

## Blending Business and Values: Meet Ben & Jerry's

Ben & Jerry's is a Vermont-based ice cream company founded in 1978 by childhood friends Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield. Known for its inventive, chunky flavors, Ben & Jerry's has also built a reputation as one of the most socially conscious businesses in the world. From environmental justice to racial equity, the brand has consistently used its voice and platform to advocate for progressive change. Unlike many large companies, Ben & Jerry's leans into activism—often using its campaigns to challenge injustice and support marginalized communities. Their approach to marketing is both playful and purposeful: they don't just market values—they walk the walk. This profile explores how Ben & Jerry's integrates equity and inclusion into its company structure, branding, and public messaging.



Ben & Jerry's. (September 3, 2019). Justice ReMix'd Limited Batch. [https://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/2019/09/introducing-justice-remixd?utm\\_campaign=BJ\\_Core&utm\\_medium=paidsearch&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_content=serp&utm\\_term=ben+and+jerry%27s](https://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/2019/09/introducing-justice-remixd?utm_campaign=BJ_Core&utm_medium=paidsearch&utm_source=google&utm_content=serp&utm_term=ben+and+jerry%27s)

## Scooping Change: What Ben & Jerry's Does and Who They Support

Ben & Jerry's produces and sells premium ice cream, frozen yogurt, and sorbet in grocery stores and scoop shops around the world. The company is widely recognized for its creative flavors and witty names like *Half Baked*, *Cherry Garcia*, *Americone Dream*, *Lights! Caramel! Action!*, and *Phish Food*. But beyond being an ice cream company, Ben & Jerry's is a certified **B Corporation**—a designation from the nonprofit B Lab that measures a company's social and environmental performance. B Corps are businesses committed to creating a positive impact on people, communities, and the planet—not just generating profit.

***"We love making ice cream - but using our business to make the world a better place gives our work its meaning."***

#### Ben & Jerry's Core Values:

- Human Rights & Dignity
- Social & Economic Justice
- Environmental Protection, Restoration, & Regeneration

#### Issues Ben & Jerry's Cares About:

- Racial Justice
- Fairtrade
- The Rights and Dignity of Refugees
- Democracy
- Campaign Finance Reform
- LGBTQ+ Rights
- Non-GMO Standards
- Climate Impact
- Climate Justice

Ben & Jerry's is especially known for its campaigns supporting Black Lives Matter, criminal justice reform, and voting rights. Racial equity has been a consistent priority for the company. It also advocates for fair trade, ethical sourcing, and a living wage for employees. Their environmental advocacy focuses on sustainable sourcing and climate justice. The company has a long-standing commitment to LGBTQ+ rights and works closely with grassroots organizations like the NAACP, Advancement Project, and Color of Change.

What sets Ben & Jerry's apart is that activism isn't their side project—it's integrated into their business model. Rather than simply responding to social movements, the company initiates campaigns and takes bold stances, even when it sparks backlash. They've issued public statements calling out white supremacy and systemic injustice, demonstrating a level of corporate advocacy that few major brands attempt.

### **Churning Change Since 1978: A Brief History of Ben & Jerry's**

Ben & Jerry's was founded in 1978 by childhood friends Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield. After taking a five-dollar correspondence course from Penn State and investing \$12,000, \$4,000 of it borrowed, Ben and Jerry opened their first scoop shop in a renovated gas station in Burlington, Vermont. From the beginning, Ben & Jerry's stood out not just for its flavorful ice cream creations, but for its progressive business model. In 1985, they established the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, committing 7.5% of annual pre-tax profits to philanthropic causes. This signaled their intentions early on and a first step to intertwine their social missions with business.

In 2000, Ben & Jerry's was acquired by global food conglomerate Unilever, which raised concerns about whether the brand would continue its activism. However, an acquisition agreement was created that ensured that an independent board would continue to oversee the

company's social mission. This unique structure allows Ben & Jerry's to operate with a degree of autonomy, particularly around their social campaigns and initiatives. Throughout its history, Ben & Jerry's has been vocal and visible in social justice movements—from opposing U.S. military intervention in the 1980s to supporting same-sex marriage, climate action, and Black Lives Matter. The company grew internationally while maintaining its activist roots and bold voice. Today, Ben & Jerry's operates as a globally recognized brand that blends business with radical transparency and progressive advocacy.

