

DARK HORSE ROASTERY

Meet the speciality coffee roastery putting the environment first

Dark Horse Roastery is a speciality coffee roastery based in South Oxfordshire and a mobile coffee shop, operating out of old mobile horse boxes. Their pop-up café caters to an assortment of events and locations, and their roastery offers wholesale to local cafes, farm shops, restaurants and delis. In addition, Dark Horse Roastery are also coffee educators, providing professional barista training courses and immersive workshops.

We sat down with Founder and Owner, Emily Stewart, to discuss what sustainability has meant to Dark Horse.



Sustainability has been a main focus for Dark Horse Roastery since the beginning. After seeing a lot of unsustainable practice and wastage throughout the café and coffee industries, Emily was determined to be a part of a community that cared about the future of our planet. She was keen to work locally, instead of travelling up and down the country, to be a more integral part of the supply chain and to have more control over both operational sustainability and product quality.

What actions have you taken as an organisation to have a more positive impact?

Reusability and intelligent purchasing

One of Dark Horse Roastery's core organisational values is to find creative and innovative ways to make use of what they already have. They have always tried to reuse, restore and re-invent rather than buy new, which is true of their horseboxes, van and roastery build. When buying new is a necessity, as it was for their coffee roaster, they invest in energy-efficient technology. Their efficient drum roaster with infrared burners has **reduced emissions up to 50%**.

Outdoor working

The team is always outside, as even their roastery is on a farm, which reduces energy usage on heating or cooling. To stay warm in winter they wear lots of layers, and there is a budget for the team to buy winter workwear.

Packaging and supply

Wholesale supply comes in returnable tubs as much as possible, and products are dispatched via e-couriers, or via their own vintage van more locally. They use local, organic milk, and partner with a local bakery with a wide vegan selection.

Upcycling

Coffee grounds are recycled into coffee logs by [Eumelia](#). Their coffee chaff is also composted and used as chicken bedding by a local farm. Their coffee sacks are upcycled for arts and crafts, and their pallets are made into furniture and serving counters.



Agricultural products

Their coffee agricultural products are certified fairtrade and organic. Most products are bought directly from co-operative farms in Honduras and Guatemala, selected for their sustainable farming practices. A recently acquired blend is wild grown in Papua New Guinean rural highlands.

What barriers has Dark Horse Roastery faced?

It was difficult for the team to find the most sustainable solution for packaging, and to get to grips with local recycling policies. They overcame this barrier by opting for 100% plant-based/biodegradable packaging, and by offering financial incentives for re-usable cups to reduce packaging in general.

They have also struggled on improving energy efficiencies as property renters, rather than owners. As renters, they aren't able to install on-site renewable energy generation, install better insulation or conduct assessments into how the building could be more efficient.

What have been the biggest benefits of being more sustainable?

The biggest benefit of sustainable action has been, "sleeping better at night trying to do the right thing". Working creatively with others who equally and genuinely care about sustainability has also been very rewarding.

Looking ahead...

Dark Horse Roastery are on the lookout for more sustainability initiatives to improve their environmental impact. In the future, they're hoping to put solar panels on their café counters, which could power filter coffee machines and fridges. They also have their sights set on a B Corp certification and are in the process of mapping out steps to achieve this.



"People like buying good-quality coffee from somewhere that cares about the planet"

Sustainable initiatives have helped Dark Horse Roastery to save money, for example, in packaging costs. Sustainability often aligns with cutting costs and getting the best margins. It also reaps rewards in terms of reputational advantage and customer loyalty. All industries can learn to put the environment first, and be able to offer an even better product because of it.

This case study was conducted by Oxfordshire Greentech on behalf of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils.

