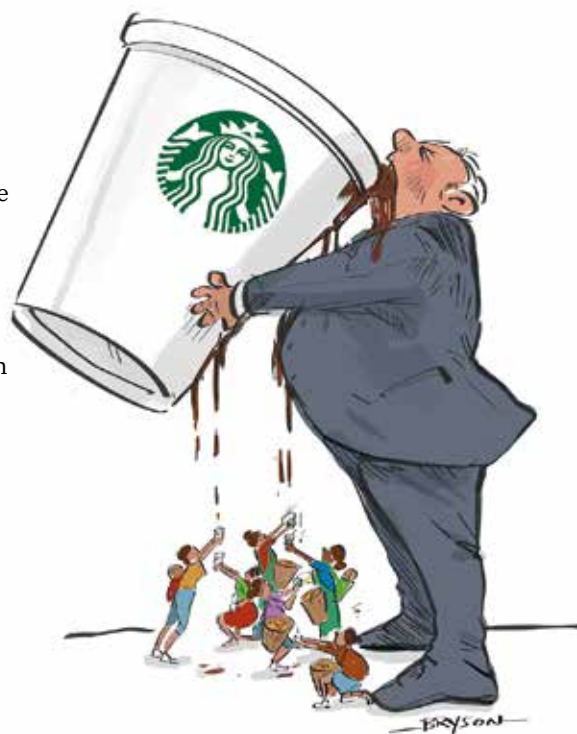
Direct trade claims are not normally externally certified, although Fairtrade and organic products can be 'directly traded' too.

## Starbucks C.A.F.E. practices

Starbucks has its own, in-house coffee label, called C.A.F.E. practices. It is similar to Rainforest Alliance in that it just polices production, there is no price regulation, although it claims to pay premium prices for premium produce.

The scheme has been criticised. In particular, slave labour has been found on Brazilian plantations 'certified' to Starbucks' C.A.F.E. Practices standards in the past few years.<sup>5</sup>

There is an argument that in-house labels are confusing for consumers – you would expect a label to indicate independent assurance, not to just be a company's own corporate responsibility scheme. Having endless labels also devalues the concept and doesn't allow for much rigorous analysis of each one. The best place to hide a bad pebble is on a beach.



## Bird Friendly

Bird Friendly is a certification created by the Smithsonian in the US, an institution created by the US government in the 19th century. Bird Friendly coffees

are organic and shade-grown, meaning the coffee is planted under a canopy of trees, rather than grown on full sun monocultures which generally give higher yields and are easier and cheaper for farmers, but exert a heavy cost on biodiversity.

## Ethical Tea Partnership



The Ethical Tea Partnership is an industry group

that was set up in 1997. It used to work as a certification scheme and conduct audits, but it has, in recent years, shifted direction and instead says that it aims to "tackle complex deep-rooted issues that cannot be addressed sufficiently through certification alone". Its members include Unilever, Typhoo, Tetley, Twinings, Taylors of Harrogate, Lavazza, Douwe Egberts, Starbucks, Teapigs, Whittard, and Yogi.

## How good are any of these schemes?

There is nowadays a pretty broad consensus that, as the Coffee Barometer put it: "the results of academic studies indicate that the implementation of VSS [Voluntary Sustainability Standards] is not an adequate solution to improving the incomes and livelihoods of smallholder farmers."<sup>6</sup> However, criticism generally comes with the qualification that standards like Fairtrade do do something. We therefore still recommend looking out for the best Fairtrade brands (see our guides), but bearing in mind that the job isn't done.

**References:** 1 Sjoerd Panhuysen and Joost Pierrot, 2020 Coffee Barometer 2 <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/87w0c2v8> 3 <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/farmers-and-workers/tea/fintea-growers-co-operative-union-ltd-kenya> 4 Eg. <http://www.msi-integrity.org/not-fit-for-purpose> 5 <https://fairworldproject.org/starbucks-has-a-slave-labor-problem> 6 Sjoerd Panhuysen and Joost Pierrot, 2020 Coffee Barometer

# Coffee shops

# Where to get a really good cup of coffee

**FRANCESCA DE LA TORRE and JANE TURNER**  
explore the ethical practices of coffee shop chains.

## SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

We have focused on 12 coffee shop chains which specialise in selling coffee and tea as their main product. We have also added in sandwich shops Pret and Greggs, which are also popular places to buy coffee.

We have not covered food-led venues like McDonalds which also sell coffee but are more likely to be visited for their burgers.

**W**hen it comes to the ethics of buying a coffee in a coffee shop, there are more issues to consider than just the coffee itself and the ethical sourcing claims of the shops.

Contemporary concerns, for example, include single-use coffee cups and reusable cups, whether you have to pay a surcharge for plant milk and whether the shops pay any corporation tax in the UK. We discuss all these issues below and explore some solutions.

Since our last guide in 2019, Coca-Cola has taken over Costa Coffee, which has caused its score to plummet from 6 to 2. And Nero Group has added Coffee#1 to its portfolio which already included Caffè Nero and Harris + Hoole.

Costa Coffee is the most popular coffee shop and has nearly three times more outlets than its nearest competitor Starbucks. You can buy a Costa coffee not only in their high-street shops and from motorway service stations, but also from their Costa Express machines which are everywhere, from petrol stations, gyms, and supermarkets, to hospitals and sixth form colleges.

Caffè Nero is the next most popular place for a coffee after Starbucks. These big three account for over 80% of all coffee shop visits.

But Costa and Starbucks are the least ethical of the shops we cover so ethical consumers could try to seek out more ethical alternatives like local independent coffee shops (see box on what to look for in an independent shop). Boston Tea Party, at the top of our score table, is a chain with only around 23 outlets (compared to Costa's 2,672). Greggs scores best of the coffee shops that you can find in most towns and cities.

## The carbon footprint of coffee shops

### Carbon reporting rating

For our carbon reporting rating, which is included in the Climate Change column on the score tables, we checked all the coffee shops for publicly available data which shows that companies:

- (a) have set targets for carbon reduction in line with international agreements,
- (b) are reporting annually on what their emissions actually are, and
- (c) have a plausible plan for how they meet the targets, including reporting on measures they've already taken.

Our Carbon Reporting rating results show a need to seriously question why some of the UK's biggest coffee chains are failing in the carbon reduction

A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website



department. The worst in terms of reporting was Caffè Ritazza, the only company with no mention at all of the environment on its website. Soho had very little information.

Starbucks and Costa (via the reporting of Coca-Cola) received a best rating whilst Greggs was middle. The other 11 got a worst rating.

### **Dairy milk is a coffee shop's biggest carbon footprint**

According to Starbucks' sustainability report, dairy milk is the biggest single contributor to its total carbon footprint, and we have therefore assumed that this applies to all coffee shops. Packaging and coffee cups make a relatively small contribution.

Unfortunately, the nation's favourite coffee is a latte – a coffee with a lot of milk. A large latte with cow's milk has the biggest carbon footprint of all coffee and tea varieties – 552g of CO<sub>2</sub>e which is roughly equivalent to driving about a mile in an average UK car. The milk accounts for three quarters of a latte's footprint. A disposable cup adds another 110g.

Using soya or oat milk almost halves the footprint of a latte and reduces it for all other drinks.

The lowest carbon option is to drink your tea and coffee black. Black tea or

herbal tea has half the footprint of a black coffee.

So for the sake of the climate, it should be out with coffee shops and back in with tea shops! But realistically, the UK's coffee habit is going to be hard to shift. This is why it's even more important that companies reduce the climate impact of a coffee by not charging more for plant milk (see page 33).

## **How to have a lower carbon coffee**

- Drink your coffee black.
- Switch from coffee to tea, especially black tea.
- Swap dairy milk for plant milk.
- Use a reusable cup.
- Only buy from coffee shops that offer plant milk for free – Esquires, Boston, AMT, Pret, Starbucks, Greggs.

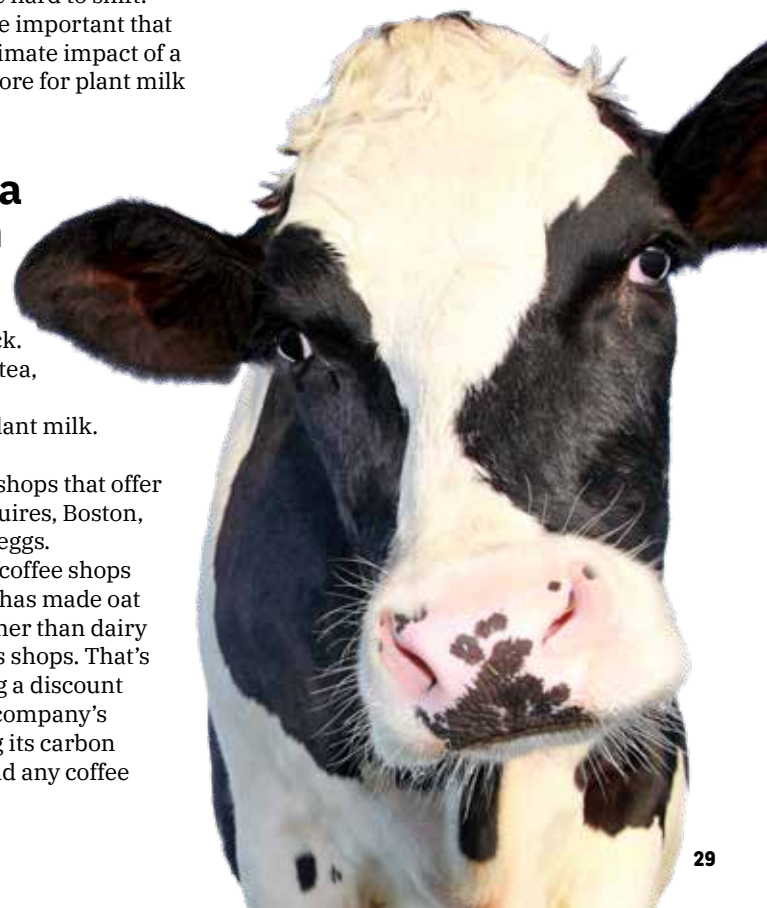
In the USA, a chain of coffee shops called Blue Bottle Coffee has made oat milk the default milk rather than dairy at more than a third of its shops. That's a good idea. So is offering a discount for plant milk to show a company's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint. We couldn't find any coffee

shops in the UK doing any of that. On the contrary, just over half of the coffee shops in this guide offer a discount for dairy milk (by charging extra for plant milk).

In the UK, we found the following dairy-free coffee shops but there may be more. Let us know. Email us at [enquiries@ethicalconsumer.org](mailto:enquiries@ethicalconsumer.org)

- Potts Coffee, 18a Slater Street, Liverpool
- The Bright Store, 268 Hackney Road, Hoxton, London

Of course, you don't have to go to a speciality coffee shop for a coffee with plant milk – there are many vegan cafes around the country where you can get a coffee to sit in or take away. Happy Cow is still the most used app for finding vegan cafes. ●



## SHOPPING GUIDE

# Coffee shops

### USING THE TABLES

**Ethicscore:** the higher the score, the better the company. Scored out of 14. Plus up to 1 extra point for Company Ethos and up to 5 extra points for Product Sustainability.

**Green (good)** = 12+  
**Amber (average)** = 11.5–5  
**Red (poor)** = 4.5–0

● = worst rating  
 ○ = middle rating  
 = best rating/no criticisms found

### USING THE TABLES

**Positive ratings (+ve):**


**Company Ethos:**

★ = full mark


☆ = half mark

**Product Sustainability:**

Various positive marks available depending on sector.

 Best Buys are highlighted in blue

### BRAND

BRAND	Ethicscore (out of 14 + 6 extras)	Environment					Animals			People				Politics				+ve		COMPANY GROUP	
		Environmental Reporting	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Palm Oil	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Management	Irresponsible Marketing	Arms & Military Supply	Controversial Technologies	Boycott Call	Political Activity	Anti-Social Finance	Tax Conduct		Company Ethos
 Boston Tea Party	9	●	●			●		●		○	○			○					☆		Boston Tea Party Group Limited
AMT Coffee/Change Please	8	●	●	○	●		●	●		●				○					★		Change Please CIC
Greggs	7.5	○	○	○	●		●	●		●				○			○				Greggs plc
Caffe Nero	6.5	●	●	○	●		●	●		○				○				●			The Nero Company
Harris & Hoole	6.5	●	●	○	●		●	●		○				○				●			The Nero Company
Soho Coffee	6.5	●	●	○	●		●	●		○	●			○							Business Trading Company
Coffee Republic	6	●	●	○	●		●	●		○	○			○				●			Coffee Republic Holdings Limited
Coffee#1	6	●	●	○	●		●	●		○	●			○				○			The Nero Company, SA Brain
Esquires Coffee	6	●	●	○	●		●	●	○	○	●			○							Cooks Global Foods
Caffe Ritazza	4.5	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	○	○			○			○	●			SSP Group Plc
Puccino's	4.5	●	●	○	●		●	●	●	○	●			○				●			Massimo Zanetti Industries SA
Costa	2	●		●	○	○	●	●	●	○				○	●	●	●	●			Coca-Cola Company
Pret	2	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○		○		○	○	●			JAB Holding Company S.A.R.L
Starbucks	2	○			●	●	●	●	●	●				○	●	●	●	●			Starbucks Corporation

All the research behind these ratings is available for subscribers to see on the score tables on [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)  
 Definitions of all the categories are at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings)



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has. 9 times out of 10 this will be the brand (or brands) that are top of the table but sometimes an ethical company which is truly innovative scores less well on our rigid scoring system and we use the Best Buy and Recommended section to acknowledge this. A company cannot be a Best Buy if it scores worst for Supply Chain Management but it can be a Recommended brand.

