



Great Logo -- But Sleazy Business Practices

An energetic reader noticed [my post last week on Peet's Coffee's seeming alliance with the California Chamber of Commerce](#), the most reactionary anti-environmental force in state politics. He forwarded it to Peet's PR department and demanded an explanation. Here's what he got back:

We're disturbed by the blog posting you sent to us which "effectively" concluded that our participation in the California Chamber of Commerce means Peet's doesn't care about the environment, and we'd like to assure you that nothing could be further from the truth.

In sharp contrast, we have strived through our actions to be a leader in protecting the environment and in having a positive social and economic impact, both locally and globally where we buy our coffee. In 2007, we invested significantly to build and open the world's only LEED® Gold certified coffee roasting facility, in Alameda, Ca. We forge long-term, direct relationships with our coffee partners, whose quality earns them premium prices that are substantially higher than market prices and always above the Fair Trade Certified(tm) brand price. And, through focused philanthropy, we help educate coffee farmers on how to improve their coffee quality as well as support and donate to organizations dedicated to bettering the lives of people who live in coffee-growing regions. You can learn more about our efforts in these areas on our website: <http://www.peets.com/sustainable/default.asp>.

I hope you will take a moment to learn more about our environmental, social and economic responsibility values and efforts through our website.

The first thing about the response is obvious: *the spokesperson never even attempts to justify why Peet's is in bed with the California Chamber!* This reminds me of the old litigators' mantra. If the law is on your side, pound on the law. If the facts are on your side, pound on the facts. If neither the facts nor the law are on your side, then pound on the table. This is pounding on the table.

Moreover, the response suggests that Peet's Coffee is "always above" the fair trade standard. But taking a closer look at the company website, as they themselves recommend,

reveals that only a few lines even achieve fair trade status. If all lines are “always above” the fair trade standard, why wouldn't they include that label as well? This is why third-party certification efforts, such as [the Forest Stewardship Council mentioned in previous posts](#), is so important: it allows the consumer to determine sustainability from more than just the company's say-so.

Indeed, the closer one looks at that website, the sleazier it appears. For example, on the page of sustainability highlights, it discusses the (admittedly delicious) Major Dickason's Blend, and states that a sustainable Costa Rican roaster's beans “enrich” that blend. But what does that mean? What's the percentage? 90%? 10%? This looks like trying to get sustainability points for an unsustainable blend; after all, if it was sustainable in any way, it would have the third-party certification. (And if Major Dickason was so great, then why wasn't he ever promoted to colonel?).

It's all very well and good for Peet's to have a LEED Gold certified roasting facility. But being on the board of California Chamber of Commerce isn't cheap: it likely costs several tens of thousands of dollars, and perhaps even into six figures. That money pays for lobbyists and advertising that seeks to undermine the state's environmental protections. And it's worse when the company engages in dodgy practices about the labor practices of its roasters. Peet's should come clean on what it is doing, or expect socially-conscious consumers to look elsewhere.