











BCT Stewardship Journal: July 2024

Katie's Thoughts from the Trail: Sustainable Deception: Greenwashing

Most of us trying to live the “green” lifestyle partake in simple changes such as cutting back on single-use products and paying special attention to what we purchase and where we purchase from. As an environmentalist, of course the products that catch my eye at the store are those decked out in light green tags, leaves and water droplets stamped all over, claims of being recyclable, and language such as “natural” or “plant-based”, all suggesting that the product is an eco-friendly choice. Unfortunately, companies often use this kind of green imagery and buzzwords to appear more sustainable than they truly are. This is known as greenwashing, a marketing technique to trick consumers into thinking they are purchasing eco-friendly products. I personally had no idea this concept existed until one of my college courses opened my eyes to just how common and deceiving these labels can be.

So, how can we avoid greenwashing and learn the difference between sustainable and non-sustainable products? A great first step is to keep an eye out for certified eco-labels that are a reliable source of evaluating true green business practices. The more of these certified eco-labels present, the better. Here are some common labels to search for next time you are at the store (click on each label to learn more):

	The Rainforest Alliance seal is awarded to products that support conservation and ethical production. Their standards focus on preventing deforestation, supporting human rights for workers, and ensuring rural communities have financial stability.
	The Fairtrade certification ensures social, economic and environmental responsibilities are met. This means rights and fair pay for workers, and for consumers it signifies that they are buying ethical products.
	1% for the Planet was created by the founder of Patagonia, with the aim of asking business to give at least one percent of their sales to environmental nonprofits to create a healthier planet.
	The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification validates that a product that uses forest products is made from responsibly managed forests. The FSC ensures workers' rights are upheld, biodiversity is maintained, and that the forestry methods are economically viable.

	<p>The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) label is only applied to wild fish or seafood from fisheries that have been certified to the MSC Fisheries Standard, a set of requirements for sustainable fishing.</p>
	<p>Cradle to Cradle's standards ensure that products are environmentally friendly, and socially ethical. They measure products across five categories: material health, material reuse, renewable energy and carbon management, water stewardship, and social fairness.</p>
	<p>The OEKO-TEX label is for textile and leather companies to verify that their products are free from harmful substances, are environmentally responsible, and have been produced in socially ethical working conditions.</p>
	<p>Certified B Corporations meet strict standards of confirmed environmental and social marks, public transparency and legal accountability. They work to build a more inclusive, sustainable economy.</p>