

## Chapter 13: From differentiated coffee markets towards alternative trade and knowledge networks

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### Introduction

Many of the chapters in this book have examined the negative consequences of the coffee crisis and commercially traded coffee commodities. They have also analyzed the multiple responses and explored the tensions and contradictions that have emerged as Fair Trade, organic and other certified production and trade relationships grow and help buffer the consequences of the coffee crisis (Bacon, 2006; Petchers and Harris, 2006; Goodman, 2006; Mutersbaugh, 2006). Although these quickly growing differentiated coffee markets represent only 1-2% of the global coffee supply (Bacon *et al.*, 2006a), emerging empirical research shows that they can provide a buffer for some producer organizations and small scale farmers (Raynolds *et al.*, 2004).

This chapter asks the question: 'What will come next?' What if we take certification as a starting point instead of a finish line? Is it possible to maintain the "alterity" within these certified markets as they rush to mainstream? What if, instead of comparing these differentiated coffee market segments to the corporate controlled conventional coffee markets, we look to the many examples of more local and alternative food networks? What can be learned from farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and other local attempts to connect producers and consumers in more direct relationships that are socially just, ecologically restorative, and which promote mutual learning and positive change processes?

This chapter presents a case study of an effort to create an alternative trade and knowledge network. This case study focuses on the Community Agroecology Network (CAN), a young organization in the process of creating a model to help expand and deepen alternative trade networks. Action-oriented researchers and activists in the U.S. and Mesoamerica started CAN with the idea that a network that linked producers and consumers, as well as producer organizations, could benefit social development and conservation efforts in the producers'

communities. We conclude this chapter by examining CAN's experience through the lenses offered by the alternative agro-food network literature.

### Alternative Agro-food Networks

Alternative agro-food networks are generally defined in opposition to the conventional food system. "What they share in common is their constitution as/of food markets that redistribute value through the network against the logic of bulk commodity production; that reconvene 'trust' between food producers and consumers; and that articulate new forms of political association and market governance." (Whatmore *et al.*, 2003: 389). In this paper, we will touch on a few of the defining characteristics of "alternative" agro-food networks, including issues of trust, closer producer-consumer relationships, empowerment, and strategies to promote a more equitable distribution of the benefits from trade.

The fair trade coffee movement started with close social relationships as pioneer cooperatives, liberation theology-inspired clergy, and Northern civil society organizations searched for strategies that supported indigenous and peasant farmers in their collective struggle for

more equality, liberty and a democratic economy (VanderHoff, 2002). These relationships have become thinner, stretched and occasionally have disappeared as fair trade adopted a certification-based model, introduced more coffee industry actors and grew into a global market involving more than 800,000 farmers and rural workers and accounting for 1 one billion dollars in retail sales in 2004 (FLO, 2004; FLO, 2005). In a similar fashion, the pioneering efforts of farmers and environmentalists to launch organic certification can also be seen as an attempt to create an alternative agro-food network. These networks continue to emerge, grow and change as they mainstream and engage people who find the conventional food system increasingly unpalatable (Whatmore et. al. 2003; Murdoch et. al., 2000; Goodman 1999). In addition to the global trade networks considered in this paper, alternative food networks include many local, regional and national initiatives that promote closer relationships and alternative forms of production and consumption *within* the geopolitical North and South (Jaffee et. al., 2004; Allen *et al.*, 2003).

Rapid commercial growth as certified products enter the mainstream and more transnational companies, such as Nestle and Proctor & Gamble, try to take a share of the certified organic and Fair

Trade market, has caused many to ask what happened to the 'alterity' in these alternative agrofood networks. While some search for 'alterity' in alternative food systems, other scholars have considered more alternative and conventional notions of sustainability (Orr, 1992) This question should be considered with attention to issues of scale in coffee markets. The bulk coffee commodities trade accounts for roughly 90% of all coffee traded globally, slightly less in the United States and higher in selected European countries (Ponte, 2004). Although 10% of the global coffee trade can be differentiated based on various attributes of quality, including taste, origin, and certifications, only about 2% of the global coffee trade is certified coffee (Ponte, 2004).

