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Dear Members of the UC Sustainability Committee:

My name is Zoe Behrman, and I am a Rhetoric and Professional Writing student at the University of Cincinnati. I recently attended a seminar titled "Going Green" in Cincinnati, which inspired me to take action towards increasing sustainability measures. I reviewed the UC Sustainability Committee's current initiatives, and I was impressed with the impactful work that you are doing.

I am writing to propose a solution to further extend the work that UC Sustainability does through introducing more Fairtrade certified coffee on campus. According to UC's website, currently, 65% of UC's dining purchases are sustainable food. By increasing this initiative to focus specifically on purchasing Fairtrade coffee, UC will be able to make an even bigger positive impact on the environment, as coffee is one of the leading causes of deforestation and environmental damage.

I hope that we can work together to make UC a more sustainable campus. Please see the attached proposal for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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A Proposal to Transition to Fairtrade Coffee  
For  
Increasing Sustainability Initiatives  
At the University of Cincinnati

Prepared for  
The UC Sustainability Committee  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, Ohio

by  
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## **Informative Abstract**

The UC Sustainability Committee has already taken concrete steps towards more sustainable and ethical food purchasing and consumption, but further action, specifically in Fairtrade coffee consumption, should be taken. A large majority of current coffee production is unsustainable, which has led to significant environmental concerns such as deforestation, erosion, loss of biodiversity, and worsening effects of climate change. Fairtrade certification offers both a chance for farmers to be guaranteed financial security and environmental education as well as a chance to organizationally implement widespread sustainable farming practices. Through the purchasing and consumption of Fairtrade coffee, UC can support initiatives that align directly with UC Sustainability's ethos and goals.

By focusing this initiative on community-led fundraising and education as well as exploring multiple avenues for viable purchasing options for Fairtrade coffee, UC can incorporate a phased approach to realistically introduce widespread Fairtrade coffee on campus. To implement this initiative, UC Sustainability should partner with student organizations, such as LEAP and ROME, dedicated to sustainability as well as the Environmental Studies program. UC Sustainability should further increase campus involvement and education through annual fundraising campaigns and through selling Fairtrade coffee at admissions events, orientation, and other large meetings. In addition, UC Sustainability can forge a partnership with the Communications and Marketing departments and the Rhetoric and Professional Studies program to implement a social media marketing campaign to further educate the community and advocate for increased support in this initiative.

## **Introduction**

### **Overview**

The University of Cincinnati (Uptown Campus) currently operates four campus-owned cafes or shops selling coffee. The university also offers coffee at events such as orientation, college fairs, and other large meetings. Thus, coffee makes up a significant portion of UC's current dining purchases. Although there has been an effort to introduce Fairtrade products on campus, a large amount of coffee that the campus purchases is still not Fairtrade certified, but instead is produced in unethical and unsustainable ways.

This report will introduce background information on why Fairtrade coffee will make a positive impact towards increased sustainability on campus and will detail a plan on how to implement a phased introduction of Fairtrade coffee on campus.

### **Background – Why Fairtrade?**

Fairtrade certification guarantees better working conditions for small farmers and promotes sustainable farming practices. Because of the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Fairtrade Premium, farmers are guaranteed a stable income and are incentivized towards investing in sustainable and community-led initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Farms that prioritize profit over sustainable practices have led to rapid deforestation due to the production of these large amounts of coffee. These practices will soon not be sustainable to support the growing population's demand for coffee.

Standards for Fairtrade certification pertain directly to sustainability measures that the UC Sustainability Committee is committed to promote and uphold. These standards cover environmental issues such as greenhouse gas reduction, renewable energy, increased quality of soil and water, and waste management.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Fairtrade certification gives farmers resources and training on transitioning to sustainable farming practices such as decreased pesticide use and increasing soil quality specifically for production.<sup>2</sup> Through these measures, Fairtrade combats the many issues that can contribute long term to climate change. Thus, by supporting Fairtrade coffee producers, UC can combat increased deforestation and aid in climate change mitigation.

### **Statement of Problem – Why Coffee?**

Coffee production is currently one of the leading causes of global deforestation. Not only does deforestation lead to reduced carbon capturing, but it can also decrease biodiversity.<sup>3</sup> According to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, Brazil has seen a recently unprecedented high for rainforest deforestation; around 13,235 square kilometers of the Amazon rainforest have been lost directly because of coffee production.<sup>3</sup> It is now estimated that every cup of coffee consumed contributes to one square inch of rainforest being destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

Unsustainable coffee practices have also led to chemical buildup in soil, which has contributed to water pollution in rivers, as well as erosion and land degradation.<sup>3</sup> In addition, fertilizers used in coffee farming can leech nitrate into the water, which further contributes to water pollution and erosion.<sup>3</sup> Rainforests are left uninhabitable for many animal and plant species because of this erosion. From these detrimental effects that unsustainable coffee production has on the environment, it is evident that sustainable coffee production must be a priority for sustainability groups like the UC Sustainability Committee going forward.