## INDEPENDENT COFFEE SHOPS

Here are a couple of listings of small independents:

- <https://indycoffee.guide/where-to-get-takeaway-coffee>. Indycoffee also sell printed, regional guides with more listings of coffee shops and roasteries.
- [www.bestcoffee.guide/pages/cafes](http://www.bestcoffee.guide/pages/cafes)

Although they may not be a chain, check whether they are ethical in the products they sell and what they serve them in. These are some of the things you might want to consider:

- Is coffee Fairtrade?
- Are there china cups for sit in?
- Do they give a discount for your reusable cup?
- Have they got a cup loan scheme?

## Table highlights

### Tax Conduct

Prior to its take-over by Coca-Cola, **Costa Coffee's** record on tax was relatively good. In the 2017-18 tax year it paid £24.7 million in taxes on profits of £103 million – over the headline rate of corporation tax. However, in the same period, Coca Cola in the US was paying 15% below the corporate rate of 35% (admittedly a tax rate above that of the UK's). At the time of the takeover, MPs raised concerns that Coca-Cola might restructure Costa to avoid a UK tax bill. We have noted that Costa Coffee's immediate parent company is now Ireland-based Coca-Cola subsidiary, European Refreshments. Ireland is on our current list of tax havens. The company has yet to receive criticisms for its tax affairs but it is certainly one to watch. It still loses a full mark under Tax Conduct as, when you buy a coffee from

Costa, the profits (whether they get taxed in the UK or not) still end up in the hands of a company with our worst rating for likely use of tax avoidance strategies.

**Caffè Nero** is one of the prime examples of tax avoidance – it has not paid corporation tax in the UK since 2007. This is because the company is loaded with debt from when its owner Gerry Ford borrowed to take the company off the stock exchange. Caffè Nero is charged exorbitantly high interest rates on this debt which pushes the company into a loss even if its coffee business makes a healthy profit. Reporting a loss means it is not required to pay any tax here in the UK. And the company it is paying these high rates to? Well that would be its parent company, of course! Based in Luxembourg, where it can reap the benefits of a very low tax rate. While this parent company is then responsible



In 2018, we were pleased to report that AMT had become the first coffee shop chain to be awarded the Fair Tax Mark. Unfortunately, it is no longer accredited due to some restructuring that the company has undergone. It did not, however, lose any marks for likely use of tax avoidance strategies.

Boston Tea Party, Change Please (AMT), Greggs, Business Trading Company (Soho Coffee) and Cooks Global Foods (Esquires) all received our best rating. The rest received our worst rating.

### Workers' Rights

As hospitality and catering are industries with traditionally low wages, we marked down companies that were not publicly committing to paying the Real Living Wage. Only Change Please and AMT had clear commitments to pay the Real Living Wage.

were not publicly committing to paying the Real Living Wage. Only Change Please and AMT had clear commitments to pay the Real Living Wage.

### Controversial Technologies

Every company also lost half a mark under Controversial Technologies for a lack of a clear company-wide policy of GMO-free sourcing (including animal feed).

### Habitats & Resources

Every company except Boston Tea Party lost half a mark here for selling fish that was not certified sustainable.

### Anti-Social Finance

Companies lost half a mark under Anti-Social Finance for paying directors annual amounts of £200,000 or more and a whole mark for paying over £1 million. Greggs and SSP (Caffè Ritazza) lost half marks, although it was noted that Greggs directors had received payments over £1 million in previous years. Coca-Cola (Costa) and Starbucks lost full marks. ●

for paying back the original loans to financial institutions this is at a far more favourable interest rate than the one it charges Caffè Nero and the company consistently refinances these allowing the system to continue.

**Starbucks** has long been criticised for its tax affairs as well. In 2020, it was reported to have claimed a UK tax credit of £4.4 million due to losses incurred during the pandemic. However, in the same year its parent company actually made a profit of £870 million. The sheer complexity of Starbucks' filings means that it is nearly impossible to tell whether its approach to tax has actually improved. With staggered filings at Companies House, and an absence of country-by-country reporting, showing exactly where profits have been made, it is very difficult to say.

As is always the case, the likes of Starbucks and Caffè Nero will point out that they pay all the tax that they are legally required to in the UK. However, the difference is between aiming to pay the right amount of tax in the right place at the right time and having an aggressive tax minimisation strategy.



Ethical independent coffee shops which offer Fairtrade coffee and free plant milk. See checklist and directory on the page opposite.

**Boston Tea Party** coffee follows the direct trade model (see page 27) and it only sells free-range meat, organic milk and certified fish. Plus, it banned disposable cups in its shops in 2018.

It only has shops in the south west and around Birmingham.

**Boston Tea Party**

9



**Greggs** is the top scoring of the ubiquitous coffee shops and sells the most Fairtrade coffee on the high street. It lags on a policy to promote the use of plant milk.

**AMT Coffee/Change Please** are good for when you are travelling because they are mainly at railway stations, and they are now owned by a social enterprise.



**Costa** are at the bottom of the score table and are owned by Coca-Cola. It lobbied against the disposable cup surcharge (latte levy, see page 34). As the biggest player it should be leading the way on this issue and encouraging plant milk to reduce the carbon impact of the millions of cups of coffee it sells every day.

**Caffè Nero** should also be avoided as it's one of the prime examples of tax avoidance – it has not paid corporation tax in the UK since 2007.

# Coffee shops

## The companies behind the brands

In 2021, a social enterprise set up by the Big Issue in 2015, **Change Please**, bought AMT, the 28-year-old chain of coffee shops in hospitals, airports and train stations. The purchase stopped AMT from going into administration and was funded by the social enterprise itself plus a mix of loan and grant finance from Social Investment Business and Comic Relief. Change Please invests 100% of profits in helping people facing homelessness by providing barista training, employment and support with housing, personal finance and therapy. They said, "People who are homeless tend to use train stations, hospitals and airports as refuge and we will work with our landlords to offer each person a training opportunity."

The AMT sites will be rebranded as Change Please which already has a few coffee shops and carts in London. Although a great project for the staff, the company does not currently appear to be selling certified coffees and other produce in the way that AMT did.

**Boston Tea Party Group** only sells organic milk, free-range meat and certified sustainable fish, making it the only company in this product guide not to lose marks under Factory Farming and Habitats & Resources. Despite being named after

the same event as the Tea Party – an anti-taxation campaign group from the U.S. – there is no evidence that Boston Tea Party has been trying to avoid its taxes! It has also completely removed disposable cups from its operations. It is still relatively small and has stores in the South West and the Midlands.

**Greggs PLC** is a Newcastle-headquartered bakery chain and is unusual for being one of the few widely available chains serving a Fairtrade cup of coffee. While the company did not commit to paying the Real Living Wage it does distribute 10% of its profits directly to all staff. The company is well known for introducing a wildly successful vegan sausage roll, and for enraging Piers Morgan in the process!

While Greggs is doing some things right it still has quite a long way to go before it could be considered an all-round ethical choice. It still receives our worst rating for Management of Workers' Rights in its Supply Chain and loses full marks under Animal Rights and Factory Farming. It would also be good to see the company find more opportunities to enrage Mr Morgan, perhaps by using organic milk or going palm oil free!

**The Coca-Cola Company** is named as one of our top five unethical companies. Since our last coffee shops guide, Coca-Cola completed its acquisition of Costa Coffee, bringing Costa's score down to just one, and making it the worst-scoring brand in this guide. The parts of Coca-Cola which manage Costa Coffee reported significant losses due to the Covid-19 lockdowns which had prevented consumers from going to its coffee shops. Coca-Cola has ongoing boycott calls against it for operating in illegal Israeli settlements. It is also named as one of

favour of its own in-house scheme. See page 26 for a comparison of certification schemes.

Nestlé owns the retail rights of Starbucks-branded coffee available in supermarkets and retail stores (the deal does not include Starbucks coffee beans purchased from Starbucks stores). Nestlé is also in our list of top five unethical companies and this will see Starbucks coffee added to the Nestlé boycott list. Starbucks coffee shops are also the target of a boycott call in the USA for failure to switch to organic milk.

**Coffee Republic Holdings** is incorporated in Curaçao despite not having operations there. We felt this was highly likely to be for tax avoidance purposes.

**SSP Group Holdings Ltd**, owner of Caffè Ritazza and also Upper Crust, specialises in providing food outlets in airports and stations. The company has a turnover of £1.4 billion and was marked down for excessive directors' pay, while its subsidiary, Caffè Ritazza, was marked down for not committing to paying its staff the Real Living Wage (a pattern common across this market). SSP Group also lost marks under Human Rights because it has operations in a number of countries considered to be governed by oppressive regimes including China, Russia and Israel.

**Business Trading Company's** UK subsidiary BTC invested in Soho Coffee Company a few years ago and now owns majority shares. It is incorporated in Qatar where its main focus is investing in and creating luxury shopping malls in the region. It has also been licenced to operate Matalan shops there too. Matalan has been criticised by Ethical Consumer across a number of categories. In 2014, it was called out for its meagre and reluctant compensation to victims of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh and currently it is facing criticism for not ensuring workers in its supply chain were paid what they were owed during the pandemic.

**The Nero Company** owns Caffè Nero and also bought Harris + Hoole from Tesco in 2016. It now also owns most of Coffee#1. In 2020, it rejected a bid from the Issa brothers who went on to buy ASDA last year. It repeatedly manages to pay little to no tax in the UK despite making millions of pounds in profit.



the world's biggest plastic polluters. So perhaps avoiding Costa Coffee is something consumers could continue to do post-lockdown!

**Starbucks Corporation** sits nearly at the bottom of our table with a score of just 2.

Despite receiving some praise for its recent overhaul of its coffee supply chain, it still gets a worst in our supply chain management rating. Like many of the brands in this guide, it has a tendency to publicise the good things it is doing with coffee, while neglecting other, still significant, aspects of the business such as the food. It only started selling Fairtrade coffee as a response to public pressure in 2008, and has now taken Fairtrade coffee back off the menu in



# Certifications and plant milk – who does what?

As our rating system takes a wider view, we have taken a look at how each of our brands is performing when it comes to providing an ethical product.

## Coffee certifications

A 12-year partnership between Starbucks and Fairtrade UK ended recently. Starbucks coffee in the UK is no longer Fairtrade certified although it will continue to be globally. The company has replaced it with its Coffee and Farmer Equity Practices (C.A.F.E) standard developed internally in partnership with Conservation International. It insisted the standard, which has been running since 2004, is equally rigorous but we don't think so. See page 27 for how Starbucks' standard compares to the other certifications.

It is the most significant firm to depart from Fairtrade UK since Nestlé announced plans to stop buying Fairtrade cocoa and sugar for its KitKat brand in 2020.

Aside from the blow to Fairtrade, nothing much has changed since our last guide in 2019.

### Best practice

- Four coffee shops sell only Fairtrade coffee, the highest standard – AMT, Esquires, Greggs, Soho.
- Three companies use Direct Trade which, in theory, means they have a direct relationship with coffee farmers – Boston Tea Party, Coffee#1, Harris + Hoole.
- Three companies sell organic coffee, which is grown without pesticides and the core standards of the International Labour Organisation must be adhered to – Esquires, Pret, Soho.
- Soho Coffee is triple certified, and Esquires is double certified

### Middle practice

- Half of the shops sell Rainforest Alliance coffee, which we view as the weaker standard because of its lack of Fairtrade's fixed price premium paid on top of the market price.

### Worst practice

- Caffè Ritazza still doesn't seem to be certifying its coffee at all.
- Coffee shops and their websites don't say much about whether their tea is certified.

- Organic milk is only offered by 4 of the 14 – AMT, Boston Tea Party, Pret and Soho. Aside from the carbon impact of milk, organic milk at least ensures some environmental and animal welfare standards.

## The plant milk surcharge

Starbucks used to charge for oat, coconut or almond but not soya, but stopped the surcharge in January 2022. The announcement followed a spoof campaign against it in December 2021 by dairy-free campaign group Switch4Good. They distributed a fake press release saying the company would drop its surcharge due to the prevalence of lactose intolerance among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Switch4Good claimed that 95% of Asians, up to 80% of Black and Latinx people, and more than 80% of Indigenous Americans cannot digest dairy. In contrast, just 15% of white people have lactose intolerance. The group accused Starbucks of dietary racism. Starbucks claimed the move was environmentally driven.

8 of the 14 coffee shops, that's just over half, still charge extra for some plant milks, although most give you soya for free. Puccinos is the only one in this guide that even charges for soya milk.



Though not in this guide as a coffee shop, we thought it was worth noting that McDonalds still doesn't offer any plant milk in the UK, surcharge or not, and was the last of the major fast-food chains to offer a vegan meat burger. It does offer oat milk in Australia.

To encourage more people to adopt a carbon- and animal-friendly diet, and to not penalise lactose intolerant people, all plant milk should be free, just like dairy milk.

Those who don't charge extra for all plant milks are: Esquires, Boston, AMT, Pret, Starbucks, and Greggs (though it only offers soya).

Arguably, given the major role that cow's milk has in the carbon footprint of a hot drink (see page 29) the charge should be reversed so that dairy milk is extra. ●



The spoof Justice Cup made as part of the Switch4Good campaign – a cup that lets customers declare their support for innovation, sustainability, and equality.

A detailed table of what each coffee shop is doing about certifications and plant milk appears online at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/coffee-shops](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/coffee-shops)

# Coffee shops

## The coffee cup problem

**A**long with drinks bottles and carrier bags, the take-away coffee cup has become a poster child for our plastic problem. It is not surprising considering that, in the UK alone, we throw away 500 of them every minute. That's about 2.5 billion a year, enough to circle the planet five and a half times. Fewer than 1 in 400 cups (0.25%) are actually recycled, the rest ending up in landfill.

Coffee cups that end up in the UK's landfill sites produce an annual carbon footprint equivalent to over 152,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, similar to what 33,300 cars produce in a year.