These recent changes have provoked many of those involved in forming the fair trade and organic foods movements to re-converge as they seek to recover the "alterity" within these so-called alternative trade and production networks. Recently, more than 650 activists, civil society organizations, businesses and others joined together in Chicago at the Fair Trade Futures conference (September 2005) to share ideas and practices about 'deepening' the Fair Trade movement. This search for more alternative approaches is what provoked CAN's founders to ask if

developing a knowledge network, where both the producer and consumer are educated about each other, could be a viable alternative that exists outside the commodity market chain.

FIGURE 13.1 HERE

Some scholars suggest that alternative agro-food networks (AAFN) can meet Karl Polanyi's challenge and begin reversing a market centered society as they advance a process of re-embedding the open-market within a series of more progressive social values and societal relationships (Raynolds, 2000; Polanyi, 1944). Others remain more skeptical regarding the degree of 'alternativeness' within the current and expanding range of AAFNs, and remind scholars that critical evaluative criteria, such as social justice, are often un-addressed within AAFNs (Allen and Kovach, 2000; Goodman, 2004).

This chapter will only begin to touch upon the many inconsistencies and contradictions surrounding the fair trade mainstreaming processes, Northern elite consumer alliances with poor

Southern farmers and the complex negotiations concerning issues of price, quality and market governance. We focus on the still incipient processes of constructing an organization called the Community Agroecology Network, as a case study that exemplifies alternative coffee trade and production networks. Organizations such as CAN posit the question: 'Can more direct relationships be developed within the differentiated coffee market that move beyond certification and further develop the alternative agro-food network?' As certification fosters public awareness around social issues yet positions itself within the mainstream market, this becomes an increasingly pressing question. This chapter explores these questions within the context of the coffee crisis, presents the CAN case study and then shares a reflective discussion analyzing CAN's experience, struggles and aspirations.

#### Finding opportunities within the coffee crisis

As stated elsewhere in this book, the coffee price to producers plummeted to its all time low in 2001, at \$0.45 per pound of green coffee (IADP, 2002; Bacon, 2005). This price decline to levels below harvest costs

unleashed a series of adverse consequences among rural workers and small-scale farmers including hunger, disintegration of families and communities, and migration to cities (CEPAL, 2002). This crisis put a human face on a product – coffee – that many hold dearly as part of their daily routine.

Although the prices of green bean coffee have recently increased, the dynamics of the system that set the crisis in motion have not changed (Ponte, 2002; Talbot, 2004). Thus, it seems that we can predict the cycle will repeat itself and a similar crisis will return. At the same time that coffee is a major player in the world commodities market and is controlled by several transnational corporations, it represents an ideal product for social change. It is farmed in 85 countries and exported by over 50 of these countries in Central and South America, Africa and Asia (ICO, 2005). Researchers at Oxfam have suggested that 125 million families, of which an estimated 70% are small-scale producers, are involved in coffee production and processing (Brown *et al.*, 2001). Most exported coffee finds its way to coffee drinkers in the United States and Europe, where it is not only consumed, but also has become an integral part of the cultural way of life. It is produced in environmentally sensitive areas, often on

mountainsides that were formerly cloud forests; yet, as an understory plant, it can be grown in ways that protects watersheds and promote biodiversity (Toledo and Moguel, 1996; Méndez, 2004).

Thus, with appropriate consumer awareness, the cup of morning coffee that warms the drinker's hands, not only can provide good tasting coffee, but also appeal to values of social justice and environmental protection. The Fair Trade certification movement has done much to educate the consumer and promote awareness about social issues in the agro-food systems of Europe and more recently in the United States (Raynolds, 2000; Renard, 1999). This effort focuses on marketing and building label-awareness among coffee drinkers and returning a steady standard price to coffee cooperatives. It has increased coffee drinkers' awareness, and created the opportunity for farmers, their communities, researchers and university students to engage in innovative networks inspired by social justice and environmental conservation.

