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“Not Just a Cup...  
...But a Just Cup”<sup>TM</sup>

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**T**hanksgiving Coffee Company recognizes that there are many factors above and beyond organic that go into the making of a "Just Cup." Certified organic coffee is one important factor, but it is not all inclusive. To recognize a "just cup" one must go beyond organic.

New relationships recently uncovered by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Project, such as the coffee/songbird connection, or revelations that the contamination of rivers and streams from coffee pulp has created the #1 environmental problem in South and Central America, have lead us to re-evaluate what exactly is, a "just cup." Obviously, we can no longer use phrases such as "social justice," "fair trade," and "environmentally responsible" to explain a "just cup." We must now look beyond those concepts to the activities that define a "just cup."

We need to list and define activities a grower may become involved in, which indicate that he is becoming part of the a "just cup" solution to the environmental problems coffee growers have traditionally not addressed.

A close look at the current picture allows us to see that, although few are involved in organic agriculture, many are involved in other significant solutions which mitigate the environmental impact of coffee processing. We must support these non-organic farmers as they move us, in their way, toward a cleaner planet. The marketplace must develop a system that recognizes and rewards those who are on the path toward a "just cup" solution. That system must be market driven, and the rewards must be monetary.

Every great adventure or leap forward necessarily begins with a first step. Ultimately, that first step will lead to the distant destination. In the interim, which may take decades, many solutions will become part of the intricate web of activity leading to a successful arrival at the destination. In our case, that destination is a clean and healthy coffee industry.

The concept of "The Just Cup" began in 1985 with the introduction of "Coffee for Peace" (Café por la Paz). Coffee for Peace was Nicaraguan coffee of the highest quality. The victorious Revolutionaries wanted the coffee that was being sold into the United States market to be "as sweet as their revolution." I brought that coffee into the United States via Canada, challenging the U.S. embargo. The coffee was packaged with the Nicaragua National Farmworkers and Ranchers union logo on the front and the

Sandinista story on the back label. This was to be a "bridge" product. A product that directly linked producers with consumers across cultures.

Such economic development projects were not unheard of in 1985. Fair trade groups and not-for-profit corporations were involved in such direct commerce, but Coffee for Peace was the first such project undertaken by a for-profit coffee company in North America. To demonstrate ThanksGiving's commitment to help coffee growers it tacked onto the wholesale price a 50¢ "consumer contribution" surcharge, and asked the consumers to vote with their dollars for a better, more just society. The contributions amounted to over \$30,000 over the decade, all going to UNAG to help improve conditions at the farm level.

This was ThanksGiving Coffee "coming around the first turn" a decade ago. Many long journeys begin with a first step, and of course many adventurous trips to Nicaragua to meet with coffee growers and small producers.

The process that I and ThanksGiving Coffee have gone through during this past decade has been one of learning through experience. The process requires one to understand that there are major market forces at work which oppose a change in the way wealth is distributed. Such forces are less concerned with environmental health than in maintaining status quo relationships with farmer communities generally at the bottom of the pile when it comes to profiting from growing coffee.

As I have learned that a "just cup" requires an environmental assessment, I have also learned that "Certified Organic" also requires an environmental certificate if his trees are grown in the managed shade of another monoculture, banana trees, and his pulp is removed in a wet mill that does not recycle its water or convert its muselage water in bio-gas generators to methane for cooking fuel?

Such are the issues—complex and expensive to solve. But should the non-certified organic farmer growing Typicas and Bourbon coffee varieties under the rain forest canopy be penalized for not being certified? Both farmers are contributing to solving the problem. Both growers are in the race, and both can get better and closer to the truly rounded sustainable

harvest we desire. In time the coffee industry can become an industry of responsible world citizens.

To recognize these growers on the continuum, to support all of them who are moving forward in the race toward sustainability, we must change our method of buying green coffee. Our price differential must reward the growers who are in the race to save the planet, and our packaging must inform the consumers of what they are buying. This new system must reflect the continuum of progress we wish to recognize. If done correctly the marketplace will vote the price/value relationships it most prefers. I contend that an informed consumer will make some sort of a conscious choice. Studies tell us that 47% of American consumers indicated that when quality, service, and price are competitive, they will buy from a socially responsible corporate citizen.

On the supply side we have to determine how valuable it is to be growing Typica in virgin rainforest shade versus growing certified organic coffee hybrids in managed shade on a major plantation. To do this we must accept both as good but we must, as industry leaders, roasters, and consumers, make our value choice when we buy green coffee to roast if we are roasters, and at the shelves, based on cost, flavor, and personal social and environmental priorities if we are consumers.