## **Proposed Solution**

### **Overview of Solution**

Through a phased approach incorporating community-led fundraising and education events as well as mindful purchasing practices, UC will be able to shift towards more sustainable and ethical coffee consumption. The following sections detail logistics about costs, timing, and steps for implementation for this initiative, as well as case studies that show successful implementation of Fairtrade campaigns from universities and colleges.

### **Costs and Timing**

#### ***Purchasing Plan***

One of the biggest concerns about switching to Fairtrade products is the cost. Fairtrade coffee costs more because its guarantee of ethical and sustainable production does not allow for economical practices that many non-Fairtrade coffee producers are able to do. Especially for non-profit organizations and universities, it can be difficult to make a complete switch to Fairtrade, but the larger environmental and ethical gains from making this change can greatly outweigh additional financial costs. In addition, Fair Trade Campaigns, an organization dedicated to helping others in their transition to Fairtrade products, has guidelines to help colleges and universities with Fairtrade purchasing.<sup>4</sup>

The first recommendation from Fair Trade Campaigns is to look for Fairtrade products on any existing contracts. It is possible that at least one vendor that UC is already working with provides Fairtrade products. According to Fair Trade Campaigns, this is the easiest and quickest method to shift to Fairtrade.<sup>4</sup> Another viable option that Fair Trade Campaigns recommends is to “look beyond food contracts,” which can especially apply to the issue of coffee.<sup>4</sup> Coffee can be placed under the category of “breakroom supplies,” which means that it can be purchased at the same time as other office supplies, which widens the chance to have Fairtrade products available under current food or office supply contracts.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, if UC buys food products directly, there is an option to purchase Fairtrade products from other organizations’ contracts through “cooperative purchasing agreements.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the recommendations that Fair Trade Campaigns offers, another option to fund these extra costs is fundraising events on campus (discussed further in “Fundraising and Educational Events” section). By collaborating with sustainability and environmental clubs and connecting with students who are passionate about protecting the environment, UC can mitigate some of the added financial costs of switching to Fairtrade coffee.

### ***Timing***

A phased introduction of Fairtrade coffee offers a more reasonable and long-lasting commitment to this initiative on campus. Because of the financial load that this project would entail, starting small with Fairtrade coffee will help build the necessary passion and connection to the movement on campus. Listed below is a possible timeline for implementation (components of this plan were adapted from Fair Trade Campaign’s resources for How to Implement a Fair Trade Campaign on a College Campus):<sup>5</sup>

*Table 1: Potential Timeline for Project Implementation*

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Stage to Complete</b>
Spring 2023	Organize a formal committee to oversee this Fairtrade coffee initiative and start conducting meetings that invite the community to take a part in this project.  Connect with campus sustainability clubs (LEAP, ROME) and the Environmental Studies program about planning fundraising events for Fall 2023.
Fall 2023	Implement fundraising events to educate campus community and raise money (detailed further under “Fundraising Events” section).  Contact vendors and start creating and advocating for a long-term purchasing plan for Fairtrade coffee.
Spring 2024	Use fundraising money from Fall 2023 to offer Fairtrade coffee at Spring 2024 admissions and open-house events.  Continue formulating and negotiating a long-term purchasing plan with vendors and university administration.
Fall 2024	Implement annual fundraising events to continue funding and providing Fairtrade coffee at all university events. Continue educating community members about the importance of Fairtrade (detailed further in “Educate Campus Community” section)  Secure long-term funding for Fairtrade purchasing for cafes.

Spring 2025	Start providing a selection of Fairtrade coffee at all campus-owned cafes and shops. Provide clear signs and information in cafes and shops about the benefits of buying Fairtrade.  Continue fundraising and education events.
Fall 2025	Continue fundraising and education events. Build up Fairtrade coffee options as more funding and awareness comes in.
Spring 2026	Continue building on past momentum and pass a formal resolution advocating for Fairtrade coffee.  From experience over the past six semesters, create a reasonable end goal to become a completely Fairtrade coffee campus.

