

Making a Coke Can Unfamiliar

E-Portfolio: Making a Coke Can Unfamiliar

Grant Lykins

University Of Colorado, Colorado Springs

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### Abstract

This assignment was much more involved and difficult than I had expected. I discovered that even in the age of the internet and easy access to information, large corporations are very good at hiding specifics from the public. I struggled to find quantitative data to back up my responses. I chose to include my opinion in some of my responses, based on the face image that Coca-Cola displays to the public. I discovered through my research that Coca-Cola developed a very bad reputation among environmentalists in the late 2000's and early 2010's, due to the company's negligence of local resources in the communities they obtained ingredients from. I learned that the company places a strong emphasis on making right of what they have done wrong, and that they began initiatives to remedy their environmental impact. I also learned that the company is very progressive in the political realm, supporting diversity in the workplace & advertisements dating back to the late 1960's. Overall, I was impressed by what I found in my research. My previous impression of the Coca-Cola company was greatly improved, and I admire the responsibility the company has taken when presented with issues and failures.

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### Research Inquiries & Findings

1. What is in it?
  - Carbonated water, sugar, caramel E150d, phosphoric acid, natural/artificial flavors, flavored caffeine
2. What does a 12oz can of Coke cost?
  - Well, this entirely depends on where you are in the world. In the U.S., a can of Coke costs about \$1 in most vending machines, sometimes \$0.50 if you are lucky and stumble across an older classic Coke machine. In other countries, the cost of a can of Coke varies greatly. In China, a can costs on average 10 Yuan, equivalent to \$1.50USD (China Highlights, 2019). In Mexico, a 12oz bottle, either plastic or glass, will run about 15.67MXN (Numbeo, 2020), equivalent to \$0.73USD. A 2-liter bottle of Coke in Mexico is only 29MEX, equivalent to \$1.30USD. According to the same source, a 12oz bottle of Coke in Russia is 51.44py6, equivalent to only \$0.66 USD! There is a great variance of cost in Coke products, depending on where they are being sold.
3. Where do the ingredients come from?
  - Coke isn't super specific about where their ingredients come from, but PDF publications are available on the company website that overview the sources of their ingredients. All ingredients are 'approved' by either the Rainforest Alliance, Ethical Tea Partnership, Fairtrade International, Roundtable Sustainable Soy, Bonsucro, and Vive Claim before they hit the Coca-Cola production line. These ingredients are sourced from the regions of: Canada, the USA, Europe, and Australia. I know for a fact that many ingredients in Coke products are sourced

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from countries NOT on this list, but Coke has not made that information publicly available on their website.

- From websites aside from Coca-Cola, I discovered that ingredients are sourced from all over the world. Many of the lemons the Coke company uses in their lemonades are sourced from Argentina. Many of the Mangoes used to flavor other sweet drinks are sourced from India.

### 4. Who made it? What is their life like?

- Coke's flavoring ingredients are sourced from all over the world. They have communities everywhere, from communities in India growing Mangos to communities in Argentina growing strawberries. It's rather hard to find information from Coca Cola about the source of their ingredients, especially the working conditions in those areas. There are many articles published by third party sources exposing abuse at dairy farms owned by Coca-Cola, tragic stories from coffee fields, and news of undesirable working conditions in Colombia.
- Coca-Cola places an emphasis on making sure they are engaged in fair trade practices. The company publishes the results in their annual reports, and they have reached a near 100% level of fair-trade practices. That does not mean that there won't be issues or hardship for the workers. Many of these workers live in conditions that Americans would deem unsuitable, but it is the norm in that region. There are also plenty of workers that live in conditions deemed unsuitable by their own communities, and Coca-Cola advertises that they are working to improve these communities.