But cups and packaging are a very small part of the carbon footprint of coffee shops (see page 29). The problem with cups is more to do with litter and plastic pollution than climate change.

Each coffee cup can take up to 30 years to degrade – and by degrade we really mean break down into parts too small to be easily detectable, rather than too small to do any damage. The plastic parts of the cup can also leach toxins into the environment as they breakdown. We have already got to the stage where micro-plastics are being found in our drinking water.

### Why don't more get recycled?

The term 'paper cup' is rather a misleading one. To stop your drink soaking through the cup they are lined with polyethylene – a non-biodegradable, oil-based plastic. The plastic layer is fused to the paper at high temperature which makes it difficult to separate the two materials at the recycling stage.

Because of this, the cups can't be put in a mixed recycling bin but have to be collected separately to be recycled at just four recycling facilities in the UK. In reality, most are put in the non-recycling bins and are destined for landfill.

### What are the solutions?

With plastic pollution being such a hot topic right now, most of the coffee shops are discussing the issue. There are three main solutions proposed.

#### 1. Improve recycling infrastructure

One solution is to keep the cups as they are but ensure that more of them are recycled. Currently, the coffee cup does not have much value as an item to recycle as there is very little return on the effort and cost of recycling them. That explains why there are only four recycling facilities for them.

Costa launched the UK's National Cup Recycling Scheme in 2018 to pay waste collectors an incentive for every tonne of cups they collect, to help to fund the right infrastructure and processes for cups to be recovered for recycling.

163 million cups have been recycled via the scheme since its launch (40 million a year) and it is now supported by more of the UK's leading coffee brands – Caffè Nero, Pret a Manger, Greggs.

That's way under Costa's target of 500 million by 2020. And it's nowhere near enough if we throw away 2.5 billion a year.

#### Costa lobbied against the 'Latte Levy'

It has been argued that the recycling scheme was started by Costa as an attempt to persuade ministers that there was no need to introduce the 'Latte Levy' which they opposed for fear that sales would be affected.

Even though the charge on plastics bags had a huge impact on making people bring their own bags, UK MPs voted against the 'Latte Levy', a similar 25p charge on single-use cups in 2018. The levy was recommended by cross-party Environmental Audit Committee. It was meant to fund infrastructure to make all cups recyclable and, if that failed, the sale of disposable cups should be banned by 2023.

Just before it was to be introduced Costa "obstructively lobbied" against it and the proposal was dropped. Costa said it wouldn't work and claimed the government would be "deliberately targeting coffee drinkers" and questioned whether cups made from plastic and paper could be deemed single-use plastic because they are 'recyclable'. Not long after this, Costa was bought by Coca-Cola, another single use packaging company that has lobbied against deposit return systems or other legislation to regulate single-use plastic.



#### Surcharge vs discount

The Environmental Audit Committee found that consumers are more likely to respond to extra charges than they are to discounts. A 25p surcharge on takeaway cups in the Houses of Parliament's own catering outlets introduced in October 2018 led to a 74% reduction in single use cups. Starbucks introduced its own 5p 'latte levy' and noticed that there was a 126% increase in the use of reusable cups but still the vast majority of customers were using the disposable option.

Scotland have unilaterally decided to introduce a mandatory 20-25p surcharge, hopefully later in 2022.

Boston Tea Party said that the discount didn't really work as an incentive. "We know first-hand this has a very low penetration and when we launched that scheme ourselves, only 5% of customers took it up."

But with no mandatory charge scheme or levy, the UK government recommended that shops voluntarily introduced reusable cup discounts which most coffee shops plumped for. Perhaps they are banking on the fact that most people forget to bring their reusable cup so it doesn't affect their income.

#### 2. Redesign the take-away cup

A few companies in this guide – Esquires Coffee House, Harris + Hoole and Coffee#1 – have redesigned their take-away cups into 'biodegradable' or 'compostable' versions.

They're still single use but maybe better than recycling. However, there are a couple of significant problems with this approach.

Cups that are labelled 'compostable'

cannot just be thrown onto your garden compost and need to be sent to a special industrial plant to be composted because home compost doesn't get hot enough. There's only 50 in the UK, not all of which deal with packaging. Many councils are not yet accepting them on the kerbside, meaning that they can be just as difficult to recycle as the paper-polyethylene cups.

The plant starch used has the potential to do harm to the environment. As George Monbiot pointed out in 2018 in reaction to a call for Starbucks and Costa to replace their plastic with corn starch: "Those who supported this call failed to ask themselves where the corn starch would come from, how much land would be needed to grow it, or how much food production it would displace. They overlooked the damage this cultivation would inflict: growing corn (maize) is notorious for causing soil erosion, and often requires heavy doses of pesticides and fertilisers."

### 3. Reusable coffee cups – reuse and refill

Both disposable and compostable cups are single use so instead of just exchanging one problem for another, we need to move away from the whole notion of 'disposability' and single use.

#### Bring your own

There is now a huge range of reusable cups on the market made from all sorts of materials including glass, bamboo, rice husks and even recycled coffee cups.

Discounts for reusable cups were put on hold over Covid, and a recent coffee shop survey we did found that most of them weren't really displaying or promoting the discount.

Most coffee shops offer a 25p discount but Pret gives you 50p which is clearly advertised. It's even more important to take your reusable cup to Pret because they seem to have stopped giving you a china cup if you sit-in. Caffè Ritazza didn't seem to offer any discount.

#### Returnable cup schemes

A problem with reusable cups is that it relies on people remembering to take their reusable cup with them everywhere. A solution is a deposit return loan scheme such as the one proposed for soft drinks bottles. You pay a deposit for a reusable cup which is refunded if you bring it back for washing and reuse.

The following schemes have been voluntarily introduced by companies:

- Boston Tea Party started a cup loan scheme in 2018 when they banned single use cups – £2.50 deposit.
- Starbucks is trialling a returnable cup scheme in Canary Wharf in London which it says it will have in all in its stores by 2025 – £1 deposit.
- Costa is trialling a reusable cup scheme – BURT (Borrow, Use, Reuse, Take back) – in shops in Glasgow. The trial ended on 29th March 2022.
- McDonalds trialled a scheme in six cafes in Northampton last year (2021) but we couldn't find out the results of the trial – £1 deposit.

Returnable cup schemes need to be made mandatory but the one planned for soft drinks bottles has been plagued with setbacks and corporate lobbying for years. It will not be in place in England until late 2024 at the earliest, six years after being announced by the government as a key environmental policy.

#### Ban single-use cups

Boston Tea Party, our Best Buy in this guide, made a bold move in 2018 and eradicated take-away cups altogether. Customers can either bring their own reusable cup, buy one at the counter or borrow one using the deposit scheme.

They said: "We have lost around 25% of our takeaway coffee sales but we modelled that into our costs as passing trade who don't want to get involved in the cup loan scheme.

"We felt this was a financial loss we had to take and we want this to be a call to action to other companies."

It would be great to see more businesses follow in the footsteps of Boston Tea Party.

A detailed table of what each coffee shop is doing about disposable cups and reusable cups appears online at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/coffee-shops](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/coffee-shops)

## What's the answer to the disposable cup problem?

- Ban single-use cups.
- Introduce mandatory deposit return schemes in all coffee shops.
- At the very least, introduce a mandatory surcharge (latte levy) on disposable cups and offer a discount for reusables.

## What can coffee drinkers do?

- Only sit-in at a cafe that serves in china cups/mugs. That means avoid Pret and AMT.
- If you need to take away, remember your reusable coffee cup when you go out. Keep one in your bag. There are even collapsible ones like the Stojos that take up less space. ■



# Coffee machines

# Espresso ethics & moka pot morals

**ALEX CRUMBIE** sets out in search for the most ethical coffee machine.

When it comes to coffee made in UK homes, instant still dominates, holding around 60% of the market. However, fresh grounds/beans and pods have become increasingly popular in recent years, especially during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, when national lockdowns meant that more people attempted to recreate the cafe experience in their own homes.

There are a million and one ways to make a coffee these days. For this guide to ethical coffee machines, we've included the most common machines on the market and assessed the ethical pros and cons of each, as well as the most ethical brands producing these machines. In general, we recommend manual machines over those that have electronic components, as electronic goods generally have a greater negative environmental impact.



AERO PRESS

**What is it?**

The new kid on the block. A brilliantly simple manual device that sits somewhere between a filter machine and a cafetière. Coffee-heads rave about it.

**Pros:** Simple, manual, no electronics, easily portable, easy to clean. A great choice.

**Cons:** Made of plastic, requires paper filters for each use – though metal filters are also available.

**What is it?**

A classic coffee maker. Coffee and hot water are left to brew, then pressed.

**Pros:** Simple, manual, no electronics. A great choice.

**Cons:** Usually made of glass and metal, so not as portable as the AeroPress.



CAFETIÈRE / FRENCH PRESS



MOKA POT / STOVE TOP

**What is it?**

The classic design, the Bialetti Moka pot, was invented in 1930s Italy. The device, which is also known

as stove top or espresso pot, is placed on the stove, which heats up water in the bottom compartment. When the water reaches near boiling point it is forced upwards through the coffee grounds and into the top section.

**Pros:** A manual, non-electronic device. Generally made of aluminium, which is infinitely recyclable. A great choice, which makes strong coffee.

**Cons:** Requires heating on a stove, many of which use gas, a fossil fuel.

A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website

**What is it?** Does everything for you at the push of a button, from grinding the whole beans to frothing the milk. The most ostentatious machine around – the Lamborghini of the coffee-machine world.

**Pros:** Requires minimal effort to make a coffee.

**Cons:** A complex, electronic machine that takes lots of materials and energy to produce.



BEAN-TO-CUP

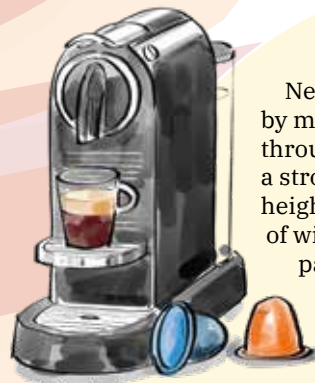


POUR OVER FILTER

**What is it?** A simple system that involves pouring hot water through coffee grounds in a filter.

**Pros:** Simple, manual, no electronics. A great choice.

**Cons:** Some filters are disposable, so create waste.



POD MACHINE

**What is it?**

Originally invented by Nespresso, but now supplied by many brands. Hot water is forced through a coffee-filled pod to produce a strong, espresso-style coffee. Once the height of sophistication, though after years of widespread criticism over the amount of packing waste produced, coffee from a pod machine will likely contain some notes of guilt.

**Pros:** Generally uses less coffee grounds per serving than other methods, which has benefits at the early stages of the coffee supply chain. Also only heats the exact amount of water needed for each coffee.

**Cons:** An electronic machine that produces a great deal of packaging waste (one pod per coffee).

Up until recently, pods have generally been made from aluminium or plastic, though compostable pods have now entered the market, which are preferable.

**What is it?**

A mini-version of the espresso machines you'll find in cafes – for the coffee maker who fancies themselves as a bit of a barista.

**Pros:** Makes you feel like you have an ounce of artisanal skill – perfect for those who sit at computers all day and question what physical skills they actually possess.

**Cons:** An electronic machine that requires a lot of energy to produce each coffee.



ESPRESSO

**What is it?**

Same as the pour-over filter, except it heats the water and drips it into the coffee grounds for you.

**Pros:** Good for making large quantities of coffee and keeping it warm.

**Cons:** A large electronic machine made of a range of materials, usually including lots of plastic.



ELECTRIC FILTER

## SHOPPING GUIDE

# Coffee machines

### USING THE TABLES

**Ethicscore:** the higher the score, the better the company. Scored out of 14. Plus up to 1 extra point for Company Ethos and up to 5 extra points for Product Sustainability.

**Green (good)** = 12+

**Amber (average)** = 11.5–5

**Red (poor)** = 4.5–0

● = worst rating

○ = middle rating

– = best rating/no criticisms found

### USING THE TABLES

**Positive ratings (+ve):**

**Company Ethos:**

★ = full mark

☆ = half mark

**Product Sustainability:**

Various positive marks available depending on sector.



Best Buys are highlighted in blue

BRAND	Ethicscore (out of 14 + 6 extras)	Environment					Animals		People				Politics			+ve		COMPANY GROUP			
		Environmental Reporting	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Palm Oil	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Management	Irresponsible Marketing	Arms & Military Supply	Controversial Technologies	Boycott Call	Political Activity		Anti-Social Finance	Tax Conduct	Company Ethos
Aeropress	12.5	○																●			Aeropress Inc
Bodum	8	●	●	●	●				●	●											Britbo Holding AG
Jura	8	●	●	●	●				●	●											Jura Kaffeemaschinen AG
Melitta	8	○	●	●	●				●	●						○					Melitta Group
Smeg	8	●	●	●	●				●	●											Smeg SpA
Swan	8	●	●	●	●				●	●											Swan Products Limited
Bialetti	7.5	●	●	●	●				●	●						○					Bialetti Holding S.r.l.
La Cafetiere	7.5	●	●						○	○	●				○	●	●				Lifetime Brands Inc
Le'Xpress	7.5	●	●						○	○	●				○	●	●				Lifetime Brands Inc
Krups	7	○	●	●	●				●	○						●	●				Groupe SEB
Illy	6.5	●	●	●			○	○	●	●	○			○	○	○			☆		Gruppo Illy spa
Sage	6.5	●	●	●	●				●	○	●					●					Breville Group
De'Longhi	6	●	●	●	●				●	●					●	●					De'Longhi Industrial SA
Bosch	5	○	●	●	●				●	●		●			●	○	●				Robert Bosch Stiftung GMBH
John Lewis	5	○	●	●		○	●	●	●	●	●		○		●			☆			John Lewis Partnership
Siemens	4.5	●	●	○		●			●	○	○		○	○	●	●	●				Robert Bosch/Siemens AG
Tassimo	4.5	○	●	○	●	●			●	○	●		○		●	○	●				Acorn/Robert Bosch/JAB
Beko	4	○	●	●	●			○	○	●	●	●		●	○	○	○				Koç Holding AS
Grundig	4	○	●	●	●			○	○	●	●	●		●	○	○	○				Koç Holding AS
Lavazza	4	●	●	●	●	●		○	○	●	○	●		○	●						Finlav SpA
Russell Hobbs	4	○	●	●	○		●	●	○	○	○			○	○	●	●				Spectrum Brands Holdings Inc
Breville	3	○	●	●	●		●		○	○	●			○	●	●	●				Newell Brands Inc
Cookworks	2	○	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	●	●		●		●	●				J Sainsbury plc
Nespresso	0	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				Nestlé SA

All the research behind these ratings is available for subscribers to see on the score tables on [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)

Definitions of all the categories are at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings)



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has. 9 times out of 10 this will be the brand (or brands) that are top of the table but sometimes an ethical company which is truly innovative scores less well on our rigid scoring system and we use the Best Buy and Recommended section to acknowledge this. A company cannot be a Best Buy if it scores worst for Supply Chain Management but it can be a Recommended brand.

