

A Fair Trade For The Price Paid

By Sandra Edmiston
Reporter

So you're standing in line at the cash register in the Chartwells Café. While searching desperately in your pocket for that loonie you knew was there just a minute ago, you glance to your right and notice a coffee container with the words "fair trade" and "organic" written on it. You ask yourself, "What is this poor coffee container doing separated from the Ritazza Roast? Doesn't it feel lonely? Have the other coffees been teasing it and so it ran over here to hide? Poor little guy, reminds me of how Jason Lane used to beat me up for my lunch money back in elementary school...oh, yeah, that reminds me. Where is that loonie?"

Ok, so maybe you're not thinking about the emotional status of the coffee container. But you may be asking along with many other

UPEI students and staff what it's doing there, how it got there, and what the heck is fair trade anyway?

The fair trade coffee is there because a small group of about five or six faculty and staff approached Marc Braithwaite, General Manager of Residence, Food, and Conference Services at UPEI about using fair trade coffee in the cafeteria. A new idea for both Braithwaite and Chartwells, and both responded with welcome enthusiasm.

According to Braithwaite, he was unfamiliar with the idea of fair trade coffee before, but is now enthusiastic about providing it on campus.

Said Braithwaite, "I'd like to see us move towards being a fair trade campus."

This push for fair trade coffee comes at an appropriate time. The Chartwells 7 year food contract

ends this May, so the University is looking at three bidders (Chartwells included) for a new contract. Residence, Food, and Conference Services has asked all bidders to incorporate fair trade coffee into their proposals.

But what exactly is fair trade coffee?

Of the 25 million coffee producers in the world, 15 million are small farmers. They cannot export their goods directly, so they are forced to sell their crops to mid-level traders. These larger companies use their monopolizing position to coerce the farmers into selling their coffee at extremely low prices. Also serving as creditors, the larger companies force the small farmers to make high interest payments, perpetuating a cycle of impoverishment and debt (Note: this shouldn't sound too unfamiliar to anyone growing up in rural PEI).

The fair trade coffee movement attempts to give small farmers a chance. According to Transfair Canada, coffee that is fairly traded ensures a set minimum price that makes sure the costs of production are covered for the farmers, the extension of credit to producers to help avoid debt while financing the next year's crop, and the agreement to longer term trading relationships that offer small farmers future security and enable them to use sustainable production practices. Thus fairly traded coffee promotes healthy rural communities, preventing the disease and poverty caused by poor economic situations.

While fair trade coffee does not necessarily mean the coffee is also organic, much coffee is both (the brand offered in the cafeteria included). But what is organic?

Coffee is a pesticide intensive crop. Many places where coffee is grown do not have regulations against harmful chemicals such as

DDT and benzene hexachloride. By choosing organically grown coffee, you're ensuring that the coffee growers are not using pesticides that damage the local environment and create human health risks.

Shade grown is another form of agriculture often coupled with fair trade and organic coffee. Shade grown coffee means that the coffee is grown under the shade of the natural forest canopy, essential for soil and wildlife habitat preservation. Coffee that is not shade grown is often being produced in areas where valuable rain forest has been destroyed.

Leo Cheverie, a library technician at Robertson Library and one of the main advocates of fair trade coffee at UPEI, encourages students, faculty and staff to buy the fair trade coffee over the non-fairly traded Ritazza.

Says Cheverie, "I hope everyone on campus supports fair trade coffee in order to make the world more equitable and more sustainable. I much appreciate that we have the opportunity to bring fair trade coffee on campus, because many other universities already offer these choices."

On a related note, there are also movements to decrease the styrofoam waste coming out of the Chartwells cafeteria. One way you can help? Bring your own containers (Gladware, tupperware) and coffee cups instead of using styrofoam and paper. As long as they are clean, the cafeteria will be glad to oblige!

So the next time you feel yourself in need of a bit of caffeine, choose not to exploit the small farmer and choose instead to buy fairly traded coffee. Fair trade coffee is also available in other locations around town (Timothy's and at the Charlottetown Farmer's Market, to name a few), so be sure to pay attention and support the attempts of businesses to buy fairly and humanely.

Notice of Intent to re-examine UPEI Student Union's continued Partnership with the Canadian Federation of Students

The UPEI Student Union is currently re-examining our involvement with the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).

Ongoing concerns regarding our partnership with the CFS have warranted this review.

Should you have any concerns or questions on this matter, please feel free to contact a member of the Student Council by visiting www.upelsu.com or drop by our offices in the W.A. Murphy Student Centre.

This issue will be discussed and voted upon during the April 8th, 2004 Student Council meeting.