

# Your coffee can help save the rainforest

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Deforestation and the destruction of tropical rainforest has been a hot topic among scientists and conservationist for years, and it continues to be a growing problem. Quoted rates vary, but scientists do agree that tropical rainforests are disappearing at an alarming rate (a football field per second, according to the Nature Conservancy). Rainforest destruction occurs when trees are cut down for logging, ranching, mining, and agriculture.

Shade grown coffee is just one of many sustainable agricultural practices that offer indigenous peoples a way to make a living while protecting the rainforest. Rather than clearcutting in order to create a coffee plantation, shade grown techniques utilize native canopy trees which provide soil nutrients and protect soils from erosion, thus minimizing the need for chemical fertilizers. Shade grown coffee plantations also provide habitats for birds and other native animals, protecting the biodiversity of the region.

According to the International Coffee Organization, over 2 million cups of coffee are consumed every day, and in many years, coffee is second only to oil as an export commodity. We drink a lot of coffee! So, choosing coffee that is shade grown is an important step that you can take to help protect tropical rainforests from destruction.

## Common Coffee Certifications

**Bird Friendly:** The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center issues a "bird friendly" label through organic coffee certification specialists. In order to obtain the label, the farm must meet a set of requirements. These include; maintaining the tree canopy and diversity of canopy trees and other plant species, as well as the creation and protection of riparian buffers along streams and rivers.

**Fair Trade:** Fair Trade International certifies products to ensure that farmers in developing countries get a minimum price for their goods. Though Fair Trade principles include environmental conservation and sustainability, Fair Trade certification on coffee does not mean that the coffee was grown organically or that the farm utilizes shade grown techniques.

**Organic:** In order to be certified organic, coffee must be grown to the USDA's organic standards. This includes being grown without using synthetic pesticides and other restricted substances (sewage sludge, certain pesticides, etc) for at least 3 years. Organic certification also does not allow the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Coffee products can carry an organic seal if at least 95% of the ingredients in the product are certified organic.

**Rainforest Alliance Certified:** The Rainforest Alliance certifies crops based on meeting a set score tailored to the size of the operation through a combination of rigorous standards set by the Sustainable Agriculture Network. These standards include criteria for the following; water, ecosystem, wildlife, and soil conservation as well as waste management, fair treatment of workers, community relations, and social and environmental management systems. The Rainforest Alliance Certification also requires that no genetically modified crops be grown on the farm.

