



## IMPACT STORIES

# Counter Culture Coffee Goes B-Corp; Sparks Important Dialogue for Business

**“If anything, the decision to go B-Corp has become a dialogue starter; a place to open up a conversation and shift even more focus to our values.**

After 25 years in business, a growing, national presence well-respected for sustainability practices, and a solid track record as trusted specialty coffee people, [Counter Culture Coffee](#) made an important choice.

They joined with over 3,500 businesses - like [Ben and Jerry's](#), [Patagonia](#), [allbirds](#), and [Danone](#) North America to name just a few - across 150 industries in 71 countries to become a [Certified B-Corporation](#).

It was a business decision long in the making - but it was a commitment to people and the planet that Counter Culture practiced since day one.

Founded in Durham, North Carolina in 1995 by Brett Smith and Fred Houk, Counter Culture wanted to produce and sell coffee differently from the get go. “The goal was always to sell coffee that helps to create positive change in the world,” says Bryan Duggan, Wholesale Operations Manager at Counter Culture Coffee. Duggan, who has been with the company for 12 years, led the B-Corp application process for Counter Culture.

That early-on commitment to values and ethos shaped their environment sustainability practices, purchasing principles, and support for humans around the globe. It also impacted how they chose to communicate.



Bryan Duggan serves as Counter Culture's Wholesale Operations Manager. He led the B-Corp application process from 2019-2020.



Featured above is Counter Culture's Field Trip Bean, a Limited Release whole bean coffee that serves as a nod to students and teachers around the globe and their ability to adapt to new ways of learning.

One such means of communications was the company's [Annual Transparency Report](#). Started in 2009, the transparency reports are just that - full-on transparency as to how Counter Culture buys coffee, the people behind their operations, and their impact on the planet.

The reports started a larger conversation, too - how to serve as a leader in the specialty coffee industry with an eye for the planet and sustainability. “It really got Counter Culture to think outside of just coffee and purchasing,” says Duggan “And more about a holistic and sustainable approach.”

One of the by-products of that level of thinking was the creation of their own direct trade certification program. “True to our desire to be leaders in the industry, we created our own tool to push progress in sustainable coffee purchasing: our Direct Trade certification program,” says Katie Carguilo, Counter Culture's Western Coffee Manager. Through the certification, Counter Culture codified their purchasing principles and commissioned a third party to audit their progress. “We were proud

of those aspects of the program, but we saw the limits of an independent approach. Ultimately, we came to appreciate that sharing standards and being connected to other responsible companies would be an even more important tool to making progress. Through this, we'd have the opportunity not only to change what we do, but also change culture—how we all think,” continues Carguilo.

That holistic approach and commitment to pursue B-Corp Certification sparked important dialogue for an even bigger conversation - how changing culture shifts how we do business.

## A FRAMEWORK TO FOCUS AND LEAD CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Although Counter Culture has been committed to environmental and sustainability efforts since day one, the B-Corp certification process provided a framework for Counter Culture to continue and to lead those efforts. "It was partially the framework that made us decide to shift over to B-Corp certification," says Duggan.

## THEY WERE STRATEGIC AS TO WHEN THEY SHARED THE NEWS

Counter Culture didn't talk externally about the B-Corp certification until after the year-long application process was complete and they were officially certified by [BLabs](#). That choice was important because it aligned with their [values](#) - thoughtfulness and thoroughness specifically, proving that they're all-in on the certification for the right reasons. It was a communication choice that honored the process. "With the B-Corp assessment, it's not just about checking boxes," says Duggan. "You're trying to answer thorough questions around specific choices - such as purchasing."

In December 2021, Counter Culture announced the B-Corp certification on all social media channels as well as a short blog on the company's website. They are formulating how to communicate it and where in 2021.

## CONTINUING TO SHARE THEIR COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL PURPOSE

As part of their communication strategy moving forward, Counter Culture will share a broader story about the company and their respective certification process. That conversation started in their December 2020 [blog post announcing the B-Corp news](#). It is a continued effort towards education, which aligns with their generous [resources](#) and sharing what they've learned via their website.

## A MEANS TO START A LARGER CONVERSATION

The decision to go B-Corp is two-fold; yes, it gave Counter Culture access to over 3,500 Certified B Corporations - like Ben and Jerry's and Patagonia - across 150 industries in 71 countries. It was also a way to start a conversation with others, including customers and partners. "One of our goals with going B-Corp was trying to make our sustainable processes and projects easier to digest and have others learn more about it," says Duggan. In making the B-Corp certification announcement, Duggan shared that one-third of customers were excited and eager to talk about it, one-third were congratulatory and acknowledged the achievement, and one-third needed more education about the move.

"If anything, it's become a dialogue starter; a place to open up and lead conversations about things like worker sustainability and shift focus to our values even more so," says Duggan. Businesses like Counter Culture Coffee have started a larger conversation - about how we connect with people every day in a more conscious, real, and unique way.

This case study is powered by [Impactika Consulting](#), a digital marketing consultancy that makes do-gooder leaders, do better. We believe these leaders have the power to drive positive change not only for business, but also for their communities. To learn more, please visit: [impactikaconsulting.com](https://www.impactikaconsulting.com).

We love impact stories. If you are a purpose-propelled business making an impact or know a business like this, please send us a note: [yavnika@impactikaconsulting.com](mailto:yavnika@impactikaconsulting.com).



**IMPACTIKA**  
Purpose Propelled Consulting\*