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PGC Day 21: Greenest

I never considered if the items on my campus were Fair Trade Certified. Through a little research I discovered that we actually have quite a decent amount of items that *are*. This doesn't necessarily surprise me, given Champlain's values rooted in sustainability, but I was shocked to know how these very popular brands we popular because they were good and also happened to be Fair Trade Certified.

Items that are NOT Fair Trade Certified:

- Soda
- Deodorant
- Toothpaste
- Many/most of the candies and snacks
- Some makeup

Items that ARE Fair Trade Certified:

- Yerba Mate Drinks
- Honest Tea
- Some Speeder & Earls Coffee Blends
- Runa Tea
- Lake Champlain Chocolates

This was a great start. However, I knew we could do better. One of the main reasons students purchase items from our Campus Store is because of convenience. They carry snacks, drinks, personal care products, makeup, school supplies, electronics, textbooks, and apparel. If a student is on campus and hungry, they're gonna grab a quick bite of whatever is available at the store. If they ran out of toothpaste and need to grab some ASAP, they're going to buy whatever brand is on the shelf at the Campus Store.

When you just need a snack or toothpaste to freshen up your breath as soon as possible, you are not going to walk five blocks to City Market to buy Fair Trade toothpaste or Alter Eco chocolate, especially if you're on your way to class or work or just busy like most students are.

My goal is to create permanent replacements of the regular brands of products in the Campus Store with their Fair Trade versions. This not only supports Fair Trade and the companies that follow it, but it also refuses products that don't have as clear values. In addition, it still satisfies a students need for an item at any time, those quick fixes, and can even create long-term brand loyalty! A student uses the Fair Trade product and realizes they really like it, they are exposed

to the brand, will recommend it to others, and seek it out in the future. A positive Fair Trade loop!

To make big change, I wanted to make a big impact. To kickstart this project I teamed up with Sarah Cipollini, who is a part of another Project Green Challenge team. We originally were just going to go to the Campus Store manager with a few ideas we had for replacements, explain how we want to work together to sell better products and support student health and wellness but also Fair Trade and everyone who worked to create the items on our shelves.

When we actually got to brainstorming, we decided we wanted to make a bigger impact. To do this we made a petition for students to sign to show their support. We created a Google Form that allowed them to vote YES to having more Fair Trade Certified items in the Campus Store along with their name and graduation year.

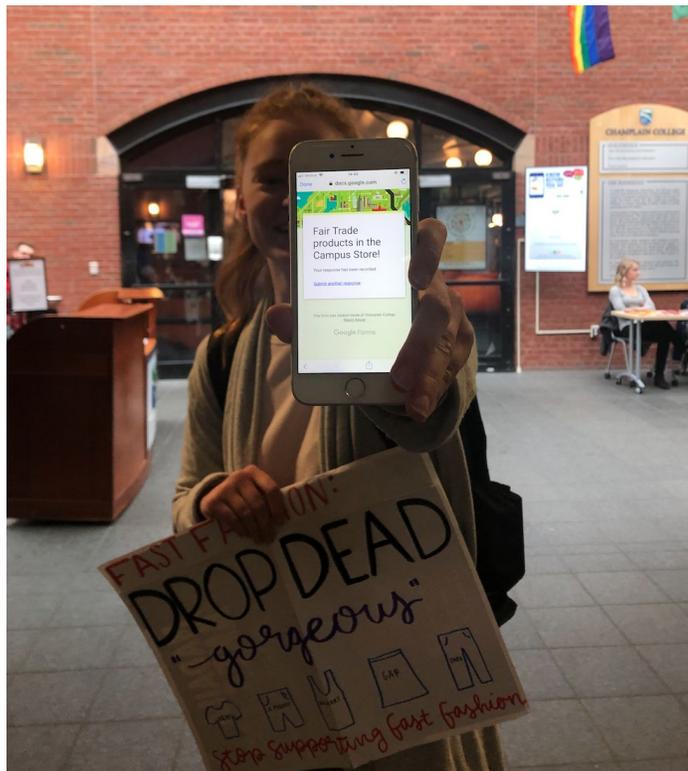
We posted and shared on Facebook, sent personal and group messages, and I stood outside the dining hall with my petition and asked people to sign! I explained a bit about what we were trying to do and most people hopped right on and signed yes!

After all of this, we had just over one hundred signatures of approval. With this jump start, we took our ideas to the campus store.

We broke the store down into categories: apparel, on the go items (snacks, beverages, gum, etc), school supplies, and personal care. We pitch our ideas to the manager of the school store and he loved them, but immediately presented us with limitations.

The Campus Store is largely directed and stocked by a bigger company, Follet, who bundles and delivers items in bulk to all the stores it runs. This large company is the curator of the selection and finds the best deals for the places it stocks. The manager of our store is employed by Follet, and only has direct purchasing control over some of the snacks and drinks.

At one point Champlain has Fair Trade shirts in the store (that were actually about five dollars cheaper than their regular shirts), but they didn't really sell so they were removed. The reason as to why they didn't sell is unclear- it could have been strictly an aversion to the style or design.



To even get these in the store in the first place there was an entire petition that had to be held and clear support of these shirts to be brought in.

Champlain presents itself as a very sustainable school, and they are in many ways, but they fall apart with the school store. We can do so much better. We just need someone to do start this positive action. I never thought I'd say this, but I think I'm one of those people.

After our meeting Sarah and I sat down to revise our plan. We are going to start with what is feasible to start with. We are going to come up with snack and drink replacements that can be stocked in the Campus Store, ones that students will actually want to purchase! We will pitch these ideas to the manager.

The next step is to reach out to the head of the Center for Service and Sustainability to see if she can offer us advice and guidance in navigating how to reach out to Follet and provide further change in the store. We don't want to just stop because it's hard, we actually want to see change. Walking through the store we noticed all the excessive plastic, items that are far from fair trade or fair in any way, and beauty products loaded with unnecessary chemicals.

We are questioning where Champlain makes it's connections and where it can improve ties in the community and the world to not only have a better image, but to be better in general. Imagine having a Campus Store that is more than 50% Fair Trade?

"We can be whatever we have the courage to see." We want to be changemakers. Starting with a snack!