### Notable Scoops in Social Impact



Old pint packaging of Cherry Garcia. Ben & Jerry's. (1987).  
<https://www.benjerry.com/about-us?through-the-decades=tab-1980s>

In 1987 Ben & Jerry's introduced its *Cherry Garcia* flavor named for Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry, a humanitarian and environmentalist, and became the first ice cream named after a rock legend.

In 1988 Ben and Jerry were named U.S. Small Business Persons of the Year by President Reagan in a White House Rose Garden ceremony.



Ben & Jerry holding their award plaques. Ben & Jerry's. (1988).  
<https://www.benjerry.com/about-us?through-the-decades=tab-1980s>



Ben & Jerry's. Take a Stand for Children. (1992).  
<https://www.benjerry.com/about-us?through-the-decades=tab-1990s>

In 1992 Ben & Jerry's joins forces with the national non-profit, Children's Defense Fund. The campaign goal was to bring children's basic needs to the top of the national agenda. Over 70,000 postcards were sent to Congress.

In **2004** Ben & Jerry's partnered with Rock the Vote to drive voter turnout among young people in the U.S. They leveraged the long lines of Free Cone Day to register over 11,000 voters—the biggest day in RTV's history.

In **2021** Ben & Jerry's launched Change is Brewing, a cold brew coffee ice cream with marshmallow swirls & fudge brownies, to call for the nation to divest from a broken criminal legal system and invest in communities.



*Ben & Jerry's. Rock the Vote! (2004).  
https://www.benjerry.com/about-us?through-the-decades=tab-2000s*



*Ben & Jerry's. (September 20, 2022). https://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/2022/09/change-is-brewing*

## Leadership: The Dream Team Behind the Cream

After Unilever acquired Ben & Jerry's in 2000, the company retained an independent Board of Directors whose sole purpose is to protect and advance Ben & Jerry's social mission. For a Unilever-owned brand, this is quite unusual—but it reflects the brand's deep and ongoing commitment to activism and progressive values.

### Board of Directors:

- **Anuradha Mittal** – An internationally recognized expert on human rights, agriculture, development, and conservation. She also serves on the boards of the Environmental Defender Law Center and the Blue Planet Project.
- **Aseel Najib** – An assistant history professor at Dartmouth College who focuses on the Islamic world. Her work aims to recover overlooked histories that can be used as tools for building a more just future.
- **Chivy Sok** – A long-time human rights educator, researcher, and trainer whose work spans environmental justice, community-centered conservation, corporate accountability, and sustainable agriculture.
- **Daryn Dodson** – An advocate for social and economic justice for underserved and marginalized communities.



- **Detavio Samuels** – CEO of REVOLT, the fastest-growing Black-owned media company in America. He brings a strong voice for representation and empowerment through media.
- **Jennifer Henderson** – A strategist who amplifies social movements for equity, justice, and fairness. She models the power of storytelling as a tool for social change, helping Ben & Jerry's communicate messages that elevate marginalized voices and foster mutual understanding.

In 2023, longtime employee Dave Stever was appointed CEO by Ben and Jerry themselves. Stever had been with the company for 34 years, since 1988, and was seen as an expert on its founding values. However, in March 2025, Unilever fired Stever over his political activism—a move that is viewed as a violation of the original 2000 merger agreement, which promised independence over social mission decisions. The firing has sparked public backlash and renewed scrutiny of corporate accountability.

[Ben & Jerry's alleges its CEO was fired over its political activism. Here's the scoop.](#)

Though Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield are no longer involved in operations, they remain vocal advocates for social justice and continue to speak out on issues aligned with the company's values.



*Jerry Greenfield (left) and Ben Cohen outside their shop in Vermont in 1980. Ted Dully/The Boston Globe, via Getty Images*

## Flavors of Integrity: Mission & Values

Ben & Jerry's operates on a three-part mission where all parts are supported equally—social responsibility, product quality and profitability:

- **Product Mission** – To make, distribute, and sell the finest quality all-natural ice cream and euphoric concoctions with a continued commitment to incorporating wholesome, sustainably produced ingredients.
- **Economic Mission** – To operate the company on a sustainable financial basis of profitable growth, increasing value for stakeholders and expanding opportunities for employees.
- **Social Mission** – To use the company in innovative ways to make the world a better place. This includes actively working to advance human rights, social and economic justice, and environmental protection.

What makes Ben & Jerry's unique is that its social mission is not a side project—it is structurally embedded into the business model. From fairtrade sourcing and environmental sustainability to

public advocacy on racial justice and climate action, the company integrates its values internally and externally.

