

Coffee Craze Stimulates a Buzz

By Julia Ritchey
Staff Writer

There is something that has been brewing worldwide for decades: a coffee crisis. Oppression hits small businesses, coffee farmers, wildlife, and small villages around the world, who are all trying to live the coffee dream. Coffee is one of the world's most important primary commodities; four hundred billion cups of coffee are consumed throughout a single year. Oil is the only product that ranks higher in the traded amounts.

Recently, pop culture has played a huge role in the coffee trend. Many television shows are focused around a caffeine rush. For example, *Friends* and *Gilmore Girls* display coffee drinking nearly every episode as part of a social scene and the need for energy.

In contrast, there are types of media that show some of the problems in the coffee business, usually portrayed in a comical way. In a *Simpsons* episode, Bart Simpson goes to the mall only to find that every store has become a Starbucks Café. This is symbolic of the chain taking over a large area. Similarly, in the *Against Me!* song "Baby, I'm an Anarchist" the chorus screams, "We marched together for the eight-hour day/ And held hands in the streets of Seattle /But when it came time to throw bricks through that Starbucks window/ You left me all alone." The song shows the opposition to the large coffee corporation.

Penn State Mont Alto's campus now supports Seattle's Best Coffee, a chain owned by Starbucks, and Peet's Coffee and Tea. Also, there are many Starbucks locations within the area.

Café Java, the café located in the Wiestling Student Center, is home to Peet's Coffee and Tea. Penn State Mont Alto student and Café Java barista Kelly Barley states, "I think it is great that Café Java has Fair Trade Blend coffee (as well as an organic option). The fact that it is produced by small

family farms gives it an "authentic" feel. The farmers get paid livable wages as well as a premium; and ten cents of each pound goes to the non-profit group TransFair USA, which promotes fair trade coffee. Knowing that people are not being exploited for producing/growing fair trade coffee is fantastic, and I think when people see "Fair Trade Blend" at Café Java, they associate positive things with it."

Even with the social scene flourishing throughout the country and other countries alike, the coffee industry economically has been unsteady this past year; coffee wholesale prices have hit a hundred-year low.

In addition to the drop in wholesale prices, the farmers who produce this rapidly-consumed product have suffered both economically and socially. Some farmers see the lesser end of the coffee dream by not profiting. The bitter coffee crisis leads to destroyed jobs and scarce money. Some struggles in the business lead farmers to use practices that harm the environment or that are illegal. As a result of the suffering, workers have been driven to leave their homes and give up practices that have been performed by generations before them in search of new work or because of starvation.

The world's coffee is mostly grown in third world countries and nations throughout Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Brazil produces one-third of the world's coffee.

The production process of coffee starts out with small farmers who grow and harvest coffee trees. In most cases, they are without equipment to help the process. Then the middlemen, also known as "coyotes," buy the beans from the farmers.

From there, the beans are transported to larger plantations with advanced equipment to process the beans and turn the beans into "green coffee." The green coffee is usually taken to a port city where the coffee will be bought again and exported. International companies then buy

the beans from the producing countries. Major coffee retailers purchase the coffee and distribute it to cafés, supermarkets, and other specialty stores. Finally, the private consumer buys the beans from the retailers.

The beans go through many hands to supply the world's market. The result of this lengthy process is a reason for the coffee crisis.

The four giants of wholesale: Nestle, Kraft, Proctor and Gamble, and Sara Lee deliver around 70 percent to 80 percent of coffee sold to the U.S.

The movement, known as the fair trade organization, was developed to make sure that farmers get a decent price for their beans, and to let consumers know about the movement with the proper labeling.

One day the fair trade hopes to achieve humanitarian goals by capitalist means. In other words,

no middlemen would be involved in the coffee bean process. Fair trade companies buy green coffee directly from farmer co-ops at a price set above world prices.

Kristi Kleinfelter, a Boston University graduate and former Oxfam International grass-root student organizer states, "I think that the biggest obstacle is education and awareness. Once people are aware of what fair trade means, most would obviously want to do what they can. Fair trade is not only important; it is essential to our environment. It creates a sustainable environment, labor and wildlife wise. The biggest goal is globalization."

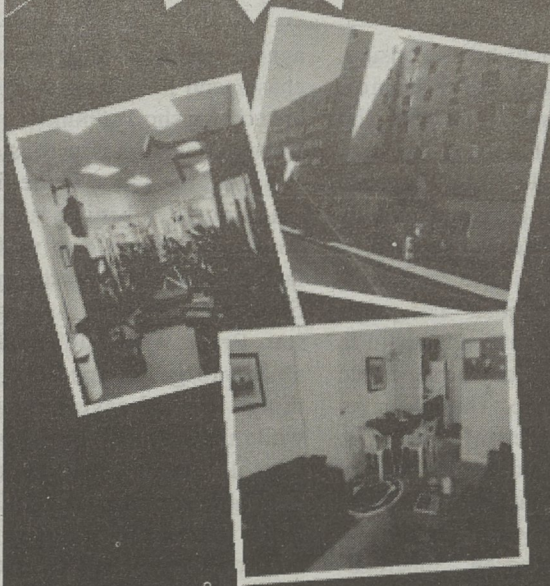
As a student organizer who co-founded a group of students that gathered together to support fair trade, Kleinfelter acted as a spokesperson for the organization. Some of the actions she took were bringing a Peruvian farmer to make a dual-speech to a

group of students on campus; standing outside grocery stores to promote fair trade products (not only coffee); and handing out recipes and locations to where one could find fair trade products.

Lauren Boyer, a former employee at an independently-run coffee shop in Hershey, PA named the Cocoa Perk, states, "We used to get customers who would walk into the café and ask if we sold fair trade products. When I'd reply that we didn't sell any, they would leave without buying anything." Today, the Cocoa Perk now serves and sells a large percentage of fair trade coffees and teas.

With 52 percent of adults in the U.S. over the age of 18 drinking coffee each day, numerous media types portraying the coffee trend, and coffee shops popping up in many towns across the nation, the coffee business demands coffee-but the grounds for change are needed.

ASK US HOW
TO WIN A
YEARS FREE
RENT!



Moving To University Park?

Enjoy Your Freedom and
Live at Calder Commons!
We Have Just What You are
Looking For:

- Spacious 2 Bedroom 2 Bathroom Floor Plans
- On Site Laundry Facilities
- Fitness Center and Study Lounge
- Free Cable TV
- Fully Furnished
- Rates Starting at only \$349 per person!

Calder Commons
520 E. Calder Way, State College, PA 16801

Call Us Today (814)238-3456 Or Visit Us At www.caldercommons.com