

How to Get Past Greenwashing and Which Eco-labels to Trust

By Jeffrey Davis

July 7, 2010

Marketing is one of the biggest road blocks standing in the way of widespread adoption of an eco-friendlier life. But the problem isn't overcoming anti-green marketing, it's not falling prey to pseudo-green marketing – or "greenwashing".

Greenwashing is a term used to describe people, organizations, or business that attempt to portray their product as somehow eco-friendly when it is, in fact, not. One of the greatest tools in the greenwashers' arsenal is the laundry list of eco "certifications" that are available to plaster on product packaging.

TerraChoice publishes The Seven Sins of Greenwashing. For the past few years this report has been known as The Six Sins of Greenwashing. However, greenwashing had grown so much in 2009's report that a seventh sin was added.

Any guesses what the sin was? The Sin of Worshipping False Labels.

With so many labels appearing on so many products, how is a well intentioned consumer to separate the wheat from the chaff? GreenFudge.com trusting only six major labels, and I agree with their selection.

Some of the more common labels they list are:



Certified Vegan: "The Certified Vegan logo is a registered trademark signifying that products are vegan, defined here as containing no animal ingredients or by-products, using no animal ingredients or by-products in the manufacturing process, and not tested on animals by any company or independent contractor. The logo is administered by the Vegan Awareness Foundation, also known as Vegan Action, a nonprofit organization promoting veganism."



Fair Trade Certified: "The Fair Trade Certified™ standards aim to ensure that farmers and farm workers in developing nations receive a fair price for their product; have direct trade relations with buyers and access to credit; and encourage sustainable farming methods, without the use of a dozen of the most harmful pesticides, and forced child labor. To bear the label, products must be grown by small-scale producers democratically organized in either cooperatives or unions."



Rainforest Alliance Certified: "Rainforest Alliance (RA) follows standards set by the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN)(also formally known as the

Conservation Agriculture Network) that are designed to promote tropical conservation and steer commercial agriculture practices in the tropics. Rainforest Alliance verifies that certified products have been grown using environmentally responsible management practices including integrated pest and disease management practices, soil and water conservation, fair labor treatment practices and good community relations."



USDA Organic: "The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a fixed set of standards that must be met by anyone using the "organic" label in the United States. There are 3 categories a product may fall under: 100% Organic, which are products that can only contain organically produced ingredients; Organic, which are products that contain 95% organically grown ingredients and 5% non-organic ingredients approved on the National List; or Made With Organic Ingredients, which are products that contain 70% organic ingredients and 30% non-organic ingredients approved on the National List."