### A flavor for All: Equity & Inclusion

Ben & Jerry's takes a bold, outspoken approach to equity and inclusion. They don't shy away from addressing systems of oppression, even when it risks backlash. Their initiatives include:

- **Racial Justice Advocacy:** The company has publicly supported movements such as Black Lives Matter, ending qualified immunity, and defunding systems of mass incarceration. They've released educational resources and calls to action tied to campaigns for systemic reform.
- **Hiring & Representation:** Ben & Jerry's is committed to improving diversity within its own organization, from frontline staff to corporate leadership. Their goal is to build a workplace where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected.
- **Partnering with Grassroots Movements:** Instead of centering their own brand, they often amplify the work of community organizations and nonprofits doing direct work in impacted communities.
- **Transparency & Accountability:** The company regularly publishes statements and updates on its social impact goals and progress, including how it measures its own performance on DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion).

Ben & Jerry's believes that equity isn't achieved through neutrality—it requires clear action, structural change, and willingness to challenge the status quo.

***"We believe in peace, in social responsibility, and in the power of business to effect positive change."***

### The 'Wink' in Ben & Jerry's Campaigns

Ben & Jerry's is known for tackling serious social issues—racism, climate change, criminal justice reform to name a few—but it does so with a distinctive voice: unapologetic, playful, and approachable. The company uses humor, quirky visuals, and pun-filled language to make complex or heavy topics feel more digestible, while not watering down the message.



Ben & Jerry's. What's New. (2024) <https://www.benjerry.com/actnow>

Whether it's naming a limited batch flavor *Change Is Brewing* to support racial equity in policing, or using cartoons to explain systemic racism in *pint-sized portions*, Ben & Jerry's excels at using charm to convey a message while still ensuring real, thought-provoking content. This contrast draws people in and encourages engagement from individuals who might otherwise tune out more traditional activism.

Even their website and social channels are filled with examples of this tone: bright colors, lighthearted graphics, and clever headlines often lead into deeply educational blog posts, petitions, or calls to action.

[Progress Comes In Many Flavors | Ben & Jerry's \[YouTube Video\]](#)

### [7 Ways We Know Systemic Racism Is Real](#)

This is their “wink”—the disarming, creativity that helps pave the way for serious conversations. It's part of what makes Ben & Jerry's activism so effective. It proves that advocacy can be bold and fun—that you can talk about human rights and still not take yourself too seriously. They wink first, then serve up content that aims to move, inform, and ignite change.

One example of this layered approach is their collaboration with Demos President Heather McGhee and UC Berkeley Law Professor Ian Haney López, who explain how racism fuels economic inequality and what we can do about it—all in a format made accessible to a broad audience.

[Demos President Heather McGhee and UC Berkeley Law Professor and author of Dog Whistle Politics Ian Haney López tell the story of how racism fuels economic inequality and what we can do about.](#)

## **Perfecting the Scoop: Best Practices**

Ben & Jerry's operates on the belief that it is just as much a social justice company as it is an ice cream company. The brand intentionally embeds its values into day-to-day operations. Its best practices stem from authenticity, transparency, and action-driven advocacy. From sourcing Fairtrade-certified ingredients to supporting sustainable dairy farms, Ben & Jerry's aligns its supply chain with its social and environmental commitments.

The company treats its website and social media channels as educational platforms—not just marketing tools. They regularly publish blogs and articles written with accessibility in mind, offering resources and plain-language explanations on topics such as racial justice, voting rights, and climate action.

Ben & Jerry's partners with grassroots organizations and community leaders to amplify underrepresented voices. They often co-create campaigns and work alongside those most

affected by the issues, ensuring the messaging is respectful and grounded. They acknowledge the expertise of those outside their organization and the value of collaboration.

Their playful tone is a strategy they've mastered. By using humor and quirky language, they make complex topics more accessible and engaging for a wide audience. They blend activism with personality, creating a tone that's friendly but impactful.

Finally, the company's independent Board of Directors serves as a safeguard to keep Ben & Jerry's true to its social mission, even under corporate ownership. This unique governance model helps protect the brand's integrity and values long-term.