One example of these newly forming networks is the rapidly expanding student fair trade movement. Although isolated student groups have long been involved in hosting fair trade farmers, conducting field internships and running campaigns to convince their local café to

carry Fair Trade certified coffee, these interactions lacked coordination among campus groups. Launched at an event held in Santa Cruz, California in 2004, United Students for Fair Trade (USFT) now links more than 80 affiliated campus-based groups promoting fair trade principles and practices throughout the USA (Curnow, 2006). A limited map of the emerging global student fair trade movements includes the Canadian Student Fair Trade Network, the Student Fair Trade coalition in the UK, Hooked in Australia, and a continent-wide network of student Fair Trade activists in Africa called PEACE (Plate-forme d'Étudiants Africains pour un Commerce Équitable / African Student Platform for Fair Trade) (Hussey, 2005).

Many of these campus-based student activist groups have originated with student-led attempts to change what they perceive as exploitative practices in their campus food system. A common entry point for these groups is a campaign to convert their university dining commons and cafes to 100% Fair Trade certified coffee. USFT's campus-based member groups have won important campaigns in universities, including Northwestern, Cornell, Harvard, University of California at Los

Angeles (UCLA) and UCSC. The national student movement facilitates communication among otherwise isolated campus groups, encouraging students to join forces in collective efforts to promote fair trade principles, practices and products. During a recent student fair trade movement gathering, student organizers shared their stories about campus conversion campaigns. However, the successes were qualified by a shared concern that the social justice values and organizing potential that accompany Fair Trade certification are threatened, as corporate providers such as Nestle or Proctor & Gamble, start using the label.

During the 2006 National Convergence, the United Students for Fair Trade (USFT) adopted a focus on anti-oppression work. Through a series of trainings, discussions and programmatic changes, USFT's leaders have attempted to deepen their understandings about social difference, including the hierarchies and resulting inequalities that accompany the ways that society has historically assigned more power and privilege to specific social groups and organizations. Student leaders and advisors believe that anti-oppression work is an essential strategy to avoid the trap of reproducing the same structures they are organizing to change.

Within the fair trade movement, alternative trade supporters believe that by forming grassroots networks, using information technology, and developing long-term relationships globalization can be transformed into a trade system that respects diversity and links sustainable livelihoods with environmental protection (IFAT, 2004). Many believe that “another world is possible” through alternative globalizations that could provide opportunities to create more empowering relationships among people that are producing, trading and consuming (Nigh, 1997; World Social Forum, 2005). To accomplish this, there is a need for people who are producing and consuming to work together in their efforts to develop more sustainable livelihoods and support environmental health. These ideas are the inspiration for many activists, companies, producer organizations and others to develop an ever-growing diversity of alternative agro-food networks. These were among the key ideas that prompted both of us to become involved in creating the Community Agroecology Network. The following case study will detail our experience to date.

#### Case Study of an Alternative Trade and Knowledge Network

##### History of the Community Agroecology Network (CAN)

In July 2001, six researchers with over 65 collective years of experience working with communities in Latin America became partners in a network to support the farming communities where they had developed long-term relationships. Each researcher liaison was actively involved in farm-based research and in supporting farmer groups in their organizational development processes. The formation of CAN occurred as the coffee crisis deepened. While each researcher was involved in ongoing studies, the communities where they worked were facing increasingly difficult livelihood challenges. The often negative influences of a corporate-centered globalization that has promoted unconstrained competition and profited from lower prices for basic commodities have continued to stress the economic, social and environmental fabric within each community. In hopes of providing external support to strengthen local empowerment processes and biodiversity conservation, CAN's founders sought to build a network and cultivate alliances among different communities. We hoped to play a role in developing opportunities to share experiences and develop common projects that would integrate environmental protection with viable livelihoods. Together, this group would work to engage the farm communities and

North American consumers in a process that could support agroecologically-based sustainable development.

