

Head: My fair city

Deck: Milwaukee becomes the first Fair Trade City in the United States

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Milwaukee is known for its beer and brats, but many aren't aware it is also an international leader in fair trade.

In fact, last June the city council passed a resolution designating Milwaukee as the first and only Fair Trade City in the United States, resulting in a beehive of activities to promote fair trade in our fair city.

Fair trade promotes livable wages, safe working conditions and long-term economic and environmental sustainability for farmers and artisans in developing countries. Green and organic products are hot, but so are fair trade products. Demand for fair trade in the U.S. is growing at a rate of approximately 40 percent annually, totaling \$2.6 billion in sales in 2006.

And fair trade is going mainstream. Walk into many McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, or Sam's Club and you will find fair trade coffee. But fair trade products have expanded beyond coffee to include chocolate, bananas, rice, wine and other agricultural products, as well as nonagricultural products such as sports balls, crafts, housewares and musical instruments. For a list of local businesses that sell fair trade certified products, such as Anodyne, Beans & Barley, Comet Café and Outpost Natural Foods, log onto [www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org).

"For many years retailers were not sure if people really cared about the plight of farmers and workers in the developing world, yet companies like the Outpost, Whole Foods, and Roundy's are taking the leap of faith by putting fair trade products on the shelf," says Paul Rice, founder and CEO of TransFair USA, the only organization certifying fair trade products in the U.S. "The good news is that people do care. We are finding through the rapid growth of this market, increasing concern about plight of the world, about social and environmental issues from people in this country."

The ground floor

There is a vibrant grass roots movement of businesses and community organizations in Milwaukee that know about fair trade, are excited about it and want to build the movement and reach more citizens in the city, notes Rice. "They have been joined by forward-thinking leaders such as Alderman Tony Zielinski, and Mayor Tom Barrett, in particular, who really got it and decided to join in the front end rather than much later, which is unique," he says.

According to Barrett, "Milwaukee has an important role in the global marketplace, but we maintain a commitment to improving the lives of workers in developing nations by supporting fair market trading practices. Fair trade is like an international farmers market, and now our citizens have the ability to affect social change by becoming consciousness consumers."

The Fair Trade Resolution, which was introduced by Zielinski, is modeled after the hundreds of fair trade cities in Europe, and encourages fair trade purchases within the city government and among local businesses, schools, religious groups and consumers. The

resolution establishes a steering committee to educate the public about fair trade. "The ultimate goal is to educate as many people in our region about fair trade so we can have as dramatic an impact as possible," says Zielinski. "The other key component is to help spread fair trade to other municipalities as well."

#### Social conscience

Local businesses are demonstrating leadership in the fair trade movement, and provide significant local community support as well. Rishi Tea Co. purchases tea from selected regions of the world, including the villages of Jing Mai, an area of China whose culture has been intertwined with ancient tea trees for more than 1,500 years and has the highest poverty rates. Rishi pays above-market prices, plus an additional premium, for community improvements such as building a library, a hot shower system, water purification, and agricultural training programs. "We do business with larger, high-quality companies on a national scale, such as Whole Foods, Wagmans and Williams Sonoma, but our bread and butter has been and remains to this day locally independently owned business café coffee shops and retailers such as Sendik's and Outpost," says Ben Harrison, co-owner of Rishi. Another "home-grown" company, Alterra, is a licensed roaster of Fair Trade Certified coffees since 2002, and now ranks among the top 12 licensees in the U.S. The business has a long-term relationship with the Kulaktik coffee cooperative in Chiapas, Mexico. Alterra's "give back program" allocates 25 cents of every pound of coffee sold to Kulaktik, which provides an additional \$15,000 to \$20,000 to the co-op each year. The co-op takes this money and fair trade premiums, and invests in business and community development, such as constructing a tasting laboratory, formation tank and health clinic. These international projects complement Alterra's local community partnerships, such as a curriculum project for fourth-graders on Fair Trade at the Fratney School. Alterra even donates its used coffee grinds to the Growing Power Food Center and Training facility. The grinds are used for a worm farm that produces high-grade fertilizer that Growing Power sells to support its nonprofit activities.

#### A personal statement

Businesses are not the only ones getting involved in fair trade; entire neighborhoods are, too. Vliet Street hosts fair trade festivals, which include fair trade wine and coffee tasting events. Also on Vliet Street is the Four Corners of the World Fair Trade Store and the Fair Grounds Coffee shop, both opened in the last two years. The interfaith community has historically been very active in promoting fair trade. For example, the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America runs the Mt. Meru Coffee Project, which promotes fair-trading with coffee farmers in Tanzania. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the grass roots organization SWIFT (SW Wisconsin Fair Trade) sponsors the Milwaukee Clean Clothes Campaign. The campaign is an anti-sweatshop initiative which has already had success with anti-sweatshop work in public and private schools, and all levels of government. The campaign has developed fair trade curriculum, and consumer information on how and where to buy fair trade products in Milwaukee. Local colleges, such as Marquette University, are also very active in the fair trade movement, and this past November sponsored a Fair Trade Christmas Fair. According to Rice, promoting fair trade it is quite simple: "You have

a voice whether you know it or not. And when you speak corporate America listens. So the most important thing that consumers can do is look for the fair trade label when they shop, buy fair trade products, and if it is not in your local store or local café, church, or school, ask for it.”