

## Saving the Rainforests with Coffee and Chocolate

Sarah Colman, General Curator

Are you one of those people who absolutely can't start the day without a cup of coffee? Is your day incomplete without a piece of chocolate at some point? If you are, then you are part of the more than 80% of Americans who consider one or both of these things indispensable parts of a normal day. These two products are such accepted parts of our lives, sometimes we forget what it takes to get them to us.

Both coffee and cocoa plants love warm, tropical locations across the globe. Prime growing areas for cocoa and coffee are in the exact places where many of our remaining rainforests are found today. Traditional methods of growing our beloved coffee and cocoa beans involve cutting down rainforest trees to create areas where these plants can be grown in full sun. Unfortunately, these methods are not that great for rainforest plants or the animals that rely on them to survive. It can take a long time for areas to recover from this type of clearing and some will never be the same. Does this mean that we should stop drinking coffee and eating chocolate? Not at all! What it means is that taking just a few seconds to look at our favorite coffee and chocolate products can help us make responsible choices for rainforests that we can feel great about. How can we do that? What do we look for? Let's take a look.

Traditional methods of growing coffee and chocolate involve growing these plants in full sun; however, this is not the only method available to farmers. Both coffee and cocoa can be grown under the shade of rainforest trees, meaning that there is no need to cut down the rainforest canopy for farming. The coffee and cocoa plants take a little longer to mature, but the product they produce is the same! The products produced from coffee and cocoa plants grown this way are called shade-grown coffee and shade-grown cocoa/chocolate. Why is this kind of product the one we should look for?

1. Shade-grown products help preserve the rainforest for all the plants and animals who rely on it to survive. This includes humans. Rainforest trees are critically important for helping produce and purify the air we all breathe. Rainforests provide plants that help us fight diseases such as cancer and are homes to incredible animals found nowhere else on Earth.
2. Shade-grown products mean that we can keep enjoying the products we love and also feel great about enjoying them. Supporting shade-grown coffee and cocoa is your way of

showing that the choices you make matter and that you want to make responsible choices for our planet and everyone who calls it home.

3. Supporting shade-grown products means that the farmers who use these methods can support their families in responsible, sustainable, ethical ways and not have to turn to wildlife poaching or the illegal trade in exotic pets. Sustainable farming on healthy land makes for better, more productive crops and a more stable source of income for farmers.

So how do we know when we are getting a shade-grown coffee or cocoa product? Luckily for us, many products are clearly marked to tell us that they contain shade-grown ingredients. The easiest way to pick out a shade-grown product is to look for the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal. This is a green round seal featuring a frog and the words "Rainforest Alliance Certified". Many popular chocolate brands such as Hershey, Dove, and others feature this seal right on the front of the package. Coffee produced by Caribou, Allegro, and Dunkin' Donuts, just to name a few, also fit the bill and proudly display the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal. You can also look for the words "Bird Friendly" on your coffee products. These are coffees that have been certified by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center as not only shade-grown but 100% organic!

The next time you enjoy that cup of coffee or that piece of chocolate during your day, take a second to think about how that product started. Somewhere in the world that delicious treat started as a plant in an area rich with rainforests and other natural resources. By making a responsible purchase, we can help make sure that those areas stay beautiful, diverse, and full of life. It's not always necessary to sacrifice to make an impact on the conservation of wild and wonderful places. Sometimes, conservation can just be one treat away.