

Grounds for Change

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Topic Title: Brewing Sustainability: Turning Coffee Waste into Opportunity

Audience: Peet’s Coffee Board of Directors

Sustainable Development Goal

SDG #12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

SDG #17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Executive Summary

With over 2.25 billion cups of coffee consumed daily, the world generates approximately 18 million tons of used coffee grounds each year—most of which end up in landfills. Peet’s Coffee, the second-largest coffee shop chain in the United States, discards an average of 7-10 kilograms of used coffee grounds per shop each day, contributing to a growing waste crisis.

The ethical concern lies in Peet’s role in perpetuating the linear waste economy by discarding their coffee ground waste and thus contributing to methane emissions—25 times more potent than CO₂. With landfills projected to reach capacity within decades and waste accounting for 20% of global methane emissions, consumers and regulators are demanding corporate accountability for waste reduction and carbon neutrality. To tackle this challenge, we propose a three-phase strategy to seamlessly integrate coffee waste into Peet’s operations, turning it into a valuable asset. Our approach includes: 1) redesigning packaging and uniforms with sustainable, coffee-based materials, 2) piloting a circular program to test and refine these innovations, and 3) launching a global marketing campaign to amplify impact and drive consumer engagement after proven success.

Peet’s Coffee will collect used coffee grounds from select Shanghai locations and export them to Vietnam, a leader in sustainable textile production. There, they will be transformed into eco-friendly packaging, utensils, and apparel for distribution across U.S. stores. This initiative not only reduces waste but also reinforces Peet’s commitment to sustainability and leadership in the circular economy. As sustainability shifts from a competitive advantage to an industry mandate, Peet’s has a responsibility to lead. By embracing innovation, Peet’s won’t just meet expectations—it will redefine them, setting a new standard for ethical and sustainable business practices.