The Community Agroecology Network (CAN) is now a vibrant U.S.-based not-for-profit organization affiliated with the University of California Santa Cruz that links five farming communities in Central America and Mexico with each other and with consumers in the U.S. CAN is an international network committed to sustaining rural livelihoods and environments by integrating research, education and trade innovations. The organization's name further describes three core concepts that our goals are developed around:

- Community -CAN has worked to build a network of community partners. Within each partner community, relations are developed with various organizations and individuals who contribute to the development and work of the network. In the producer communities, this includes farmers and their families; farmer cooperatives; social groups such as women's organizations, churches, schools, etc. (See Table 13.1 Chart of Organizational Partners). The CAN network collaborates in strategic ways to support the partner organizations in implementing their vision of

how to integrate sustainable livelihoods with conservation practices. In North American communities, CAN works with organizations, such as universities, fair and alternative trade organizations, and is also building an organization membership of individuals interested in more conscientious consumption.

- Agroecology – Conservation efforts are especially important in mountainous tropical rainforest ecosystems and they cannot just be relegated to areas peripheral to the human sphere of habitation (Pimentel *et al.*, 1992). Farm systems have the potential to integrate ecological practices that protect watersheds, soils, and the health of their communities. By looking at their farm as integral to a whole landscape, farmers can increase their knowledge base of how to apply ecological principles on their farm (Gliessman, 1998). Farmer organizations can become a center for agroecology-based workshops and community-based tree nurseries, composting systems, etc; farm-based research can focus on the farmers' needs and interests (Pretty, 2002; Pretty & Smith, 2004). CAN's role is to help facilitate this agroecological approach through research and education, as well as to develop direct links between an increased

economic return to the farmers and their protection of environmental resources on their farms and in their communities.

- Network –We hope CAN will become a network that promotes a more egalitarian exchange among students, farmers, cooperatives, consumers and landscapes throughout the Americas. Our goal is to educate participants in and through this network and to encourage them to take an active role in engaging others, whether it is the farmer next door, in another community, or through farmer-consumer interactions. Our goal is to build relationships between farmers and consumers so that the coffee drinker understands the individuals and the ecosystems that produce the coffee, and farmers learn about the people drinking their coffee. These more conscious linkages will foster an active and less exploitative participation in the ecology of the food system (Francis *et al.*, 2003).

TABLE 13.1 HERE

## Addressing the Needs of Small-Scale Farmers, Students and Northern Consumers

To address the needs of the small-scale farmer and to create a viable alternative trade system, people need to be aware of where their coffee comes from, and who produced it using which practices. To negotiate for better prices, farmers need information about who drinks their coffee and the functioning of the larger coffee market to determine which ways they can influence it. A few decades ago, the isolation of these coffee-producing communities was difficult to overcome. Travel to them was difficult, and global communication was close to impossible. It is not a surprise that these limitations produced a system of control by a few large transnational corporations. It was a system where farmers were not aware of the quality of their coffee beans and the consumer believed what the advertising told them about Juan Valdez. Today, the Internet and increased investments in rural infrastructure have improved communications and access. This increased access offers an opportunity to address some of the exploitive relationships entrenched in the commodity system.

CAN's response to the coffee crisis and farmers' needs is an explicit effort to move beyond the certification markets. The network focuses on improving market return to the farmer, their organization and community; developing sustainable livelihoods; and improving environmental sustainability. In order to improve market return, farmers need to know how their product is judged in the marketplace and learn ways to improve its quality (Daniels & Petchers, 2005). They need to understand the multiple levels of transactions that take place to deliver the cup of coffee to the consumer so that they can find ways to improve their position in the market. CAN works with farmers and their organizations as we grapple with the question of how we can make the transition from a vertical hierarchy with small-scale producers at the very bottom to a more egalitarian network. Of the five communities involved in CAN, four depend on coffee production for their cash income. CAN's goal is to embed the alternative market in community-based change that develops long-term relationships between the farmers and consumers, students and researchers. The alternative market is not developed in isolation, but instead is part of long-term research and educational interactions that are key components of CAN (Figure 13.2).

