



REDEMPTION ROASTERS IS PART OF A NEW WAVE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES RESHAPING THE COFFEE INDUSTRY.

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CAFFEINE HIGHS

Almost 30 years after Fairtrade certification was introduced, the coffee industry is awash with social enterprises whose benefits reach even further than the communities that farm the beans. **Francisca Kellett** gets a taste

Hugh Jackman really loves coffee. He really loves coffee. The Hollywood actor has said he'd drink 20 cups a day if he could. But when he travelled to Ethiopia with humanitarian charity World Vision a decade ago, he hadn't expected coffee to change his life. Jackman was there to film a documentary about coffee farming. It was when he spent time with a local farmer called Dukale – helping with the gruelling work of digging, planting and picking coffee “cherries”

– that he properly understood the challenges a small-scale producer faces every day. When he went back to the US, he'd found his mission: to create a fair trade coffee company that would help farmers like Dukale.

In 2011, he buddied up with friend David Steingard to launch the Laughing Man coffee company. It was a success thanks to the quality of its coffee and clever marketing – Jackman was happy to use his face to promote the product – but also because of its social enterprise message. What makes Laughing Man coffee stand out is that all of Jackman's profits

are funnelled back into projects that help coffee-producing communities, including farmers like Dukale.

In addition to selling ground coffee and recyclable pods, there are now two Laughing Man cafés in New York City. The bestselling coffee? A mellow roast called Dukale's Blend. “The simplicity of coffee,” Jackman has said, “can actually tackle some of the biggest issues this planet is facing.”

Coffee is one of the most popular drinks in the world. We drink around two billion cups each day with 725

million cups consumed daily in Europe alone¹. Retail sales in the US are worth \$5.18 billion² and, worldwide, it supports the livelihoods of 25 million people.³ Coffee, in other words, is big business.

More than 90% of it is grown in developing countries, which raises questions over supply chains and exploitation. That's where fair trade certification schemes come in. These were first introduced by Cafédirect in the UK in 1991 – a reaction to the struggle faced by Mexican farmers after the global collapse of world coffee prices.⁴

These trust marks help ensure that producers are paid an above-market “fair” price for their produce. So if your daily grind has a nice green stamp on it, surely you're ticking all the sustainability boxes?

“Certification schemes are still relevant, but their appeal has been decreasing,” says Chris Stemman, executive director of the British Coffee Association (BCA). “Recently, coffee companies have wanted to become much more empowered in their own supply chains, all the way back to the farmer, and to ensure that transparency, pricing, sustainability and investment in farmers... is more intrinsic to the brand.”

Martin Elwert, founder of Coffee Circle in Berlin, agrees. “The intention might be good, but I think the one-size-fits-all-system is flawed,” he says. The German company was sceptical of traditional coffee supply chains so instead created a model that puts it in direct contact with producers to ensure they are being paid well. Coffee Circle, which operates its own roastery, works directly with producers, visiting cooperatives in Ethiopia, making personal connections with growers and cutting out the middlemen.

“We wanted to improve the livelihoods of farmers,” Elwert explains, with Coffee Circle paying “well above” the market average, investing back into the value chain: €1 of every kilogram sold (one kilogram is priced from €20) goes directly to projects in Ethiopia. It's simple but effective: since 2010, Coffee Circle has improved the living standards of more than 200,000 people by channelling €375,000 into social projects in coffee regions, helping improve schools, training and sanitation. A café and barista training centre has just opened on Berlin's Lindower Strasse.

This forensic approach to supply has raised other issues for coffee companies. Girls Who Grind Coffee founders Fi O'Brien and Casey Lalonde, based in Wiltshire, UK, noticed that the majority of the labour force in coffee production was female, yet women are usually paid less and rarely have positions of power. Their female-run roastery works only with female cooperatives and supports women's social projects. The Congo roast, for example, helps fund the Rebuild Women's Hope programme, which invests in female entrepreneurship, training and economic empowerment.

Question Coffee in Kigali, Rwanda, tackles similar issues closer to the source. Partnering with The Relationship Coffee Institute, the company invests in training and infrastructure for female producers, assisting them improve their production and, fundamentally, increase their livelihoods by helping them be more efficient and achieve a higher price for their harvest. Question Coffee's stylish, standalone café in Kigali offers masterclasses and cooperative tours, as well as a really good cup of coffee.

In their quest to create the best possible brew, some new brands are looking beyond the supply chain to the baristas actually making the stuff. Redemption Roasters, which launched in the UK in 2016, trains and empowers prison inmates to address reoffending rates. The idea, explains founder Ted Rosner, was a “prison-based roastery that would give offenders meaningful activity while they served their sentences, followed by concrete routes into employment after release.” It worked. Around 90 offenders have taken the three-week course run at a number of British prisons, and none has reoffended. “Our

intention is to show the coffee industry that exceptional coffee can come from unexpected places – and unlikely people.”

London has become a coffee social enterprise hub. Old Spike Roastery in Peckham trains and employs homeless people; Brewbird in Camberwell helps those struggling with long-term unemployment, while Paper & Cup in Shoreditch supports and trains recovering addicts. And at Change Please coffee vans, the barista preparing your morning cappuccino was, until recently, sleeping rough on the streets. Founded by Cemal Ezel, the company trains homeless people and provides employment with its mobile coffee vans. “The model is incredibly simple,” explains Ezel. “It matches a huge area of commercial growth – coffee – with a community of people who need, and are very keen, to work.”

Change Please has partnered with The Big Issue to train 86 homeless people since 2015, with a training academy opening this summer. More sites are on the way, including in Manchester and across London's tube network, and there are plans for a New York academy, too.

Also in the US, 1951 Coffee runs non-profit cafés in Oakland and San Diego that are 100% managed by refugees and its barista training programmes help more than 100 refugees find

employment each year. Meanwhile, 734 Coffee focuses on Sudanese refugees, reflecting the background of its founder, Manyang Reath Kher. Proceeds from sales have helped 40,000 people in refugee camps across East Africa so far.

The social impact these companies make is central to their brands and it is becoming more important to customers, too. “Consumers don't seem to be guided nearly as much by certification schemes,” says Stemman from the BCA. “They are guided much more by what they think the brands themselves are doing to safeguard coffee farmers and invest in sustainability.”

“Young people's expectations are higher,” adds Elwert from Coffee Circle. “The next generation has grown up interacting with brands through social media. They are used to transparency. They ask questions.”

When Laughing Man was acquired by Keurig in 2014, Hugh Jackman told *Forbes* that “Most people now, thankfully, want to know where their T-shirt, pair of jeans or cup of coffee is coming from and how the people bringing it to them are being treated.”⁵ Coffee, in other words, needs to show that it is doing good. As Stemman puts it, “If a company isn't interested in sustainability and giving back to society in some way, then I dare say it won't be in business for too much longer.”



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CHRIS STEMMAN, BRITISH COFFEE ASSOCIATION