



## Fact vs. Fiction in the Marketplace

July 14, 2010

*Perception might be reality in politics, but when it comes to the long-term survival of the planet, it's vitally important that we be able to distinguish between the two. Walk into any store these days and you'll see shelves crowded with competing brands, many of which are increasingly making claims of environmental responsibility as they vie for your attention and dollars. Are consumers able to tell which claims are real and which are greenwashing? A new study shows that the public's perception of a company's eco-footprint often does not mirror reality.*

New Scientist magazine recently released the results of an investigation that examined the views of United States consumers about the "green auras" of particular companies and compared them to the companies' actual performance. Looking at nine sectors of the economy, the study ranked the "environmental impact" of individual businesses relative to others in their sector and surveyed shoppers to get their opinions about these same companies.

Among the 22 companies in the food and beverage category, for example, Fresh Del Monte Produce was ranked last among its peers for its actual performance but earned second place from United States consumers for its perceived greenness. Meanwhile, Unilever — which owns the first Rainforest Alliance Certified™ tea estate in the world

and has pledged to source all of the tea in its Lipton tea bags from Rainforest Alliance Certified farms by the year 2015 — was ranked 21st by consumers, next to last, despite earning a second-place position for its actual environmental impact.

Given the barrage of marketing information aimed at consumers, it's not surprising to learn that they are having a hard time distinguishing fact from fiction. And many of the companies themselves don't make that task any easier. According to a 2009 report by the environmental marketing firm TerraChoice, which examined 2,219 retail goods sold in the United States and Canada, a whopping 98 percent of products made at least one claim that could be categorized as "greenwashing," either actively misleading shoppers or giving a false impression by omitting key details.

What these studies both highlight is the importance of credible, independent information that lets consumers know when a product is truly green — which is exactly the point of certification programs like ours. The Rainforest Alliance Certified seal provides concerned shoppers with a trustworthy, third-party assessment that tells them a product has been made in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Look for it every time you shop — it's one label you can really rely on.