## Successful Case Studies

### *UWE Bristol*

The University of the West of England Bristol (UWE Bristol) is a certified Fairtrade school and has successfully implemented a widespread Fairtrade campaign throughout all their on-campus shops, cafes, and restaurants.<sup>2</sup> The university offers over 25 Fairtrade products on campus and has continued initiatives to increase this range of products in the future.<sup>2</sup> UWE Bristol also specifically recognizes the need for Fairtrade coffee as they have created an award-winning coffee cart that only stocks Fairtrade products available for students and staff on campus. In addition, the university offers over 70% Fairtrade coffee in cafes and restaurants, further demonstrating the emphasis on why Fairtrade coffee is particularly impactful and that Fairtrade coffee campaigns are possible for universities to implement.<sup>2</sup>

### *Rollins College*

Rollins College is a liberal arts university in Winter Park, Florida. This college champions student involvement in sustainability, which directly applies to the UC Sustainability Committee's ethos. Their initiatives are spearheaded by the Center for Sustainability, which connects students, staff, faculty, and community members to get involved with the sustainability movement. The center works in conjunction with EcoRollins, a sustainability program on campus, and the Committee on Environmental and Sustainable Issues. These three groups work together to create and implement campaigns such as "Fair Trade Your Finals," "Fair Trade Valentine's," and "World Fair Trade Day," which educates the community about the benefits of Fairtrade and provides Fairtrade products on campus. These events have continued annually at the college, which demonstrates how Rollins' Fairtrade initiatives can continue long term. These annual events also show how similar campaigns could be implemented at UC to produce positive results.

## Description of Solution

### *Assemble Fairtrade Team*

The base for the Fairtrade team would be a committee of members from the UC Sustainability Committee, but, to increase community involvement and reduce workload from the committee, additional members from student sustainability groups should be included in this initiative. By including the greater campus community in important decisions, the UC Sustainability Committee will have a stronger base to build future fundraising and education events from. In addition, this campaign could connect to Environmental Studies courses through service learning and experiential education credit.

### *Fundraising and Educational Events*

To generate long-term interest and fundraising for Fairtrade coffee, annual fundraising events should be implemented. These events can be similar to those previously mentioned in Rollins College's successful Fairtrade campaign. Listed below are a few options of potential fundraising themes and focuses:

*Table 2: Annual Fundraising Event Options*

<b>Event Title</b>	<b>Event Description</b>	<b>Semester</b>
Valentine's Fairtrade Exchange	Have a booth on Main Street with Fairtrade coffee for sale including educational materials and more information on how to join the Fairtrade movement. Offer a Fairtrade coffee and chocolate gift set for purchase.	Spring
Summer Kickoff to Fairtrade	During the last week of the semester, sell iced lattes with Fairtrade coffee. Continue distributing educational materials with detailed plans on what the Fairtrade coffee campaign will be implementing in the Fall. Encourage campus community to shop Fairtrade products in the summer.	Spring
Welcome Week Fairtrade Coffee Event	Offer a booth at the organization and club fair with information about how students can join the Fairtrade coffee initiative including educational materials to distribute to the community. Sell Fairtrade coffee to those at the event.	Fall
International Coffee Day Event (October 1 <sup>st</sup> )	Distribute signage and flyers around campus with information about the benefits of Fairtrade coffee. Hold a tasting of Fairtrade coffees from different countries around the world.	Fall

### ***Educate Campus Community***

An important aspect of community-led initiatives, like this proposed plan, is including open educational resources for community members to fully understand why these initiatives are impactful. UC Sustainability can educate the campus community in part through fundraising events with educational pamphlets, flyers, and posters, as well as through putting up these materials around campus and in stores and cafes to drive additional attention to the issue.

The UC Sustainability Committee can also specifically target the student population by working directly with courses that students are already enrolled in. For instance, UC Sustainability can offer workshops on shopping Fairtrade to Environmental Studies learning communities or Introduction to Environmental Studies courses, as well as Environmental Studies “Advanced Topics” courses in Atmosphere and Climate, Food, and Environmental Justice. These workshops could get students directly involved with the Fairtrade movement by offering service-learning credit opportunities or could simply educate and encourage students to consider shopping Fairtrade.

In addition, to reach outside of the Environmental Studies program, UC Sustainability can collaborate with the wider campus community through social media marketing practices. By partnering with departments such as Communications and Marketing as well as the Rhetoric and Professional Writing program, UC Sustainability could offer additional service learning and/or co-op opportunities for students interesting in pursuing a career in social media and get the word out further about Fairtrade coffee education, fundraising events, and availability on campus. UC prides itself on its co-op and experiential learning opportunities, and the UC Sustainability Committee is in an excellent position to continue the UC experiential learning legacy, as well as to positively impact the environment.

## **Conclusion**

By taking action towards increasing sustainable and ethical consumption of coffee, the UC Sustainability Committee can foster a deeper bond with campus-community members and build on their actions to promote environmentally friendly practices. Through a phased realistic implementation of this widespread campaign, UC Sustainability can forge a long-term commitment to the Fairtrade coffee movement and can continuously build on momentum from fundraising and community-led educational events. The associated financial costs of this initiative are greatly outweighed by the added value it provides; not only will this campaign increase UC Sustainability’s present goal of sustainable food consumption, but it also will offer an invaluable opportunity for an interdisciplinary approach of experiential learning opportunities for students.

## References

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