

UWO first in U.S. to become a Fair Trade University

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1188/uwo-1st-in-us-to-become-a-fair-trade-university/>

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is the first university in the U.S. to become a Fair Trade University by making a commitment to do its part toward ending trade injustices that result in millions of people living in poverty.

Fair trade products have been produced providing artisans and farmers with a living wage for their work and humane working conditions, while also protecting the environment. About 70 universities in Europe have Fair Trade University status, including the University of Birmingham and the University of Edinburgh, but UW Oshkosh is the first American university to do so.

To become a Fair Trade University, UW Oshkosh's four governing bodies endorsed a resolution outlining its commitment to: selling Fair Trade Certified coffee, tea and chocolate in dining establishments, at catered functions and in department offices whenever feasible and within the confines of its food service contract; offering Fair Trade Certified food products and handicrafts at University stores whenever possible; and identifying and acknowledging Fair Trade Certified products and encouraging their purchase by students, faculty and staff. The Fair Trade program will be overseen by the newly formed Campus Sustainability Council.

"Sustainability goes well beyond being 'green,'" said Chancellor Richard H. Wells. "It includes social justice as well. By becoming a Fair Trade University, UW Oshkosh is making a commitment to do our part toward helping workers around the world get a livable wage and humane working conditions. As a large institution, UW Oshkosh can play an important part in shaping the future and in supporting green practices on all levels."

Becoming a Fair Trade University is not the first step UW Oshkosh has taken toward becoming more sustainable. The University is a member of the Fair Labor Association, and only works with vendors who have been inspected by the organization and certified as not subjecting employees to sweatshop conditions.

"Becoming a Fair Trade University is a natural next step for us," said Petra Roter, vice chancellor for student affairs. "This is part of who we are and demonstrates what we believe."

In 2002 the University became one of the first to endorse the Earth Charter — an international declaration of interdependence that outlines fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society for the 21st century.

In 2003, UW Oshkosh became the first Wisconsin university to join the Environmental Protection Agency's Green Power Partnership by agreeing to purchase at least 3 percent of its energy from renewable sources, making it at the time the largest purchaser of green energy in Wisconsin. As a result, the University won an EPA Green Power Purchase Award and was listed by the EPA as an Energy Star

Case Study.

The University also received the 2003 EPA Leadership Award — the 11th U.S. university to receive the EPA's highest leadership award. In 2004, UW Oshkosh won a National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Recognition Award for its campus environmental audit and in 2005, the university received a second Energy Star Award from the EPA.

In 2008, the University adopted a policy to purchase cage-free eggs and unveiled its Campus Sustainability Plan, which guides its efforts to continue as a national leader in responsible environmental stewardship, education, outreach and research.

Additionally, UW Oshkosh is one of only 41 universities in the United States listed on the U.S. Department of Energy's Web site as a large purchaser of renewable energy.

The University will also be announcing this month the results of a carbon footprint study, conducted in collaboration with Johnson Controls.

“Sustainability is a long-term commitment and an important one for higher education. Fair trade is particularly important because it is focused on both social justice and environmental responsibility,” said David Barnhill, chair of UW Oshkosh's environmental studies program. “One of the most important features of fair trade is that, unlike free trade, it empowers growers and workers in developing countries and provides economic security.”

Barnhill added that he expects that UW Oshkosh's declaration will result in other universities in the U.S. seeking Fair Trade University status, leading to the formation of a formal organization to monitor and support their efforts.

While there are no other Fair Trade Universities in the U.S., there are Fair Trade Towns. Milwaukee was one of the first cities in the U.S. to become a Fair Trade Town.

- For more information about the sustainability initiatives at UW Oshkosh, visit www.uwosh.edu/sustainability.
- For more information about Fair Trade Universities in Europe, visit www.fairtrade.org.uk.
- For more information about Fair Trade Towns, visit www.fairtradetownsusa.org.