FIGURE 13.2 HERE

The direct coffee market is one part of ongoing inter-community relationships. CAN, to date, fosters two additional programs that promote this long-term exchange. (1) Participatory Action Research, which engages farmers, their cooperatives and researchers in investigations that seek to both generate information that supports farmers' empowerment processes and promote the transition toward more sustainable farm management practices. (2) Field Internships, which involve university students in action education where they spend a semester in the farm community in a cross-cultural exchange that engages them in community-based projects to promote sustainability. In this integrated structure, the market is just one component of an interconnected network that promotes the education supporting transitions toward sustainability among all participants: farm families and their organizations, researchers, students and consumers.

### Participatory Action Research– Farmer Engagement with Research and Learning

As has been documented through the evaluation of many large governmental programs, throwing money at an issue does not necessarily

create change. It is the engagement and empowerment of all of the actors that can bring about a shift in the dynamics of a system. Thus while direct marketing is an important alternative trade focus for the CAN network, this is closely linked with our Participatory Action Research program (PAR) in all five of the CAN communities. Each counterpart organization affiliated with the CAN Network is closely associated with a researcher engaged in active learning and sharing with the farmers. Bacon, Méndez and Brown describe participatory action research as a cyclical approach that attempts to involve a wider diversity of stakeholders as active subjects in a process of research, reflection and community-led action for positive change (Bacon *et al.*, 2005a). PAR provides the researcher with a framework in which to work with a group of stakeholders around a specific issue. This process engages cooperatives and the farmers to help set the research agenda, generate information, analyze results and serve as the principal actors who will decide upon and implement the changes that they find appropriate for their situation.

In Tacuba, El Salvador, Matagalpa, Nicaragua and Huatusco, Mexico, researchers and farmers have engaged in issues related to shade tree diversity on coffee farms. (Guadarrama-Zugasti, 2000; Méndez, 2004;

Bacon *et al.*, 2005a; Méndez & Bacon, 2005) This research has led to greater understanding of the multi-use of shade trees by farmers and the potential for conserving native tree species within these farms. Researchers seek to develop knowledge partnerships, linking farmers' local and indigenous knowledge about shade tree species diversity and management with scientific and market knowledge in search of strategies that could link shade tree diversity to livelihoods and farming practices. In both Nicaragua and El Salvador, the cooperatives have used coffee biodiversity research as part of a strategy to develop cooperative-led agroecotourism initiatives (Méndez and Bacon, 2005). Continued research and presentations through international short courses in agroecology may further engage the farmer organizations as they seek more diverse farms and livelihood options.

In Huatusco, Veracruz, Mexico, researchers Laura Trujillo and Carlos Guadarrama began a series of farmer workshops on improving coffee quality through a cupping activity that offered a blind tasting of several different coffees following the regimen that coffee importers and roasters use. The farmers predicted that the Colombian coffee would taste the best. After using the scale to taste for acidity, flavor, body, aftertaste

and balance, they were surprised to find that their own coffee ranked high. This insight opened the door to their asking questions as to how to improve the taste and quality even more through their farming practices. The researchers continue to work closely with the farmers in a series of workshops and on-farm research. In this way the farmers learn how they can improve the marketability of their coffee, along with improving their agroecosystems.

Similarly, the involvement of CAN researchers in PAR creates a network of researchers working collaboratively to share procedures and explore opportunities to have the farmers learn from each other. CAN in its own organizational development is currently building its participatory action research and training infrastructure. Chris Bacon, in collaboration with CAN, was awarded a Switzer Foundation Leadership Fellowship to develop an infrastructure to promote participatory action research and training in and among CAN partners. During the next year, CAN will develop case studies of research and change in each of the communities. Ultimately, CAN's goal is to support ongoing research projects in the partner communities that engage the farmers in learning about and

improving their farming systems to promote sustainable livelihoods linked to environmental conservation.