## WHAT TO BUY

- **Is it simple?** Complex, electronic coffee machines require more materials and energy to produce and are not as easily recycled, so opt for simple, manual machines.
- **Is it second hand?** Buying second hand is nearly always the more environmentally friendly option, especially for an electronic machine.

## WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Is it a pod machine?** Although there may be some environmental benefits to pod machines (see page 41), pods create excessive waste – particularly if they are made from plastic. If you do opt for pod, ideally choose compostable pods (see Coffee guide).

## Price comparison

Some of the complex, high-tech coffee machines cost an arm and leg. The most expensive machine we came across was made by Jura and cost £3,795! The good news is that the most ethical ways to make coffee are also the least expensive. The machineless methods discussed on page 39 are probably the cheapest, but simple, manual devices such as the AeroPress, cafetière, pour-over filter, and moka pot are each available for under £30.

## Machine-less methods of making coffee

### The coffee & cup method

For the Luddites among us, you can make perfectly good, fresh coffee without any machine by following these simple steps:

1. Place coffee grounds in your mug.
2. Saturate the grounds with a small amount of hot water to keep them at the bottom of your mug.
3. Top up with hot water.
4. Allow to sit for several minutes to allow the coffee to brew.
5. If any grounds remain at the top, stir the surface gently and leave for a minute to settle.
6. Drink! Though be careful not to drink the coffee grounds when you near the end.

### Arabic or Turkish coffee

There are many other coffee making methods around the world that don't require high-tech machines. We can't do justice to the nuances of all of them here, but one of the best known is Arabic or Turkish coffee. Of course, coffee is made differently across the Arab world, so we advise you to look into the particularities of each region, but here is a general recipe to start you off:

1. Heat water in a saucepan, dallah (Arabic coffee pot), or cezve (Turkish coffee pot).
2. Remove from the heat, let stand for 30 seconds, then add ground coffee.
3. Brew the coffee on a low heat (without letting it boil) for up to ten minutes. Foam should start to rise.
4. If desired, add crushed cardamom and other spices.
5. Return to a low heat for another five minutes, then remove from the heat and let stand for several minutes.
6. Pour coffee (straining if desired) into a pre-warmed dallah, thermos or teapot, stopping when the coffee grounds start to pour out.
7. Serve into small teacups and enjoy!

### Cold brew coffee – the low-carbon alternative

While cold coffee may not be particularly appealing in the depths of winter, it is perfect during those few sacred days of summer when the sun graces the UK with its presence. The cold brew method doesn't require any water heating and therefore results in fewer carbon emissions than other methods. Here's how you do it:

1. Grind coffee coarsely.
2. Add this to cold water.
3. Leave it to steep for around 12 hours.
4. Strain the coffee and either drink straight, with added water, or with milk.

## Table highlights

AeroPress tops our table and is several points ahead of the second-best scoring companies. The company only produces the AeroPress (plus accessories) and doesn't produce any electrical goods – thereby avoiding the ethical issues associated with such goods. It also received our Best rating in our Environmental Reporting and Supply Chain Management categories, though it did lose a whole mark in the Tax Conduct category because it was incorporated in Delaware, US (a tax haven) while its principal offices were in British Columbia, Canada.

When we last looked at coffee machines, back in 2019, Bialetti came top of the table with a score of 12, but now scores 7.5. When we last researched the

company, we weren't aware that it sold a range of electronic machines as well as moka pots. So it is now subject to our ratings on conflict minerals and pollution/toxics (electronics), for which it scores worst. This time it also lost half marks for excessive director's remuneration and operations in two oppressive regimes. Despite its lower score, we still recommend the Bialetti moka pot as an alternative to electronic coffee machines.

### Company Ethos

Only two companies received marks in the Company Ethos column: Illy received half a mark because it is a certified B-Corp, and John Lewis Partnership received half a mark for being an employee-owned business. ●



**AeroPress** is our only Best Buy for this guide. The company scored well in our ratings and the AeroPress is one of the most environmentally friendly coffee machines on offer.

**AeroPress**  
**12.5**



## RECOMMENDED

Manual coffee machines generally have less environmental impact than their electronic counterparts. Brands that scored reasonably well and produced manual machines are: **Bodum, Melitta, Bialetti, La Cafetiere** and **Le'Xpress**.

## BRANDS TO AVOID

**Nespresso**, which is owned by **Nestlé**, finds itself at the bottom of the table with an impressive nil points. Nestlé has long been boycotted by consumers, particularly for its irresponsible marketing of breast milk substitutes, particularly in developing countries.

**Spectrum Brands (Russell Hobbs)** scores 4 and is worth avoiding because it is a major supplier of pet food, through its brands Eukanuba and IAMS, both of which use factory-farmed meat.

# Coffee machines

## Conflict minerals

Most of the brands produced electronic coffee machines, or other electronic goods, and were therefore expected to have policies addressing the issue of conflict minerals (tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold). These minerals can be sourced from many different locations around the world, but in politically unstable areas, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, the minerals trade can be used to finance armed groups, fuel forced labour and other human rights abuses, and support corruption and money laundering.

The majority of brands received our worst rating for conflict minerals, though the following received our middle rating: Cookworks, Russell Hobbs, and Siemens.

Three brands (AeroPress, La Cafetiere and Le'Xpress) didn't produce any electronics goods and so weren't expected to have policies on conflict minerals and therefore didn't lose any marks in relation to this issue.

## Climate change

Most brands lost a whole mark in the Climate Change column. Illy was the only brand to receive our Best rating for Carbon Management and Reporting (thereby losing no marks), while AeroPress and John Lewis received a Middle (thereby only losing half a mark).

Bosch deserves special mention for its role in the Volkswagen emissions scandal, also known as Dieselgate – one of the largest corporate greenwashing

scandals in history. In 2019 the company was handed a €90 million fine by German prosecutors for lapses in its supervisory responsibilities which enabled carmakers to cheat regulatory emissions testing.

## Repairs

Most brands offer some form of coffee machine repair service, as shown in the table below, but make sure you read the small print before purchasing any machine. Of course, simple machines such as cafétieres or pour-over filters are much easier to repair yourself, with most brands in this guide supplying spare parts.

## Who sells what?

Brand	Ethicscore	Repair service*	Spare parts	Manual			Electric			
				Cafetière / French press	Moka pot / stove top	Pour-over filter	Bean-to-cup	Espresso machine	Filter machine	Pod machine
Aeropress	12.5	×	✓			✓**				
Bodum	8	×	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Jura	8	✓	✓				✓			
Melitta	8	3rd party	✓			✓	✓		✓	
Smeg	8	3rd party	✓				✓	✓		
Swan	8	✓	✓					✓	✓	
Bialetti	7.5	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
La Cafetiere	7.5	×	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Le'Xpress	7.5	×	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Krups	7	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
Illy	6.5	3rd party	✓		✓			✓		✓
Sage	6.5	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
De'Longhi	6	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Bosch	5	✓	✓				✓		✓	
John Lewis	5	×	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Siemens	4.5	✓	✓				✓			
Tassimo	4.5	✓	✓							✓
Beko	4	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Grundig	4	✓	✓						✓	
Lavazza	4	Limited	✓							✓
Russell Hobbs	4	Limited	✓					✓	✓	
Breville	3	Limited	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Cookworks	2	×	×						✓	
Nespresso	0	✓	✓							✓

\* This is only applicable to more complex, electronic machines. Manual machines can usually be repaired at home if spare parts can be ordered.

\*\*AeroPress is a unique coffee maker, but it is most similar to a manual filter system.



## Coffee pods

### Nespresso and the rise of the coffee pod

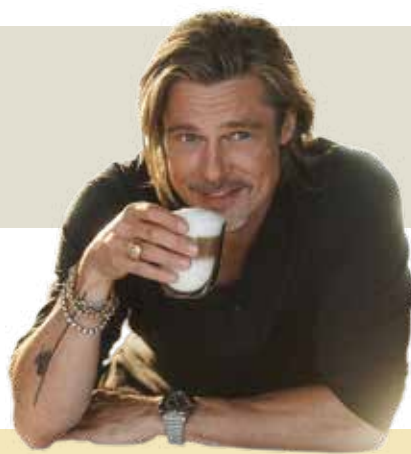
Coffee pods were introduced to the world by Nespresso, whose portmanteau moniker combines the name of its owner (Nestlé) and the type of coffee that these machines could produce (espresso). Nespresso was officially launched in 1986, but it took several years and some considerable rebranding before started to gain ground in the coffee market. The brand really took off in 2006 as a result of its high-profile marketing campaign with George Clooney, who is still the brand's 'ambassador' to this day.

The Nespresso brand became dominant across much of the globe, with the notable exception of the USA, where Nespresso's small portions struggled to satisfy to the big American appetite. Its dominance was challenged around 2012 when some of Nespresso's key patents expired, allowing competitors to enter the market. There has also been increasing concern about the environmental impact of pods.

### Are coffee pods bad for the environment?

The obvious negative impact of coffee pods is the waste that they produce, with each coffee made requiring a new pod. While many pods can be recycled, the majority end up in landfill instead of being recycled. According to The Rolling Bean, of the 39,000 capsules produced every minute worldwide, only 29,000 are actually recycled.

Nespresso pods are mostly made of aluminium (88% in consumer capsules and 67% in professional capsules), which is infinitely recyclable, though they also contain other materials including the filter, lacquer and silicon ring, which need to be melted off the aluminium during the recycling process. Due to the mix



#### THE RISE OF THE BRAND 'AMBASSADOR'

Nespresso's partnership with George Clooney set the trend for upmarket coffee brands partnering with suave, middle-aged male celebrities, with Roger Federer the ambassador for Swiss brand, Jura and Brad Pitt the ambassador for De'Longhi.

The homogeneity of these brand partnerships illustrates just how successful Nespresso's initial campaign with Clooney was. These brands aren't just selling convenient and tasty coffee, they are selling consumers a suave and sophisticated experience, all from the comfort of the home.

of materials and the complexity of the recycling process, it has generally not been possible to recycle coffee pods with the rest of your household recycling.

For this reason Nespresso has operated its own recycling scheme for a number of years, where customers can send used pods to Nespresso, or drop them off at a collection point. In 2021, three of biggest coffee pod brands, Nespresso, Nescafé Dolce Gusto and Tassimo, launched a partnership program, Podback, to allow consumers to recycle their coffee pods more easily. Pods can be dropped off at a number of locations across the UK, or left at the kerbside with your other household waste – though only if your local authority is part of the scheme.

This is a positive development if it helps to increase the number of pods that make it to recycling instead of landfill. However, even if pods are recycled, this does not mean that their environmental

impact is neutralised – the pods must still be produced, which requires energy and resources, and the recycling process takes more energy still.

### The benefits of pod machines

Although pods create more packaging waste than other coffee products, some have argued that overall they are more environmentally friendly than other coffee making methods. A 2019 article by Wired even went so far as to proclaim that "coffee pods are actually pretty good for the environment."

The first thing to put right about this misleading claim is that no method of making coffee is 'good' for the environment – rather, we are looking at which is the least harmful. This may seem like a pessimistic way of viewing the situation, but the production of most goods in the current global economy generally has many negative implications, not least due to the burning of fossil fuels in the production, transport, and use phases.

The Wired article argues that coffee pods are 'good' because they are generally less wasteful than other methods of making coffee. There is truth to this claim, because pods contain the exact amount of coffee needed to make a coffee, and on average this is significantly less than is used in other coffee brewing methods. Pod machines also only use and heat up the exact amount of water needed, whereas other methods (such as those that involved boiling a kettle) may heat up too much.

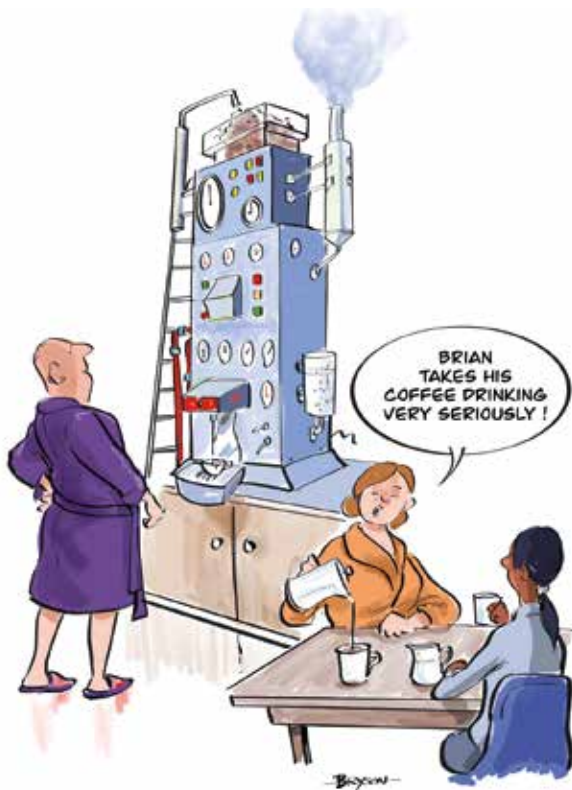
It is important to minimise waste, both of coffee and energy, because according to lifecycle analysis studies of making coffee, "the greatest environmental impact is attributed to the production of the ground coffee itself and the energy needed to brew the coffee." More coffee wasted means more coffee needs to be grown, which comes with a host of environmental impacts, including use of pesticides, water, land and energy (see the diagram on p11). Using more energy than necessary at the brewing stage likely leads to more fossil fuels being burned.

