



Organic Consumers Association

Campaigning for Health, Justice, Sustainability, Peace, and Democracy

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CONTACT: RYAN ZINN • 907-947-6046
RYAN@ORGANICCONSUMERS.ORG

“Earth to TransFair: Fair Trade is a Movement Not a Brand!”

Coalition Forms to Stop Rebranding of TransFair as “Fair Trade USA”

Organic Consumers Association and Dr. Bronner’s File Federal Trade Commission Complaint to Stop TransFair’s “FairWash” of Personal Care

WASHINGTON, DC – North America’s largest consumer advocacy organization, the Organic Consumers Association (OCA), which represents over 850,000 members, is coordinating a new campaign to oppose the name change of the fair trade certifier TransFair USA to “Fair Trade USA”. TransFair has applied for the new name to be trademarked, along with the term “Fair Trade Certified”. TransFair’s name change is an attempt to legally claim, as an exclusive brand, a term that encompasses a broad movement that extends far beyond the work of TransFair.

“For more than sixty years, hundreds of organizations allied with conscious consumers across the United States and the world have actively supported a different approach to trade based on dialogue, transparency and respect, in order to create greater equity in the international economic system. That approach is called Fair Trade,” says OCA Executive Director Ronnie Cummins.

Consumers and organizations dedicated to building equitable markets for disadvantaged farmers and artisans through Fair Trade, believe that the term should be celebrated as a movement, not a brand claimed by any one organization. “It is misguided and misleading for TransFair USA to attempt to claim jurisdiction over fair trade in the United States by changing their name to Fair Trade USA,” explains Cummins.

To help celebrate Fair Trade as a movement of many parts, OCA is asking consumers, stores, companies and organizations to sign a petition to urge TransFair to keep the name they have established. Leading fair trade organizations and companies have already signed their names. The petition can be found at: <http://organicconsumers.org/transfairusa/>

Cummins continues, “TransFair previously trademarked the term ‘Fair Trade Certified’ and incorrectly represents itself as the ‘only fair trade certifier in the us.’ The name change is a further attempt to perpetuate the myth that TransFair is the only fair trade certifier in the American fair trade movement. It’s as if an organic certifier renamed itself ‘Organic USA’ and proceeded to aggressively promote itself as the only organic certifier in the us.”

FTC Complaint to Stop TransFair’s “FairWash” of Personal Care

OCA has also joined forces with Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, the top selling brand of certified fair trade soap to request the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launch an investigation of deceptive practices in advertising and labeling of certain “Fair Trade Certified” personal care products. OCA and Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps are asking that the FTC prevent TransFair from continuing to allow brands such as Hain’s Queen Helene and Avon’s Mark to use as little as 2% certified fair trade ingredients in products while carrying identical ‘Fair Trade Certified’ marks as products made up mostly or entirely of certified fair trade content. The complaint and supporting exhibits may be viewed online at: <http://organicconsumers.org/bodycare/stop-transfair.cfm>

David Bronner, President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps stated that the FTC complaint is the last resort. "We have sent letters and held face to face meetings to stop TransFair from misleading consumers with deceptive fair trade marks and claims, which conflate products with majority and minimal fair trade content. The former provide real market volume for fair trade farmers; the latter sabotages that market. TransFair receives the same licensing fee for their look-alike marks on both majority and minimal fair trade content products, and is losing sight of its mission."

The Fair Trade movement emerged decades ago with the goal of delivering a better standard of living to many impoverished farmers and workers in the developing world, where unfair and exploitative prices, wages and working conditions prevail, trapping millions in poverty.

The movement, fueled by hundreds of retailers, NGOs, mission-driven for-profit "Alternative Trading Organizations" and conscious consumers, has established criteria and standards for fair pricing, wages and working conditions in farming and processing of diverse commodities and products. Products certified to these standards empower farmers and workers, and their families and communities, enabling them to improve their lives and livelihoods.

One Fair Trade standard and certification organization is the Fair Labeling Organization (FLO), which has developed fair trade standards and certifies producer groups that comply with these standards. TransFair is the US arm of FLO, and receives a "licensing fee" from companies that use the TransFair logo on products that are certified or contain fair trade ingredients.

Another Fair Trade standard and certification system is the Institute for Market Ecology's (IMO) Fair for Life program. Fully committed fair trade companies including Equal Exchange, Theo Chocolate and Dr. Bronner's have chosen to use IMO rather than FLO/TransFair for several reasons. In particular, IMO does not allow use of its seal on products and brands that do not have a majority of fair trade certified ingredients or materials. Further, Fair for Life also broadened the scope of fair trade to allow for the certification of virtually all agricultural commodities produced in developing countries if Fair Trade conditions are met along the entire value chain.

The Fair Trade Federation (FTF) is a US membership organization that accepts only dedicated fair trade "Alternative Trading Organizations," and screens applicants against rigorous fair trade criteria. Fully committed fair trade companies such as Equal Exchange, Co-Op Coffees, Guayaki and Dr. Bronner's are proud members.

While TransFair has done an admirable job in promoting the concept of fair trade and broadening its visibility, OCA and Dr. Bronner's are concerned that TransFair has permitted its certification to be used in ways that mislead consumers and has attempted to claim exclusive use of the term "Fair Trade" in ways that unfairly hurt other certifiers and undermine the fair trade movement.

"Fair trade is a movement not a brand and its promise and reach is much bigger than that of TransFair or any single certifier or other fair trade organization," says OCA's Cummins.

David Bronner continues, "Many in the movement feel that TransFair needs to be held accountable, and that consumers need to be educated about alternatives, in particular IMO's Fair for Life certification program. To prevent TransFair from monopolizing and abusing the term "Fair Trade", the Organic Consumers Association and Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps have filed a formal complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. It details the issues and problems with TransFair, along with illustrative examples of 'fair trade cheater brands' like Avon/Mark and Hain Celestial/Queen Helene."

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To arrange interviews with representatives from the Organic Consumers Association or Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps, please contact Ryan Zinn at 907-947-6046, ryan@organicconsumers.org or Adam Eiding at 202-744-2671, adam@mintwood.com