

# Ethiquable: reconciles fair trade with ecology and economy

Ethiquable is a cooperative with the clear social objective of promoting organic and fair trade products. The core of its business is the support of sustainable agriculture. 'We aim to reduce our environmental footprint while at the same time developing a profitable business model. Sustainable packaging has an important role to play in this. But our packaging strategy cannot be decreed from behind a desk,' explains Stephan Vincent, Benelux Director.

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## Open and transparent communication raise the credibility

Founded in France in 2003 and active in the Benelux since September 2009, Ethiquable creates, develops, manufactures and distributes a range of 100 organic fair trade products originating from sustainable agriculture. With consumers becoming increasingly sensitive to the needs of the environment, Ethiquable has put in place a business model that successfully responds to this sensitivity. It has achieved an annual growth rate of almost 50%. Working with 40 partners spread across 23 developing countries, 'Ethiquable situates its core business in sustainable development

according to an approach which is as comprehensive as possible, including social, economic and environmental considerations,' explains Vincent. As a former director of Oxfam he is a trusted voice when he states that 'our desire to reduce our impact on the environment is part of our cooperative's DNA'. A key point in Ethiquable's philosophy aims at developing maximum added value for the producer. 'We enable them to assume power over the processing of their product. Most products are therefore grown or manufactured, processed and packaged on site.'

## Packaging: the highest environmental impact

Its ethical and organic fair trade commitment requires this cooperative company to be consistent in its operations, particularly in terms of its environmental responsibility. In very specific terms, Ethiquable has analysed and prioritized the areas in which its activities have the greatest impact on the environment:

- **Packaging** has the highest impact: from 23 to 28% of the total impact
- **Transport** takes second place: products originating from distant countries are imported exclusively by sea
- The product's **end of life** is the third major impact to be considered.

As a result, Ethiquable has achieved marked and noticeable efforts in optimizing its packaging in recent years. In 2012, it was the winner of a *Greener Packaging Award* for the packaging of its herbal teas. Other recent developments include:

- Replacing two 250g **coffee** packets with a **500g economy-size package**. This resulted in a 54% savings in consumer packaging. Another noteworthy development is the

elimination of aluminium throughout the entire range of Ethiquable coffee product packaging.

- Prioritizing the use of **materials that respect the environment** when manufacturing its packaging: i.e. printing with plant-based inks and using recycled cardboard to package chocolate and tea.
- **The volume of cereals and rice packaging has been reduced** by better aligning the packaging to the actual quantity of product.
- **The elimination of external film and staples** for sachets of tea and herbal tea.

The tangible results of this approach are twofold and offer numerous positive effects. At the end of their life cycle, certain products are now entirely recyclable, while the reduction in packaging volume results in lower transport costs on the one hand and lower volumes of waste on the other.

good to remember

The approach of Ethiquable meets both **an environmental AND economic objective**.

Ecodesign requires one to listen and **gather accurate consumer information**.

Packaging optimization requires **close collaboration** with **producers**, often involving **technical training**.

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### The challenges of optimization

Packaging optimization processes represent a major challenge for cooperative networks, often located in developing countries that do not always possess the necessary technical expertise. This requires the on-site educational efforts of Ethiquable's employees, as well as collaboration with, for example, Agronomists and Veterinarians Without Borders (AVSF). Rather than changing suppliers, Ethiquable assists and supports its existing partners in learning a new process. As a rule, the implementation of these improvements, dictated by a very pragmatic approach, results in positive economic terms for Ethiquable and the producers

themselves. These include transport optimization (improved use of space) and lower production costs (lower quantities of packaging used), among other considerations. Investments do not necessarily represent a barrier. Fair trade guarantees a minimum price as well as a development subsidy. The latter is allocated to the cooperative, which then distributes it where it can accomplish the greatest good.



### Ethiquable's advice:

#### «How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time»

- Fair trade business today represents only 0.01% of global trade. Effecting a major change will require starting small. One must take a measured approach to organic fair trade.
- It is a niche market that meets a growing demand. Today the fair trade product is the same quality as a conventional product but it must offer more if it is to become more competitive. The fair trade product must be visually as well as ethically appealing.
- The organic fair trade business model aims to be profitable while being beneficial to producers and consumers.

[www.ethiquable.be](http://www.ethiquable.be)