Of course, an individual using too much coffee or boiling a little too much water has minimal effect. But there is not just one individual making coffee – there are millions of people making several cups every day. ●

#### COMPOSTABLE PODS

There has been a rise in the number of brands offering compostable coffee pods. The production of any sort of pods takes energy and resources, but a recent academic study found that compostable pods had the lowest environmental impact when compared to plastic or aluminium pods. So for those of you that have pod machines, compostable pods look to be the best option when it comes to environmental impact.

# Coffee machines



## Which is the most environmentally friendly way to make coffee?

Academics love to disagree, and this is the case when it comes to the question of which form of coffee making is least harmful. One study we looked at found that coffee pods score better than other forms of coffee making when assessed across a number of different environmental categories. However, this study did not take account of the energy used to make the pods and assumed that there wouldn't be excessive wastage once the pod has been used.

Another study, which had broader scope, found that "the AeroPress and French Press presented the lowest general environmental impacts among the methods evaluated," while "the single-serve pod with paper sachet (soft pod) was the best alternative". This study found that when the production and disposal of the pod was considered, pod machines generally had a greater impact than other methods.

Another factor to consider is whether you have your coffee black or white. As you can see in our guide to coffee shops (p28), milk accounts for a significant proportion of a coffee's environmental impact, with milk accounting for three quarters of a latte's carbon footprint.

On balance, making small amounts of black coffee using simple, manual machines looks to be the most environmentally friendly option. So now that we've got to the bottom of that debate, it's time to sit back and just enjoy your coffee!

## Companies behind the brands

**AeroPress, Inc** is a US-based company founded by Alan Adler, an inventor and retired Stanford University engineering instructor. In 1984 Adler founded Aerobie, Inc, which produced sports toys, including the Aerobie Pro – a flying ring toy (like a hollow Frisbee) which was used to set a Guinness World Record for farthest thrown object. However, in 2017 the company sold the Aerobie sports brand and became AeroPress Inc, which is almost exclusively focused on the AeroPress and its accessories.

The AeroPress has taken the coffee world by storm in recent years and has a loyal fanbase. This is evidenced by the World AeroPress Championships, a fan-driven event that has taken place annually since 2008 and sees more than 3,000 entrants competing to make the best AeroPress coffee.

The simplicity of the AeroPress, requiring no electronic elements, is in stark contrast to the increasing complexity of other coffee machines. But it is this simplicity and versatility that is at the heart of its appeal. Many people don't want machines to do everything for them, preferring instead to have a hand in the productive process.

**Bialetti Industrie S.p.A.** is best known for producing the moka pot, an aluminium, Art Deco coffee-making device, invented by Alfonso Bialetti in 1933. The moka pot takes its name from Mokha, the port city of Yemen which, historically, was Arabia's chief coffee-exporting centre.

While the moka pot's name is tied to the history of the coffee trade, the material from which it is primarily made, aluminium, is historically tied to the rise of fascist Italy. The metal, which was found in abundance in Italy, was seen by Mussolini's government as essential for Italian progress, allowing the country to develop new technologies and reduce imports of other metals from foreign lands, while also embodying the tradition of Italian craftsmanship. As one 1931 editorial stated: "A new and decisively important protagonist has emerged in the nation's economic life: ALUMINUM. An Italian metal, the abundance of which makes us the envy of the world ..."

Bialetti's main product remains the moka pot, which has barely changed in design since the 1930s, but in 2010 the company branched out and also began producing electrical espresso machines.

Renato Bialetti, the son of Alfonso, was credited with successfully marketing his father's invention and making it into a widely recognised symbol of Italian coffee making. When he died, in 2016, his ashes were placed in a large replica of a moka pot and then buried. ■



Renato Bialetti, had his ashes put into his coffee pot design.

# Handbook of ethical purchasing

## Five ways of dealing with complexity in consumer markets

**In a world where a mobile phone can contain more than 300 separate components, each with different impacts, making ethical shopping decisions can quickly get complicated. In this third extract from 'The Handbook of Ethical Purchasing', ROB HARRISON introduces five approaches that consumers commonly use to help.**

There is a lot of complexity in trying to make ethical choices in modern consumer markets because:

- different products can be strong in different ethical areas;
- there are a lot of ethical grey areas in the real world;
- most people are looking at price and quality as well as ethics; and
- supply chains stretching round the world can make it difficult to check what is going on.

There are five main approaches which we can observe consumers using to take shortcuts through this complexity.

### 1. Ethical labels have become shorthand for many consumers

An ethical label on a product can give consumers confidence that someone else has looked at the problem and tried to address it. Although this works most of the time, one problem with this is that ethical labels or campaigns are often trying to solve just one specific problem and are not always looking at the whole product or company.

Fairtrade and organic labels, for example, can also appear on the products of companies which are less ethical in other parts of the business (e.g. tax avoidance). We have also seen that there is quite a wide variation in quality of labels and their standards.

### 2. Many consumers find a brand they trust and stick with it

As the New Economics Foundation explained in 1998:

"The main mechanism for labels (or brands) to work is not to change or make up the mind of the consumer in a shop, but to confirm an earlier decision made outside the market place influenced by marketing, the media and, crucially, civil processes."

This means that once someone has identified, for example, a toothpaste that tastes OK, is not too expensive, and is not tested on animals, they will make repeat purchases – sometimes for decades. And when they find a brand that they trust on ethics generally, such as Patagonia or Lush Cosmetics, they can buy a whole range of things from footwear to shampoo

without having to recheck all the ethical details each time they choose a new product from them. This is probably the key approach which makes complexity manageable for most ethical consumers and is why many brands try hard to be seen as green or ethical – often when they are not.



### 3. Third party advice and rankings are growing too

Our own Ethical Consumer magazine is perhaps the prime example, but our 'Global Directory' (<https://research.ethicalconsumer.org/research-hub/global-directory-ethical-consumption-organisations>) in 2018 listed 39 others around the world. There are two main types of advice organisations in this list:

(a) Small self-help groups of consumers which have been created specifically to address this issue of complexity. For example, the Italian group Consumietici is run by 'Acea Onlus', the Association of Ethical and Alternative Fuel Consumption, Public Goods and Lifestyles. It describes itself as "a voluntary association that focuses on the protection of individual rights, the promotion of ethical consumption and sustainable lifestyles, and solidarity, and the protection of common goods for public welfare."



(b) Some of the larger mainstream consumers' organisations, formed in the 20th century mainly to provide advice on product quality and safety, have now branched out and address ethical issues

too. The Consumers' Union of Finland (Konsumentförbundet Kuluttajaliitto) is one example of an organisation of this type.

Sometimes governments can become involved in funding or performing ethical rankings themselves. One such example is the Austrian Bewusstkaufen project, an initiative of the Environment Department. It provides a web portal for sustainable consumption in Austria which, amongst other things, provides a quality grading or ranking of around 250 ecolabels.

### 4. Commercial websites have also proliferated in this area

Because consumers are looking for help to navigate this complexity, the idea has emerged of the provision of ethical buying advice as a commercial service. There has been a proliferation of websites offering people the ability to buy a wide range of 'green' products online. The selection process for these products is where the service of simplification comes in.

Ethical Consumer has provided a guide to online shopping guides too. [www.ethicalconsumer.org/retailers/shopping-guide/ethical-online-shopping](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/retailers/shopping-guide/ethical-online-shopping).

### 5. General principles can be useful too

Asking questions such as "is it made locally?" or "is it made from natural materials?" can sometimes be shortcuts to less problematic choices in this space. Unfortunately, the definition of a 'natural' material is not in itself problem-free, though 'locally' is usually a bit more straightforward.

The Handbook of Ethical Purchasing, which contains references and more information on the extract above, is published by Routledge and is available here:

[www.routledge.com/The-Handbook-of-Ethical-Purchasing-Principles-and-Practice/Harrison/p/book/9781032059952](http://www.routledge.com/The-Handbook-of-Ethical-Purchasing-Principles-and-Practice/Harrison/p/book/9781032059952) for £29.99



# Are corporate net zero claims bullshit?

**Josie Wexler asks how sceptical we should be of company claims that they are “carbon neutral” or “net zero”.**

**T**he number of companies with ‘net zero’ climate targets is mushrooming. By the end of 2021, a third of the largest listed companies in G20 countries had them, up from a fifth the year before.

But confusion reigns about how credible they are. And the population is pretty jaded from so many years of obfuscation and word play in the area – the late renewable energy expert David Mackay once invented a greenwash award for “most creative use of the word ‘zero’”.

Some companies claim their targets are “science based” without any clear indication of how. A few claim to be working towards net zero while at the same time claiming to already be carbon neutral, which you could be forgiven for thinking sounds like the same thing. Adam Matthews, chief responsible investment officer at the Church of England Pensions Board, spoke for many when he told the Financial Times: “quite frankly, I didn’t know how to differentiate credible commitments from bullshit”. We’ll summarise some of the issues here.

## What does net zero mean for the world?

‘Net zero’ for the world means that carbon sources are balanced by carbon sinks. Carbon sinks are mainly plants that absorb carbon dioxide as they grow, and the oceans that absorb it as it gets mixed into the water.

We can enhance these sinks by restoring forests, peatlands and mangroves, and with bioenergy or direct air capture combined with carbon capture and storage (BECCS or DACCS). Such things are often called ‘net negatives’. They are controversial, particularly as they generally take up a lot of land, and the planet is currently a little rammed. However, all government scenarios under the COP 21 Paris Agreements consistent with a 1.5°C temperature rise include a major role for them. Their capacity is very limited though – they can only be used to mop up the dregs.

Limiting global warming to 1.5°C requires a deep reduction of emissions by about 90% below 2010 levels by around 2050, with the remaining emissions, from the sectors that are hardest to abate, being neutralised with such net negatives in order to take us to zero. Then towards the end of the century we will need to go into negative emissions as a globe to suck out the overshoot.

## Carbon neutral is not net zero

The terms ‘net zero’ and ‘carbon neutral’ are generally used quite differently. It’s easiest to understand the essence of how ‘carbon neutral’ is mostly used if you view it as not so much neutral for the climate, but neutral in terms of either tackling climate change or not. It is as if someone says “do you think we ought

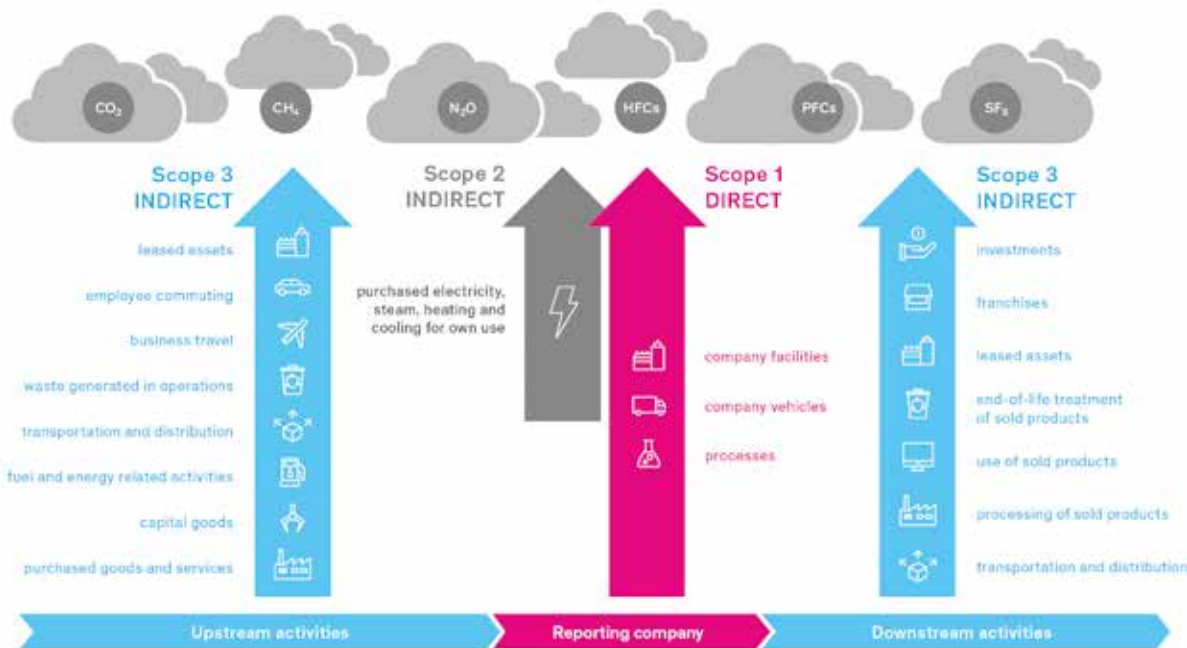
to tackle climate change?” and you reply “I’m neutral on it”.

