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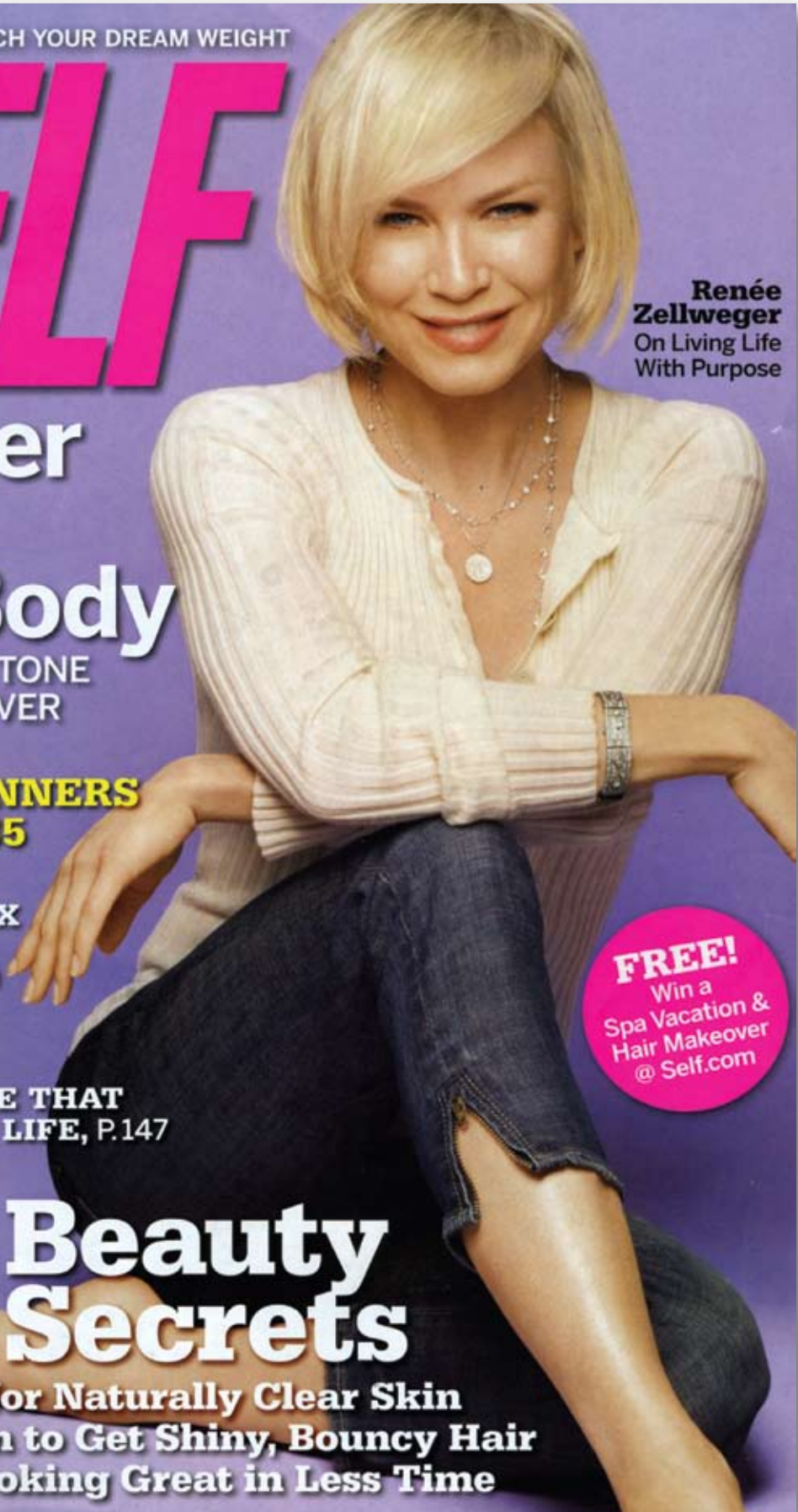
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beauty NEED TO KNOW

Can lotion change the world?

Believe it or not, yes. "Think globally, act locally" is as easy as making smart choices at the beauty counter.

By Beth Janes

Usually when waiting on line at Starbucks, I'm an oblivious zombie until my Venti skim latte fix. But sometimes, I'm conscious enough to take in my surroundings. It was one such morning that I noticed a Fair Trade Certified seal on a bag of coffee beans. That's nice, I thought, knowing only that it meant growers in poor countries were paid a living wage for their labor and crops.

I walked home, feeling more awake, and hopped in the shower, where I eyed my coffee-infused body scrub. What about the farmers of these beans? And of the shea butter listed on my conditioner bottle? And the babassu oil in my shampoo? These ingredients came from developing countries, too, and only one bottle mentioned fair trade. Did the farmers toiling over the ingredients in the other products that crowded my bathroom get screwed? Suddenly I didn't feel so clean.

As with other disheartening realities—war, global warming, ponying up \$4 for coffee in a tanking economy—I pushed the issue out of my mind. Until, that is, I received a reporting assignment to Nicaragua. Beauty companies are increasingly sourcing fair trade ingredients, and The Body Shop, a pioneer of the movement for 21 years, wanted to raise awareness. Toward that end, the company invited me to interview members of the Juan Francisco Paz Silva farming cooperative, which sells sesame oil to the brand, to see firsthand what fair trade is all about.

Soon I was bumping along in a Land Cruiser to Achuapa, a municipality of around 13,000 that's home to the co-op. During the five-hour drive from the capital, Managua, I saw towns with run-down houses and garbage piled high. I expected it: Nicaragua is the second-poorest country in the western hemisphere. But Achuapa had a different feel. Flowers bloomed in yards, the streets were clean—as much the fruit of fair trade, I would soon learn, as is a living wage for the farmers.



The author beating sesame stalks for their seeds.



The seeds, before being processed.



Epifanio Rodríguez, a co-op farmer, and his wife, Wana.

Growers do see the immediate benefit. Small, rural farmers organize or join a co-op (Achuapa's has 300 members), allowing them to pool crops and resources so they can sell directly to companies. Independent farmers with small amounts to sell, on the other hand, have little choice but to deal with middlemen who lowball them or cheat in other ways (by paying with bad checks, for example), says Brigido Souza, the cooperative's president. The co-op system gives farmers control. In Achuapa, the price of sesame oil (used in about 50 of The Body Shop's products, including its Moringa Body Butter, \$20) is determined not only by the cost of the crop but also by the expense put out for food and shelter by each farmer.

The community reaps benefits as well, as the town of Achuapa proves. Buyers—of sesame, coffee, etc.—pay a small amount extra, called the fair trade premium, which the co-op invests in the community. (The exact figure for sesame is elusive, as it fluctuates frequently, The Body Shop notes. But for coffee, it's about 10 cents per pound.) It may seem like a drop in the bucket for corporations, but for the town or village, that money results in improvements such as schools, roads and clean water.

In Paraguay, where beauty brand Aura Cacia sources sugar for body scrubs, the premium helped to fund the repair of a bridge connecting remote farmers to the rest of the region. The South African tea growers for BeeCeuticals Organics, a skin-care