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- Many of the workers in third world countries work for a farm that supplies to Coca-Cola, but their day-to-day job is not much different than a regular farm job. Many of these farms are locally owned and governed by people from the region. This allows the farm to maintain its native culture while reaping the benefits of supplying to a major organization.
5. What is the impact of Coke on the local community where it is produced?
- It depends on the community. In some communities like the mango farms in India, the community is affected as they would be by any other growing/harvest season. In South American communities, where the coca plants are grown to give Coke its signature flavor, there have been issues with water usage and management. Colombia and Guatemala especially have faced crises with farmer's wells running dry, and the local watershed being completely decimated for Coke's production lines (War on Want, 2007). That data is now 13 years old, and hopefully the company has taken action to re-establish the watershed in these communities.
    - A report published by the Washington Post in 2016 indicated that the company has taken steps to undo their wrong-doing to these communities. There has been no available quantitative data published to back this up.
6. Do they drink it?
- Yes! The producers are able to enjoy what they work to produce. Sadly, they do not get a free supply of Coca-Cola, they still have to pay.
7. How much do they earn?

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- I cannot find quantitative data on the income for Coke's global farmers. I was able to find rough estimates from 2003 and 2008, but that data is irrelevant at this point because it is so old.
  - My opinion: the farmers are likely paid just over the average in the region. Large corporations engage in practices like this to appear like they are being generous to the farmers (since they are being paid more than other farmers in the region), but the corporation could afford to pay them much more. The corporation needs/wants to keep their profits to a maximum, so they continue this practice. I think that much of the [potential] abuse in payment to farmers has been overcome by Coke's involvement with their various fair-trade partners, but there are still opportunities for negligence.
8. What are the health impacts?
- I'm not sure if this question is in regards to the health impact on consumers of Coca-Cola, or if it is in regards to the farmers. I will address both.
  - Consumers: Coca-Cola offers a variety of products, ranging from uber-healthy to uber-toxic. Coke's products such as Fair Life milk and Smart Water offer many nutritional and health benefits to their consumers. Their iconic Coca-Cola soda does not offer any health benefits (aside from a dose of caffeine). Coca-Cola tastes really good, but I have an issue ingesting the same liquid that I use to de-corrode battery terminals when I'm working on a car. There have been numerous studies into the negative health impacts of the brand's sugary-drinks, especially the diet-Coke lineup.

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- Farmers: There is not much information available about the impacts of Coca-Cola's agricultural practices on the farmers. I did observe from images in reports many farmers in less developed countries have to wrap their entire hands in cloth due to cuts and scratches they obtained while picking crops. Many of the workers look like they have spent much of their life in the harsh sunlight, which can lead to skin related problems (melanoma, other forms of skin cancer, etc.)
9. What are the environmental impacts?
- As mentioned above, Coca-Cola came under fire in the late 2000's and early 2010's for failing to replenish the watershed in communities that produced key ingredients. Coca-Cola has made a commitment since then to make the situation right. They began an initiative to replenish every drop of water used in the manufacturing process (sans the water contained in the products) by 2020, and met their goal in 2015 (Coca-Cola, 2019).
  - The company has also put out many publications detailing their commitment to the environment and fair-trade. They publish annual and semi-annual reports, all of which are easily accessible from the company website.
10. What is the environmental impact of making a can of Coke, considering what it takes to grow and process ingredients such as high-fructose corn syrup and the quantity of water required to produce the finished product?
- According to Coca-Cola's current operational model, the biggest impact remaining on the environment to produce a can of Coke is the extraction of raw materials (for cans/bottles) and the water that is contained within the products. The company is engaged in sustainable farming in order to avoid over-

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farming their plots. They also take measures to minimize leaching of pesticides into local water supplies.

- There are environmental impacts from the company that extend well beyond when a can of Coke is produced. Resources are consumed during the distribution process. The most obvious resource is fuel for the delivery of bottled Coke product as well as their syrups. Resources are also consumed any time a bag of syrup is produced--those bags are housed in thick cardboard packaging so that they are easy to transport, along with minimizing the risk of accidental punctures. Ideally, these materials would be recycled at the end of their service life, but that falls upon the consumer, not the company.



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