This is because ‘carbon neutral’ is basically neutral relative to a business-as-usual scenario. It refers to a specific product or process at a specific snapshot in time, and it means that any emissions associated with it have been ‘neutralised’, which generally means paying someone else to reduce their emissions by an equivalent amount. But this is just passing the buck onto someone else, which doesn’t work when they have to be wrestling with the buck themselves already – we all have to. The emissions you ‘neutralise’ in a product at the moment of use may also be ‘recaptured’ over many years into the distant future – such as over the 200-year life of a tree.

Additionally, as defined by the PAS 2060 international standard, ‘carbon neutral’ only needs to cover scope 1 and 2 emissions (see definitions opposite). In summary: carbon neutral is for scoundrels.

## A nice net if it’s not full of holes

‘Net zero’ is in general much more meaningful. It refers to the whole organisation, and almost always to future targets, which reflects the reality of the situation. Decarbonisation is a process, and there is no way to be genuinely net zero in a world as far from it as we are today. No one is an island.



- **Scope one** emissions are a company's direct emissions.
- **Scope two** are the emissions of their purchased electricity and heat.
- **Scope three** are those of their supply chain and those emitted during the use of their products. Scope three are generally in the order of 90% of a company's emissions.

**Corporate SBTi targets must take into account Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.**

The Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi) Net Zero Standard states that for a company's target to be 'net zero' and align with the 1.5-degree target, it must aim to halve its greenhouse gas emissions across Scope one and two and two thirds of Scope 3 by the end of the decade, and then make a minimum 90-95% reduction in all scopes by mid-century. Only then may it use net negatives to neutralise any last remaining emissions, or pay anyone else to.

That looks pretty solid. In reality, however, many Net Zero targets fall far short of this, and depressingly, as we see below, that appears to include even some of those approved by the SBTi.

offsetting can mean net negatives, more often it just means paying someone else to reduce their emissions, and not at the end but at the beginning, because "we can't make the changes ourselves yet".

That has far too much potential to be a confusing distraction. If you can't do it yet, you need to be working on the structural changes that will make it possible.

Furthermore, a lot of offsets are of such dubious quality that it is unclear whether they are cutting carbon at all, and 66% of the firms that plan to use them fail to specify any conditions.

**Other forms of creative accounting and slipperiness**

Offsetting is only one way in which net zero targets can fail to be credible. Last month a German NGO called the New Climate Institute released an in-depth analysis of the Net Zero targets of 25 of the world's largest corporations (see graph overleaf), whose combined carbon emissions amount to 5% of the world's total. It determined that the proposed cuts only add up to 40% by 2050, not 100%. Many of the criticised targets were approved by the SBTi.

The issue is copious loopholes, and just terrible practice. Companies are often not reporting on large sources

of Scope three emissions, emissions from their subsidiaries, or emissions associated with land use change. They are counting carbon credits for purchased electricity as zero emission, when in reality many such credits are not meaningful. (In the UK, such credits are called 'REGOs'— we've written about them before).

The Institute also found what appears to just be sneaky cheating. For example, a US health insurance company called CVS Health has a SBTi-approved target for a 47% reduction in Scope 3 emissions from 2019 levels by 2030. All looking good, except that its Scope 3 emissions in 2019 were about 70% higher than in any of the surrounding years. It gives no explanation of this, but even if there was a totally kosher reason, it means that the 2030 target does not involve any cut from the present at all.

Disturbingly, given that the SBTi is the best we currently have, the New Climate Institute overall says:

"For the majority of the 18 companies assessed in this report with an SBTi approved 1.5°C or 2°C aligned target, we would consider such ratings as either highly contentious or inaccurate, due to subtleties that are difficult to detect."

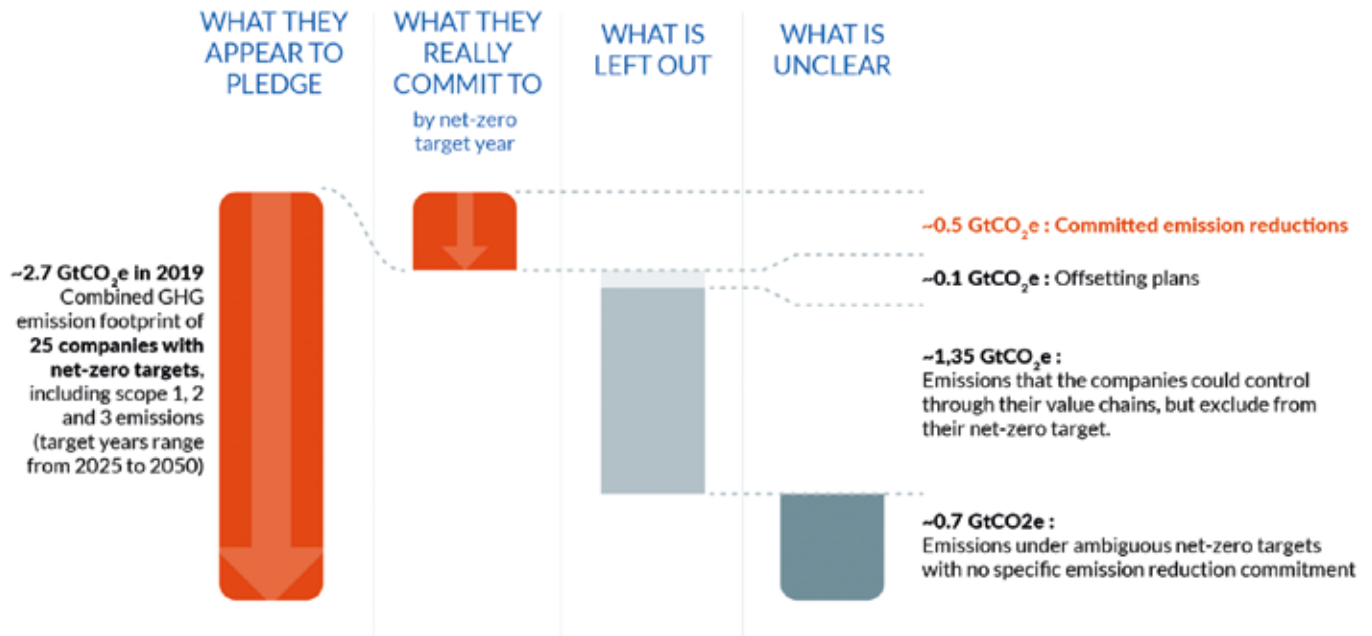
The SBTi responded to the report that it "welcomed stronger scrutiny of corporate climate targets", and that only one of the companies of the 25 in the report had met its new 'Net-Zero Standard' launched in October 2021.



**Offsetting**

Although the SBTi does not allow offsetting until the end of the process, of the 632 firms which the website Net Zero Tracker identified as having a net zero target in 2021, 43% planned to use offsetting to achieve it. And while

## The integrity of corporate net-zero pledges



The 25 companies assessed in this report are not necessarily a representative sample of all corporate actors with net-zero targets. They represent 25 of the largest companies in the world, accounting for approximately 5% of global GHG emissions and revenues of USD 3.2 trillion in 2020.

Source: Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2022, New Climate Institute – <https://newclimate.org>

### One truth but so many different ways to lie

Here are a few examples of some grossly misleading corporate claims that rest on the idea of ‘zero’ or ‘neutral’:

- The (recently collapsed) electricity company Bulb claimed on its website that “the average member lowers their carbon impact by a whopping 3.2 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e every year ... [because] with Bulb, annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the energy you use at home are zero.” 3.2 tonnes is around a third of your carbon footprint, so this is no mean boast. It rests on the fact that Bulb buys REGO credits to offset the electricity it buys, and carbon offsets to offset the gas. A more honest appraisal of the effect this has on your carbon footprint is – not much.
- Nestlé, which has a SBTi approved target, was one of the companies rated lowest by the New Climate Institute. This is because it states different things in different places: its SBTi target is compared to a 2019 base year, but its own publications suggest that it is really compared to a business-as-usual scenario. It claims to not use offsetting, but individual brands claim carbon neutrality on the basis of offsetting. Its target also doesn’t include major emissions sources, and there is no proper plan.
- JBS, a Brazilian meat processor, was another of the companies rated lowest by the Institute. Its target – net zero by 2040, is not approved by the SBTi, and the Institute determined that it only covers about 3% of its emissions as it ignores those from farms it does not own, and those related to deforestation.

### What needs to happen?

We will not tackle climate change while we are drowning in confusion and bullshit.

In terms of a good example, while the New Climate Institute did not rate any company targets as “high integrity”, Maersk received the best rating of all companies. It is committed to net zero emissions across all scopes by 2040, although it admits it will probably need to use offsetting for the last 5-10% of this. It has interim targets, a detailed credible plan, and it does not use misleading terms like ‘neutral’.

While offsetting cannot be used to avoid cutting emissions, finance is needed to scale up net negative technologies. The New Climate Institute and others suggest that firms buy credits, but rather than reporting it as reducing their emissions, they treat it as an additional contribution to climate mitigation efforts.

Overall we need much more clarity, and standards and regulation from government would be very helpful. In addition, the SBTi and others providing scrutiny need to be much more careful before approving targets.

In the meantime, while consumers and investors are unlikely to be able to do the kind of expert work the New Climate Institute did to separate the wheat from the chaff, it should be possible to gain enough carbon literacy to identify the really seriously chaff – we hope this article helped.

The main things that companies should be doing are:

- Only making net zero or carbon neutral claims to refer to the end point of a credible, long-term carbon reduction plan that cuts 90-95% of all the emissions they are connected with. Test it against the SBTi’s new standard.
- Not making claims to have reduced their own emissions on the back of their supporting external carbon mitigation or net negative projects, apart from right at the end once this cut has been achieved. However, it is fine (indeed very beneficial) to support them as an additional contribution to tackling climate change.

# Beyond consumerism

## Untelevised

**Our Beyond Consumerism features seek out ideas big and small, for rethinking economic systems and reducing reliance on corporations. We talk to Untelevised about making social change possible and accessible around the world.**

### Can you tell us a bit about the background of Untelevised?

We are a collaboration between the media production company, Filmanthropy, and the grassroots organisation, Revoke. The partnership seeks to bridge the gap between those who produce media, and those in grassroots environments with stories to tell but no access to tell them.

We aim to simplify political ideas for anyone who questions the current system but needs inspiration to help them take action.

We launched in 2019 with a visit to Nijmegen in the Netherlands, a city hailed as the 'Havana of Holland' – brimming with imaginative projects that showcase alternatives to our current capitalist, consumerist society.

We visited nomadic communities living from dumpster diving, compost toilets and water butt systems; cafes serving free meals sourced from surplus food; a bar run entirely by volunteers to raise money for the homeless, and much more. In documenting these projects, for those who did not have the media skills, equipment or capacity to document themselves, we were able to garner solidarity for their causes, whilst sharing practical examples for others to implement in their own lives.

### How did you adapt your approach during lockdown?

When lockdown hit in 2020, we were no longer able to visit and film projects and had to find a new way to share these stories. In June 2020, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter uprisings showed a heightened appetite for social change, and we were keen to capitalise on this mobilisation and to show that, whilst exciting, uprisings are only the beginning.

We launched Untelevised: The Podcast, to provide a resource for anyone interested in social change, to learn, discuss and share the struggles, the wins, the possibilities.

### What topics does the podcast cover?

Each episode is aimed at taking people along their journey: from the initial penny drop moment to the deeper dive into the questions that arise; to offering

practical solutions and signposting to ongoing actions they can take and projects they can support.

The podcast is in its fourth season and we've covered topics from 'What is Capitalism?' to 'Can consumerism ever be ethical?'. Our guests have ranged from the CEO & founder of Choose Love, the chair of Trussell Trust Foodbank Network, award-winning journalists like Anjan Sundaram, and businesses exploring more ethical practices like Riverford, Know the Origin and Suma Wholefoods.

For an episode on climate change for example, the content might take the form of:

- **Learn:** what does regeneration mean?
- **Discuss:** interviews with people tackling regeneration from different perspectives e.g. frontline farmers and policy makers.
- **Share:** what are the regenerative projects near you? What resources are available that you can read? What are some simple steps you can take to reduce consumption in your own life at low cost?

### How are Untelevised, the Lush Spring Prize and Glasgow connected?

In October 2021, Untelevised hosted the 2021 Lush Spring Prize ceremony from central Glasgow, in conjunction with Lush Cosmetics and Ethical Consumer (see issue 195).

The Spring Prize recognises and rewards grassroots, regenerative projects from around the world, which are not only fighting the effects of climate change but are also working to reverse them. The ceremony was hosted in Glasgow (with live connections around the world)



because the city was gearing up to host the COP26 climate summit. With the world's eyes, and hopes, on yet another global summit, genuine alternatives to our current unsustainable, consumerist society need to be represented.

Without tangible alternatives, the fight for climate change – or any social change – can feel incredibly overwhelming, and for many people, outright impossible.

This is exactly what we're trying to address with Untelevised – making social change seem possible, accessible and even enjoyable to those who are not veteran activists or so-called 'experts' in the field. For all those people who feel in their bones that society needs a drastic overhaul, but don't know where to start. We hope they might start with us.

In our explorations we ask ourselves and our guests, when, if at all, will this work no longer be needed? We hope that you will join us to reach that world, where this work will no longer be needed.

Listen and find out more: [www.untelevised.co.uk](http://www.untelevised.co.uk) and [@untelevised\\_tv](https://twitter.com/untelevised_tv). The Podcast is available on all streaming platforms under 'Untelevised: The Podcast'.

## Boycotting Russia

On February 24th, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for an international trade embargo. On March 7th, he specified: “a boycott of Russian exports, in particular the rejection of oil and oil products from Russia.”

On 15th March, Oleg Ustenko, economic adviser to Zelensky, told the New York Times “We’re talking about supplying Russia with bloody money that they’re using to feed a military machine that is killing my people [...] We need a full embargo, a full boycott.”

