Paul Rice Bio

Paul Rice is the founder, President & CEO of Fair Trade USA, the leading certifier of Fair Trade products in the United States.

Fair Trade is an innovative, market-based model for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. It empowers Conscious Consumers and rewards U.S. companies and developing world farmers who comply with rigorous social and environmental standards.

Since launching the Fair Trade Certified™ label in 1998, Paul has helped established Fair Trade as one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. food industry. To date, Fair Trade USA has developed business partnerships with over 800 companies, including industry leaders Green Mountain Coffee, Starbucks, Dunkin’ Donuts, Pepsico, Hershey’s, Whole Foods, Target, Costco and Walmart. Fair Trade USA now certifies coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, rice, wine, flowers, spices and dozens of fresh fruits and vegetables. More recently, through groundbreaking partnerships with Patagonia and West Elm, Fair Trade has begun certifying apparel and home goods. In 2014, consumer recognition of the Fair Trade Certified label reached 55% and U.S. retail sales of Fair Trade products grew to an estimated $3 billion.

As a result, between 1999 and 2014, low-income family farmers earned over $350 million in additional income by selling to the U.S. Fair Trade market, allowing them to keep their kids in school, care for the land and steadily improve their living standards.

While Fair Trade USA has already reached millions of farming and working families in Africa, Asia and Latin America, it aspires to have a much larger positive impact on the lives of the two billion people worldwide who live on less than $2 per day. Toward that end, Paul launched Fair Trade for All in 2011 to dramatically scale the Fair Trade movement. By innovating the historic model, expanding to new categories of producers, strengthening supply chain transparency and security, and engaging consumers more deeply, Fair Trade for All seeks to generate $1 billion in cumulative impact for hardworking farming families by the year 2020. Paul is currently leading Fair Trade USA’s campaign to raise $25 million in philanthropic capital to fund the growth strategy, which recently attained a challenge gift of $10 million from the Stiller Family Foundation.

Prior to launching Fair Trade USA, Paul worked for 11 years as a rural development specialist in the mountains of Nicaragua, where he founded and led the country's first Fair Trade, organic coffee export cooperative. His first-hand experience over the last 30 years in the areas of global supply chain transparency, social auditing, sustainable agriculture, and cooperative enterprise development is unique in the certification world. Paul is now a leading advocate of global market linkage as a core strategy for poverty alleviation and sustainable community development.

Paul has received numerous honors for his pioneering work as a social entrepreneur, including the Ashoka Fellowship (www.ashoka.org), the World Economic Forum Award for Social Entrepreneurship (www.schwabfound.org), Fast Company magazine’s Social Capitalist of the Year award (four-time winner), and the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship (www.skollfoundation.org). Paul holds an Economics and Political Science degree from Yale University and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley.