

[Home](#) » [National](#) » Article

Poor nations get taste of Australian fair go



Wells Trenfield has seen business boom in fair-trade coffee.

Photo: *Jason South*

Chantal Rumble

April 28, 2007

MELBOURNE coffee roaster Wells Trenfield has no doubt Australian shoppers have a conscience.

Since he introduced fair-trade coffee four years ago, his business has almost doubled and interest in his ethically produced coffee beans continues to grow. "People are becoming conscious of the implications of their consumption," he said.

Sales of fair trade products are booming nationwide.

Introduced to Australia in 2003, the fair trade concept is an international movement that aims to ensure producers in poor countries get a good deal for their products. Producers, mainly of coffee, tea and cocoa, are paid a fair price and offered long-term contracts to guarantee a sustainable livelihood. The trade relationship sometimes extends to the development of community health and education programs.

In its first, timid year in Australia, six companies became certified Fairtrade licensees, including Mr Trenfield's Jasper Coffee, and retail sales amounted to just \$145,000. By last year there were 68 licensees, including 26 in Victoria, and annual sales had ballooned to more than \$6.5 million.

Coffee was the biggest seller, accounting for 75 per cent of fair-trade sales, followed by chocolate, tea and balls such as footballs. Fair-trade rice and sugar are also making their way onto our shelves.

Neil Bowker, executive officer of the Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand, the independent certifier, said the rapid growth proved consumers had a conscience. "People want to do the right thing by the producers."

But even with the dramatic growth of the past four years, fair-trade sales in Australia remain a drop

in the retail ocean.

Bureau of Statistics figures show Australians spend more than \$510 million on coffee a year, just \$5.2 million of it on fair-trade beans.

Tea-leaves tell a similar story, with annual sales approaching \$300 million, but only \$500,000 spent on fair-trade varieties last year.

Dr Paul Harrison, senior lecturer in consumer behaviour at Deakin University, said Australians considered themselves ethical consumers but this often failed to translate into sales.

Dr Harrison said fair trade would remain a niche market until it was pitched at our self-interest rather than altruism, and was more readily accessible.

When you see news happening: SMS/MMS: 0406 THE AGE (0406 843 243), or [email](#) us. [More](#)

[Subscribe to The Age for your chance to win 12 years of Penfolds Grange!](#)

Copyright © 2007. The Age Company Ltd.