### Formal boycott campaigns

#### [www.boycottrussia.info](http://www.boycottrussia.info)

This website, launched on 9th March, lists companies taking action and those not. However, it may not be up to date. In late March, its list of ‘Companies to target’ said, for example, that Toyota had taken no action when, in fact, it announced suspended operations several weeks earlier.

It’s also calling on western firms to stop advertising on Russian state TV, and The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) is similarly calling on brands to “reconsider” media and marketing investments in Russia.

#### [Putin100.org](http://Putin100.org)

Launched on March 10th, this website lists details of the 100 financial



institutions most heavily entangled in Russian oil and gas. It appears to be based on data from November 2021 and February 2022, so some may be out of date.

Over 1 million people have signed an Avaaz petition this website linked to, calling on EU leaders, world governments, and CEOs of finance firms to stop doing business with Russian fossil fuel companies.

[https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/eu\\_stop\\_fuelling\\_putin\\_war\\_loc](https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/eu_stop_fuelling_putin_war_loc)

### Sporting and cultural boycotts

At least 30 international sporting federations have joined the boycott including FIFA, football's global governing body, which has suspended all Russian teams from international competition until further notice.

Several education, science and research collaborations with Russian institutions have been paused or affected. Eurovision banned Russian artists

from participating, and the Cannes Film Festival will not welcome official Russian delegations.

### Criticisms of a boycott

#### Ordinary civilians pay the price?

There is a growing body of commentary and tools for businesses to ensure they are considering human rights in all elements of their response, including responsible exit.

Blanket withdrawals could lead to unintentional harm. For example, an exodus of pharmaceutical companies could prevent Russian civilians from accessing healthcare.

#### A false sense of achievement

Patrick Cockburn argued in iNews that sanctions “give a false sense of achievement which is largely illusory”. Others, however, argue that sanctions can have a powerful impact, such as Anita Ramasastry at the University of Washington School of Law.

### Other actions

Other citizen actions include:

- donating to emergency appeals,
- volunteering with refugee organisations,
- turning down your thermostat to cut the consumption of Russian gas.

## The power of lists

The Yale School of Management is making hourly updates to a list of companies’ activities in Russia which has apparently encouraged many more companies to withdraw. As of 28th March it says:

174 companies have completely withdrawn from Russia, including:

- Airbnb
- Asda
- Asos
- BP
- eBay
- Netflix
- Sainsbury’s
- Spotify

194 have suspended operations with Russia while keeping options open for return, including:

- Adidas
- Amazon
- Apple
- Coca-Cola
- Disney
- H&M
- Nike
- Starbucks

28 are ‘reducing’ operations in Russia, including:

- Allianz
- Bacardi
- Bosch
- Carlsberg
- HSBC
- Natura
- Pepsi
- Whirlpool

54 are holding off on new investments or developments, such as:

- Cargill
- Colgate-Palmolive
- Danone
- Johnson & Johnson
- Mars
- Nestlé
- Procter & Gamble
- Unilever

43 are listed as “Defying demands for exit or reduction of activities”, including:

- Acer
- Credit Suisse
- Decathlon
- Emirates Airlines
- Huawei
- Koch Industries
- Lenovo
- Xiaomi



## Boycott on Uzbek cotton lifted after 13 years of campaigning



Since 2009, The Cotton Campaign, in response to a petition by Uzbek civil society actors, has called a boycott on Uzbek cotton due to state-sponsored forced labour. Over 300 companies were signed up to the Uzbek Cotton Pledge Against Forced Labour and it has formed an integral part of our own cotton rating, with companies losing marks under Workers' Rights if they failed to have a clear policy against sourcing from the country.

In March 2022, it was announced that the boycott was being lifted. For the first time, in the 2021 cotton harvest, Uzbek Forum for Human Rights found no government-sponsored forced labour. This came five years after the Uzbek Government first entered into negotiations with campaigners to work towards ending the boycott.

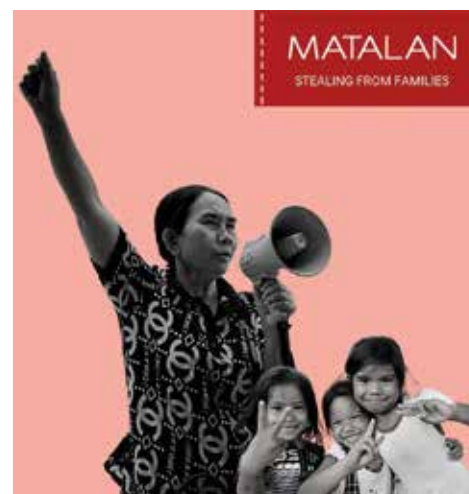
The Uzbek Forum for Human Rights stated: "Uzbekistan has demonstrated that it is able to harvest cotton almost entirely without coercion. This is in part due to a significant increase in pay for

cotton pickers which rose incrementally as the harvest progressed to compensate for lower earning potential [...] The central government's policy of preventing the forced labor of cotton pickers was tangible and was communicated throughout all branches of government."<sup>1</sup>

This is a clear success for the campaign, however there are still instances of local-authority coercion and individual cases of forced labour. But it is felt that, rather than continuing the boycott, a focus on strengthening freedom of association (unionisation) and other key protections for workers will have more success at dealing with these issues.

"Today we are celebrating, but our work continues to help build a fair and humane industry going forward," said Allison Gill, Cotton Campaign Steering Committee member and Forced Labor Program Director for GLJ-ILRF [Global Labor Justice-International Labor Rights Forum]. "We have the opportunity to create a new kind of supply chain, in which suppliers and brands have real transparency about labour practices and can invest in workers' rights and maintain high labour standards. Instead of forcing producers to compete for the lowest prices and, in turn, push labour standards down, brands should work with suppliers and labour organisations to develop a responsible business model, based on fair purchasing practices, to ensure decent work at all levels of the supply chain."<sup>2</sup>

In response to this positive news we will be adjusting our cotton rating, no longer requiring companies to have a policy prohibiting Uzbek cotton. The rating will continue to require companies to prohibit cotton from Turkmenistan, where government-sponsored forced labour is still a part of the annual cotton harvest. For the moment, the issue of Uyghur forced labour in cotton supply chains is addressed through a separate rating based on the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) report on the situation.<sup>3</sup>



### Take Action: Matalan campaign

As we have been reporting since the start of the pandemic, many clothing companies left garment workers without pay by refusing to pay for orders already made.

Labour Behind the Label is now calling on Matalan to pay its workers. The campaign organisation states:

"Matalan prides itself as a modern family brand, so we are inviting you to send a message from your family calling on the brand to pay the workers who make their clothes. Ramatex workers in Matalan's supply chain are owed \$1.4 million in unpaid compensation and damages. The workers were fired and then robbed of legally owed compensation when the Violet Apparel factory in Cambodia closed suddenly in July 2020. The vast majority of workers have families that depend on their income. Stealing from workers is stealing from families."

You and your family can support the campaign by taking a photo of yourselves holding a sign saying: "MATALAN, STOP STEALING FROM FAMILIES" and posting it to social media with the hashtag #PayYourWorkers. Don't forget to tag @Matalan too!

You can also sign petitions here:

- [labourbehindthelabel.org/matalan-stop-stealing-from-families](https://labourbehindthelabel.org/matalan-stop-stealing-from-families)
- [www.payyourworkers.org/ramatex](https://www.payyourworkers.org/ramatex)

### NEW GUIDE TO T-SHIRTS NOW ON OUR WEBSITE

T-shirt weather is on its way! Check out our new guide to ethical T-shirts to find out which T-shirt brands are sweat-shop free, what the most sustainable fabric choices are and where to get vegan-friendly T-shirts.

[www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/shopping-guide/ethical-t-shirts](https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/shopping-guide/ethical-t-shirts)

**References:** **1** [www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-ends-its-call-for-a-global-boycott-of-cotton-from-uzbekistan](https://www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-ends-its-call-for-a-global-boycott-of-cotton-from-uzbekistan) **2** [www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-government-of-uzbekistan-joint-statement-on-ending-the-call-for-a-global-boycott-of-uzbek-cotton](https://www.cottoncampaign.org/news/cotton-campaign-government-of-uzbekistan-joint-statement-on-ending-the-call-for-a-global-boycott-of-uzbek-cotton) **3** [www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale](https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale)

## UK finance fuelling Ukraine invasion

Campaign groups are calling for banks and investment companies to reduce President Putin's military power by scaling back their investments in fossil-fuels.

In February, global governments announced a series of sanctions against Russian corporations and influential figures, aimed at freezing any assets that could be used to fund arms for the invasion of Ukraine.

But a number of UK retail banks, including HSBC, Barclays, Banco Santander and Lloyds Bank, are still indirectly funding the atrocities through their investments in the region's oil and gas interests, and the Russian financial institutions that were omitted from the list of excluded corporations.

A report by research group Profundo said that Western banks gave Putin the means to launch the war by providing lending and funding for the Russian energy industry in recent years.

"European banks and investors have fuelled the Russian oil and gas industry with billions of euros, financing all steps in the value chain, from exploration and production to pipelines and other infrastructure needed for storage and transportation," said report author Jan Willem van Gelder.

The researcher said that HSBC had provided \$48 million in credit, and \$247 million in investment to the country's oil and gas sector between 2016 and 2021. It added that Lloyds Banking Group had supplied \$22 million in loans to the sector



over the same period.

According to the report, many European investors, including pension funds, insurance companies and asset managers, have also invested in Russian government bonds. "The proceeds of these bonds are directly used to finance all Russian government expenses, including the huge amounts spent on the army, weapon production and the maintenance of nuclear weapons," it said.

Make My Money Matter has called for all UK pensions schemes to divest their Russian assets where possible. The campaign group said that pension schemes should follow the example of organisations including Nest, Church of England, and Legal & General, and reduce their exposure to the Russian economy in response to the war on Ukraine.

"In doing so, the financial sector can display moral leadership, sound financial management, and help protect the savings of UK pension holders," said CEO Tony Burdon.

The organisation said that pension holders can ask their scheme to cut their exposure to Russia through its website: [www.makemymoneymatter.co.uk/ukraine](http://www.makemymoneymatter.co.uk/ukraine)

### COMMUNITY INVESTMENT OFFER

### SHERIFFHALES COMMUNITY ENERGY

Sheriffhales Community Energy (SCE) is launching an investment bond to raise £925,000 to maintain its 3.2 MW community-owned solar array in Shropshire.

The money raised through the investment will enable the Community Benefit Society to repay the short-term loan it used to buy the array and ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the project.

SCE was formed in 2018 to buy an established solar array from Lightsource BP, which is 50% owned by BP. Lightsource BP continue to provide ongoing maintenance services under a long-term contract.

The solar array, comprising 11,976 panels, is built on local farmland and generates around 2,971,000 kWh of green electricity each year. This is equivalent to the annual consumption of 825 homes and is enough electricity to make 95 million cups of tea or travel 11 million miles in an electric car.

The project produces around 2,984 MWh of clean energy each year. It has an annual revenue of more than £400,000 and is expected to generate around £1,000,000 over the lifetime of the array.

SCE uses this income to fund local community initiatives and has already allocated £150,000 to local causes.

The land under and around the solar panels is managed to maintain a species rich meadow of grasses, herbs and wildflowers and encourage wildlife and biodiversity, SCE said.

The bond is targeting annual returns of 4% with capital returned over 15 years, and will be eligible to be held tax-free within an Innovative Finance ISA.

SEC has at the time of writing raised £28,206 for the bond.

Full details on how to apply are available on the Ethex positive investment platform:

[www.ethex.org.uk/invest/sheriffhales](http://www.ethex.org.uk/invest/sheriffhales)  
**Deadline:** 31 May 2022

**Minimum investment:** £100

**Interest:** 4%

**Investment type:** Fixed rate unsecured fifteen-year bond

## Carbon divested funds: financial performance

Carbon divested fund	5-year cumulative performance to 23/03/22	Ethiscore as of 09/2020
Janus Henderson Global Sustainable Equity Fund	101.1	7
BMO Responsible Global Equity	84.4	10.5
Jupiter Ecology	56.4	6.5
EdenTree Amity International	52.1	7
WHEB Sustainability	52.8	16
Triodos Pioneer Impact	57.3	16
Quilter Cheviot Climate Assets*	38.38	6
Rathbone Ethical Corporate Bond	17.8	6
AXA Ethical Distribution	14.1	10
Sarasin Sustainable Global Real Estate Equity	14.9	11
Castlefield B.E.S.T Sustainable Income	4.5	13
Aegon Ethical Corporate Bond**	9.4	5
IA Global (for comparison)	59.0	-

\* 28 February 2022, data from quiltercheviot.com \*\* Name change from Kames to Aegon

# Tax justice

## Fair Tax Mark news

On February 22nd, Coventry Building Society announced that it had secured its first Fair Tax Mark accreditation, thereby joining the growing movement of responsible businesses who are proud to take a stand against aggressive corporate tax avoidance.

Coventry is the second largest building society in the UK. It was founded in 1884 and currently holds £53 billion in assets. By securing the Fair Tax Mark, Coventry Building Society is now demonstrating leading edge responsible tax conduct to its 2 million members and 2,800 colleagues.



**Fair Tax**

Coventry Building Society was already an Ethical Consumer recommended buy for savings accounts, mortgages and Cash ISAs.

Also in February, the Fair Tax Foundation announced that Newcastle City Council had become the 20th council in the UK, and 6th in the North East, to sign up for its Councils for Fair Tax Declaration.

Local authorities that approve the Declaration commit to leading by example on their own tax conduct, demanding greater transparency from suppliers and calling for more meaningful powers to tackle tax avoidance amongst suppliers when buying goods and services.

On January 31st, Torfaen Council became the first Welsh council to sign up to the Declaration. Torfaen covers the towns of Pontypool, Cwmbran and surrounding areas north of Cardiff in South Wales.

The Sample Motion and Councils for Fair Tax Declaration (in English and Welsh) appears on the Fair Tax Foundation website.