Such a system of "certification, verification, and seal creation" is generally left to the social and academic engineers of the type found in foundations, environmental and social N.G.O.s, such as the National Resource Defense Fund or the Fair Trade Associations of Europe. This is good because they are clearly trustworthy when it comes to being believed by a cynical and suspect consumer.

However, I believe Thanksgiving Coffee Company can set "just cup" standards for its own green coffee purchasing without conferring with the traditional N.G.O.s, or waiting for some "third party" standards to hit the national scene with a big bang.

I have noticed that such events enter with a bang, and leave with a whimper. There is a need to pre-link the supply with existing demand if selective buying power is to be utilized to change a marketplace. If the consumer is educated, looks for the "seal of approval," and cannot find it associated with

any coffee, that consumer's power is lost. "The coffee" must be where the educated consumer is, and it must be there before the consumer comes to purchase it, not after she/he asks the retailer for it. **This must be a roaster driven change because it is the roasters who are at the gate.** They are the buyers and the sellers, and they are the only group that deals in both green and roasted product.

Who will organize the roasters, and how will they find sellers of "beyond organic" coffees, the roasters will as they see the market advantage develop for them.

At Thanksgiving Coffee Company we have begun the search for such coffees, and we are roasting them as you read this. However, not all our coffees meet even one "just cup" criteria. We are a 25 year old company roasting over one million pounds per year from 15 different countries. Even dedicated roasters cannot change an entire market overnight. As an industry we must support roasters in transitions as we support growers in transition.

Thanksgiving Coffee Company with 30% of its sales being "certified organic" still cannot say it is 30% closer to the goal. Some of those organic coffees may be sun grown or picked by almost feudal slave labor. We must sell our coffees based on what we know personally and can stand behind when the spotlight of public awareness is pointed our way, as it most certainly will be. Coffees that we know nothing about but their country of origin, grade, altitude grown, and flavor must not be rated. They fall outside the race track we are on. Only known coffees can receive a rating.

We must now return to the main premise: that we must define activities that create "the just cup." By knowing what strategies growers are using to move beyond organic toward sustainable coffee agriculture, we can personally see and experience the supply side changes and we can buy those coffees with confidence. Then we can rate those coffees so consumers can vote with their pocketbooks when they select their coffee by its social and environmental value.

At Thanksgiving Coffee we now look at fourteen factors which we call our "Green Coffee Buying Criteria for a Healthier Planet."

This list presents the ground rules in short form. It is ironic that now,

after 25 years in the coffee industry, we return to our earliest motto, "in search of the perfect cup," refining it to include the just cup principles established by Thanksgiving Coffee Company in 1996.

These are the first publicly stated coffee buying principles set to standards of a healthier planet, not to standards of price and flavor alone.

The "Just Cup" seal will be placed on coffees that meet at least three of the fourteen standards and/or ten points on the value scale.

The "Just Cup" seal will carry a numerical value to indicate to the consumer where the coffee resides on the value scale between ten (lowest "Just Cup") to thirty-five (highest rating).

An educational program will be found "on site" where these coffees are on the shelves. This will help the consumer think about these issues in a numerical way and get them familiar with a "Just Cup."

From this first step I visualize a change in the way coffee is grown in the world. We must be careful to recognize, however, the time consuming physical steps that each country, growing region, and farmer must take to make the change a real move toward a sustainable coffee producing industry.

# PURCHASING FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

## NUMERICAL VALUE CHART

Values	Criteria
5	Trees are Bourbon or Typica
5	Trees are Certified Organically grown
4	Land ownership promotes strong cultural survival of indigenous peoples
4	Shade grown under natural rain forest canopy
4	"Fair Traded" purchased directly from Fair Trade Organizations
3	Grown in traditional poly-culture shade
3	Cooperative member produced
3	Small farm grown/owner picker grown
2	Bio-dynamically grown or organically grown but not certified
2	Shade grown under managed shade of indigenous trees
3	The coffee is processed using methods that reduce stream and grown water pollution
2	The coffee is sun dried or solar dried
2	There are social and environmental benefit programs with N.G.O.s linker to the system
2	Environmental assessments of the regions where the coffee is grown show a positive contribution of the area to bio-diversity through the creation or maintenance of environmentally protected bio-region corridors.
2	The coffee is purchased from stateside importers or green coffee brokers, who share our social, environmental, and economic values.