## **Recent News & Reports Related to Equity and Inclusion**

Ben & Jerry's equity and inclusion work has made headlines across a wide range of platforms—from mainstream news to activist-driven blogs. While countless examples exist online, the selections below serve as strong illustrations of how the brand consistently shows up in the public conversation:

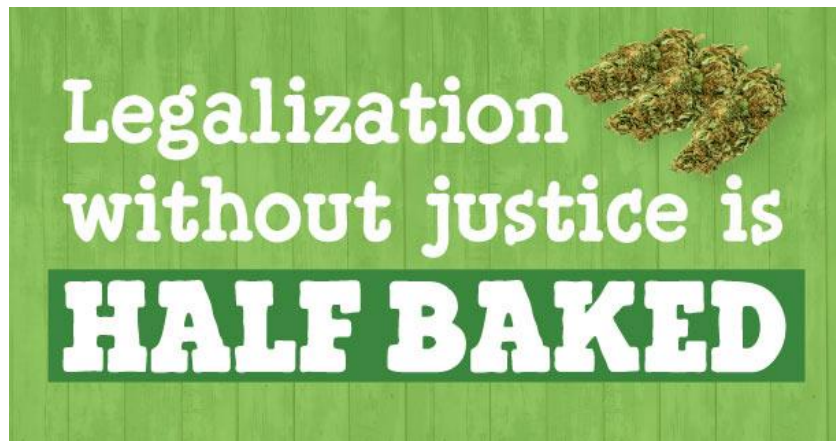
- [Ben & Jerry's alleges parent company Unilever removed its CEO over social activism](#)  
*AP News—March 19, 2025*
- [Perspective: What the Ben & Jerry's legal fight says about 'woke' commerce today](#)  
*Deseret News—March 19, 2025*
- [Ben & Jerry's gets cold shoulder for 'ridiculous' July 4th activism: 'Let me enjoy my ice cream in peace'](#)  
*Fox News—July 6, 2023*
- [High Time for Change: This 4/20 Ben & Jerry's Urges Senate to Improve Country's Half Baked Approach to Cannabis Justice](#)  
*PR Newswire—April 18, 2022*
- [Employers like Ben & Jerry's must help create real first chances to prevent incarceration](#)  
*Fast Company—May 31, 2022*
- [Mural featuring Colin Kaepernick unveiled in Tampa](#)  
*ESPN—February 3, 2021*
- [Arizona Dumps Bonds After Ben & Jerry's Stops Selling In Israeli-Occupied Territories](#)  
*NPR—September 10, 2021*
- [Ben & Jerry: We white people need to use our power to fight police abuse](#)  
*USA Today—November 9, 2021*
- [Statement from Ben & Jerry's: We must dismantle white supremacy](#)  
*Business & Human Rights Resource Centre—June 1, 2020*
- [Ben & Jerry's is launching a podcast about white supremacy in America](#)  
*CNN—September 1, 2020*

## **Selected Blog Posts from Ben & Jerry's**

- [Silence Is NOT An Option](#)



- [A Criminal Record Shouldn't Lock You Out of the Ballot Box](#)
- [Is Your State Changing Its Voting Rules?](#)
- [5 Reasons We Stand with Providers on Abortion Provider Appreciation Day — And Every Day](#)
- [Every Kid Has the Right to Hug Their Parent: Tell Jails to Reinstate In-Person Visits](#)
- [What Would It Look Like if We Invested in People Instead of Prisons?](#)
- [Hey, Vermont! Let's Invest in Women, Not Prisons](#)



*Ben & Jerry's. (April 18, 2022). Ben & Jerry's Asks Fans to Take Action to tell US Senate that the current approach to Cannabis Justice is Half Baked. PR Newswire. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/high-time-for-change-this-420-ben--jerrys-urges-senate-to-improve->*

## Controversies & Organizational Response

Ben & Jerry's has faced its fair share of controversy, especially in recent years. A current incident involves parent company Unilever removing Ben & Jerry's CEO due to the brand's outspoken political activism—a move the company claims violates its acquisition agreement. Additionally, the brand sparked backlash when it stated that the United States is founded on stolen Indigenous land and called for land to be returned. Another point of contention came when Ben & Jerry's decided to stop selling ice cream in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, which led to significant political and financial backlash.

In each case, Ben & Jerry's stood firm in its values. Rather than apologizing or softening its stance in response to public outcry, the company used its platform to further explain the reasoning behind its actions. Through blog posts, educational resources, and social media messaging, Ben & Jerry's consistently reiterates its commitment to progressive ideals. They don't shy away from the fallout—instead, they double down on transparency, stating clearly who they are and why they make the decisions they do.

## Closing Reflection

Ben & Jerry's shows that a company can stay true to its values, even in a corporate landscape that often favors neutrality. Through creative campaigns, fearless advocacy, and structural commitment to justice, they remind us that progress really can come in many flavors.

## References

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<https://www.benjerry.com/about-us/b-corp>

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