We are also pleased to announce that Ethical Consumer's own accreditation with the Fair Tax Foundation was renewed in March 2022.

Find out more: [fairtaxmark.net](http://fairtaxmark.net)

## No windfall tax on oil companies in the UK despite strong campaigning

The Chancellor's spring statement on March 23rd perhaps surprised no-one by failing to announce a windfall tax on some of the extraordinary profits that oil companies have been making since the war on Ukraine had helped to send oil prices skyrocketing even higher.

Campaigners, including the opposition Labour party and Greenpeace, had argued that a tax of this kind would be a logical way to raise revenue to help the poorest people weather fuel price rises which are already beginning to affect them disproportionately.

Campaigners also pointed out that a failure to tax in this way created an additional danger whereby these cash-rich oil companies, when spared higher taxes, could instead invest in more oil and gas drilling. This made no sense in a time of climate crisis and when the reliance on Russian oil and gas had made a dash for renewables a much more sensible option.

Three-quarters of Conservative voters supported a new windfall tax on oil and gas companies, according to a poll in January.



© Jason White / Greenpeace

Greenpeace said that by bringing in a windfall tax on the huge profits made by fossil fuel giants the Chancellor could raise enough money to cover a £500 payment to six million households expected to be in fuel poverty by April, with money to spare for insulating homes.

## TAX WEALTH TO TACKLE INEQUALITY



In March, Church Action for Tax Justice announced that the response to its 'Good Measure' campaign had, so far, been the best it had ever seen. It is asking for two things:

1. A one-off wealth tax on the richest 1% of individuals in the UK. The top 1% of households have wealth of more than £3.6 million each, and they hold 43% of all the wealth in Great Britain.
2. A commitment to review the tax system, both in terms of plugging the 'loopholes' the very wealthy can use to avoid paying their taxes; and in terms of ensuring a fair interaction of wealth taxes with other taxes that relate to wealth – such as capital gains taxes, and inheritance tax.

Some other countries do have wealth taxes: the Tax Foundation recently commented that of OECD countries, Colombia, France, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland all levy them. Currently there are increasing calls for wealth taxes to be reconsidered in various countries around the world.

More information about the campaign, which is due to run throughout 2022, can be found at: [www.eccr.org.uk/good-measure-campaign](http://www.eccr.org.uk/good-measure-campaign)



## Infinity Foods delivery

**Ed:** In the letters page in EC195 (p52/3) we stated that Infinity Foods (based in Brighton) only offered home delivery services to people living in Brighton and Hove. In fact, Infinity Foods offers nationwide delivery, though the further away you live the greater the minimum order. We will look to include them in the supermarket guide in due course.

## Vattenfall and the Scottish Wildcat

I wish to correct three mistakes in the letter 'Vattenfall and the Scottish Wildcat', published in EC195:

1. Wildcat Haven is not a charity – it is a Community Interest Company which does not have charitable status and is based in Wales.

2. The main work to preserve the Scottish wildcat is conducted by Saving Wildcats, which is led by the charity the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland: [savingwildcats.org.uk](http://savingwildcats.org.uk)

3. Wildcat Haven is not fighting Vattenfall in the courts, but is one of the organisations and individuals making representations at a public enquiry into Vattenfall's proposed wind farm. It is the public enquiry that will consider all matters presented to it, including wildcats, and will determine whether or not the wind farm goes ahead.

**Cathy**

## Guppy bags

I hope I have not left it too late to save Brian (whose letter appeared in EC193) from wasting his money on Guppy bags. Wanting to do the right thing, I purchased my first Guppy bag in November 2018 at a cost of £25, I read all the instructions and started to use it 2-3 times a week. I soon realised one is not enough, I always fill my washing machine with a full load, but even for a smaller 3kg wash, I was going to need at least two bags, I bought another one in 2019, another £25.

The microfibrils are meant to collect in the hems of the bag, but I never found much that I could pick out, it was tedious and time consuming. Then my husband started to complain about the dusty residue that was being left on his clothes, presumably microfibrils. I was willing to brush this off, but he was less forgiving, and as Brian said in his letter, if I brush them off where are they going? Into the air of my home or garden? The final blow was when the plastic zips broke, first in one, and a few months later in the other, so I had less than 3 years use out of them. I hope I have saved Brian some money!

**Mandy**

## Suma and ethical banking

I have recently joined a small group who order in bulk from Suma. I was extremely disappointed when paying on line to find out that they bank with NatWest. In my mind this should take them far down the ethical table. Please could you follow this up with them and any other Best Buy companies as it's really important all so-called ethical companies bank with the ethical banks.

**Kath**

**Ed:** We do not take into account which bank a company uses for its finances. While we do believe this is important, it is not currently within the scope of our research (there is a limit to what research we can do) and it is not always possible to find out this information. However, we passed your email to Suma, who gave the following reply:

"We appreciate Ethical Consumer passing on this feedback, it's really helpful to know what our customers are thinking. Our Finance Committee actually raised this issue at the start of February, and we have been researching the options for changing bank. We

are developing a new sustainability strategy which is what prompted us to review this, though I acknowledge your reader's disappointment and recognise that reviewing our banking choices is something we should have done before now.

"The Ethical Consumer banking guide proved really helpful with this work! We were really keen on Triodos but sadly they are not currently opening business bank accounts, so we are looking in to other options that are aligned with our values and principles."

## Suma – orders for individuals

I'm writing in response to Darryl-Jo's letter, titled 'Supermarket Boycott' in EC196. I have used Suma for the last ten years, which is the main reason I too have been able to avoid supermarkets. I am an individual, rather than a business, and have occasionally combined an order with neighbours. Once they know you, i.e. after initial order, it is possible to get certain items in smaller quantities so you don't need your own private warehouse. The Suma service is incredibly friendly and efficient, and they deliver UK-wide. A genuine life-changer.

**Charlie**

## Where to find WHEB

In your guide to Stocks & Shares ISAs, you say that the WHEB Sustainability fund is only available via two of the platforms covered – Big Exchange and Hargreaves Lansdown. In fact the fund is also available via Interactive Investor. A quick glance at the Bestinvest website confirms the WHEB fund is also available on that platform.

**Steve**

## Printing ethics

I was interested that within your guide to Booksellers (EC193) it goes into discussing paper without discussing the actual printing. There's a lot of books and magazines printed (including Ethical Consumer) in a very damaging way. Full of VOCs and other nastiness. If you smell the pages of Ethical Consumer you can actually smell the chemical of the printing process – it's quite strong.

If we're to start changing the industry and improving the environmental impacts of printing then environmental publications should lead the way in clean and green printing. Printing can now be waterless, alcohol and substitute free, using 100% VOC-free inks, renewable energy with zero waste to landfill.

**Dave**

**Ed:** It's true that lots of printing is done in a way that is very environmentally damaging. However, we ensure that Ethical Consumer magazine is printed in way that minimises its environmental impact. Our printers, RAP Spiderweb, are based in Oldham, just down the road from our Manchester offices. Their printing press is a modern Komori G29, so has the latest environmental technology and is chemical free. Our magazine is printed using vegetable inks on 100% post-consumer waste, chlorine-free recycled paper.

The reason the magazine 'smells' is because the vegetable-based inks soak into the uncoated paper and remain within the fibres. The smell is not chemicals, it's a combination of the ink and uncoated paper. If you smell the cover, which is printed on a coated paper, you'll notice the smell is nowhere near as strong as it is on the internal pages which are uncoated.

## Hollyoaks & OnlyFans

In response to Boycotts News, EC194: I had to read your paragraph twice before I could believe what you were saying. Am I really correct in seeing that you want people to boycott Hollyoaks because they axed an actress for putting herself onto OnlyFans?

I work with online sex offenders, so I'd like to think I know at least a fair amount about online sexual content. I applaud Hollyoaks for taking a stance against someone who has brought further attention to OnlyFans by putting herself on it. As a magazine concerned with ethical consumption, have you even thought about what you were doing in writing this piece?

OnlyFans is a highly unethical enterprise, which has been investigated by reporters as being very easy for under 18s to gain access to and earn through. I'm trying to work out why you thought advertising the boycott of Hollyoaks was fine. Was it some belief in public nudity being a human right, or an attempt to be liberal and say that pornography is acceptable? Do you think people putting sexual content onto OnlyFans is OK?

Easy access to sexual content is having catastrophic effects across all areas of society.

**Neia**

**Ed:** Firstly, Hollyoaks didn't fire Dunn in protest of OnlyFans' failure to enforce its age restriction and prohibit violent sexual content. It fired Dunn because she was involved in (legal) sex work. If Channel 4 decides to launch a campaign against OnlyFans for its many issues, we'd probably report on that. But it didn't – Channel 4 just fired Dunn and left OnlyFans uncriticised.

Secondly, it is true that mass access to sexual content has troublesome effects across society. Firing Dunn doesn't challenge this mass access. Worryingly and devastatingly, as you'll know, children can access porn in far easier ways than going on OnlyFans. All firing her does is reinforce the message that it's shameful and unrespectable to be involved in sex

work. This compounds the idea that women who feature in sexual content aren't worthy of rights or respect – a dangerous message.

## Nationwide & Aegon

Your product guide to current accounts (EC186) gives Nationwide Building Society an ethicscore of 12, but there is no mention of their third-party investments partner Aegon, which appears at the bottom of the score table in your guide to ethical pensions (EC187). I don't know if this is a new situation, but has it been taken into account when deciding on Nationwide's score?

**Sharon**

**Ed:** It is not uncommon for banks to offer services provided by other companies, but this is not something we currently account for in our rankings. The world of finance is complex and there are almost endless factors we could include in our analysis, but we are a relatively small team of researchers so we have to draw the line somewhere. However, it may be something that we are able to consider in future.

**We welcome readers' letters. Letters may be edited for reasons of space or clarity. If you do not want letters or emails to be published, please mark them 'Not for publication'. Our address is on page 3, or email us at [letters@ethicalconsumer.org](mailto:letters@ethicalconsumer.org)**



# Strawberry Farms Forever



One of Europe's most important national parks is under threat from strawberries, says **SIMON BIRCH**.

For the past three years, Ethical Consumer has been campaigning against the exploitation of farm workers in southern Spain who are crucial for the supply of soft fruit and vegetables to supermarkets across Europe and the UK.

However, it's not just the farm workers who are paying the price for our demand for year-round fruit and veg as the environment is picking up the tab too.

South west Spain is now the epicentre for the booming strawberry sector and is the biggest supplier of strawberries in Europe, accounting for around 20% of the strawberries bought in the UK.

The problem is that many strawberry farms have been built illegally on former forested land and, with southern Spain increasingly experiencing severe droughts, many of these illegal farms are also illegally pumping groundwater to irrigate their strawberries.

The bad news is that many of these farms have sprung up right next door to Doñana National Park, one of the most important wetland refuges for wildlife in Europe and a crucial refuelling point for millions of migratory birds between Europe and Africa.

With strawberry production now booming, the underground water supplies that sustain Doñana are being overexploited with catastrophic results.

Despite being the most protected national park in Europe, as well as being a UN World Heritage site, Doñana is now being pumped dry and its future is under threat.

## And the bad news doesn't stop there.

Earlier this year the right-wing regional government proposed to grant an amnesty to all the illegal farms and their wells, a move that was condemned by Spain's central government, the EU and wildlife campaigners:

"WWF believes that nature and agriculture can co-exist around Doñana as long as forested land is not

A banner saying 'Stop Water Theft' seen from the air next to Doñana national park as part of the campaign against the granting of an amnesty to illegal strawberry farms.



© WWF España

converted and overall water use is kept at a sustainable level," says a WWF spokesperson.

"The amnesty proposed by the Andalusian regional government will make it virtually impossible to get water use back to a sustainable level and WWF will continue to fight to prevent the proposed law from being enacted."

## So should consumers boycott Spanish strawberries in protest?

Well actually no, says Roberto Gonzalez Garcia from SEO, Spain's leading bird conservation group:

"The region where the strawberries are grown, like many areas of Spain has very few employment opportunities which has led to high levels of unemployment," says Garcia.

"The only option is farming but because there's so little available land for cultivation many people have had to turn to farming on illegal land."

Alex Crumby a researcher at Ethical Consumer agrees with Roberto Gonzalez Garcia:

"While boycotts can be an effective campaign tool, they can also have negative, unintended consequences such as job losses.

"We've been supporting migrant workers and trade unions in southern

Spain for several years and we would only consider supporting a boycott of Spanish goods if it was called for by them," says Crumby.

So what should consumers do if they're concerned about Doñana's future?

"If you wish to address the negative environmental impact of strawberry production in Spain, we recommend you write to supermarkets and ask them what they are doing about this issue," advises Crumby.

The good news is that many of the biggest supermarkets in Europe and the UK are now well aware of the issues surrounding Spanish strawberries.

Over half of them including ASDA, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose have recently written to the Andalusian regional government calling on it to abandon its plans to give an amnesty to the illegal strawberry farms.

"Major European retailers have made it clear," says Stuart Orr from WWF.

"This amnesty must not become law because it threatens the future of the irreplaceable Doñana as well as the legal fruit industry that drives the local economy."

@SimonBirchSays



A Workers Co-operative,  
Supplying Ethically Traded  
Organic & Natural  
Wholefoods, Since 1971.

..... Naturally good!



\* An Unparalleled Range Of Branded Goods..

\* An Extensive And Varied Range Of Infinity Foods Own Brand Products.

\* Local, National And International Delivery.

**info@infinity.coop**

# VEGAN SANDALS

Over 200 footwear styles, including...





Dana (Blue)



Lydia (Black)



Wedge (Metallic Silver)



Moab (Brown)



Helena (Black)



Redwood (Brown)



Toe Strap (Gold)



Toe Post (Metallic Red)



Toe Strap (Metallic Blue)

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