### CAN Field Internships – Fostering Student Involvement

As described earlier, university students play a key role in CAN's activities, using their connection to coffee as a tool to educate themselves and other Northern citizens about the issues of globalization, commodity markets and the complex social and ecological relationships in coffee growing communities. However, the most outstanding teachers for the students are the farm families themselves. CAN works with the cooperatives in the CAN network to offer field internships in each community. These internships provide an opportunity for a student to live in the community for 10 – 12 weeks, engage with families on their farms and become involved in community-based projects. The internship promotes cultural exchange that gives the university student a new way of looking at the world and often an opportunity to apply their academic learning. It also gives the farm community a way to share their knowledge about their community and lifestyles while providing an alternative source of income. While in the community, students engage in

projects related to community interests and/or the student's individual pursuit. Sample projects to date have included: development of a vermicomposting system, establishment of a computer center in a cooperative, production of a documentary film made by the interns, and participation in longer-term research projects led by CAN's PAR researchers. Beyond the specific projects and the additional source of income to both farmers and their cooperatives, an interaction takes place that is often life changing for all of those involved. Farmers often talk about how they had never really valued their role as a farmer before and now they see they have a lot to share with young people. Students often return with a whole new understanding of the privilege they have and a commitment to work for social change.

CAN is currently developing a collaborative internship program with Oxfam America and United Students for Fair Trade (USFT). This program will connect returning field interns with the USFT student fair trade movement on campuses and provide the opportunity for a summer internship with Oxfam America. By building these connections, students have the opportunity to transform their academic learning into one of action education, where they have the opportunity to experience different

cultures and to understand the impacts of globalization. They can then transfer their individual experience to a systemic level by working with organizations that are engaging people in social change.

### The Integration of Participatory Action Research, Field Internships and the Direct Market

The conventional hierarchy of transactions to bring coffee to market depends on lack of economic power and knowledge on the part of the farmer and their organizations. Without negotiating power or the capacity to add value to their product, small-scale farmers become trapped in a system that can involve as many as eight transactions to bring the coffee to market. CAN partners specifically seek to use education and participatory action research to support small-scale farmers in their attempts to leverage the certified coffee markets to greater advantage.

In Agua Buena, Costa Rica, the farmers' cooperative has developed the capacity to ship roasted coffee directly to North American consumers' doors. This process has given the cooperative direct access to the consumer and ownership of the coffee until it reaches the consumer. The direct market was tested and developed collaboratively between the

cooperative and CAN using the model of a farmer's market, with the objective of the farmer and consumer having a direct exchange of goods. Consumers have the opportunity to know who grows their coffee and where their coffee is from. The farmer organization is responsible for taking the product directly to the consumer (harvest, roasting, packaging, order fulfillment) and benefits from the added value gained by controlling the product through these intermediary steps. CAN staff and volunteers in Santa Cruz provide customer service and help explore new sales possibilities. The obvious difference here is between a 'local' farmers market or community supported agriculture and an international exchange of coffee. The delivery system depends on the postal service and the direct exchange depends on e-mail and other information technology, which is facilitated through CAN. The result of the direct market is that more of the responsibilities and value added benefits (roasting, packaging, and shipping) stay in the country of origin, and the knowledge exchange between the consumer and farmer organization is key to maintaining this system.

Impact of the Direct Market

We have found, that especially in times of crisis, an alternative market can help a small group of farmers transition towards sustainability. An example of this is the direct market established with the Cooperativa Coopabuena, R.L. in Costa Rica. This 40-year old cooperative of 600 families had been struggling with the low coffee prices that increased their annual debt load. In spring 2003, CAN began the direct marketing partnership described above with them. Although the direct market returned over \$3 per pound net profit to the cooperative, it represented only 1% of their 3 million pound harvest. Furthermore, Costa Rican cooperative law requires that the profit be distributed equally among the membership, thus making the increased return to individual farm families negligible. Thus the fifty Coopabuena farm families who were engaged in a process of transition towards more sustainable farming practices and were involved with CAN's research and internship programs did not see an explicit gain from the direct market.

In 2004 as a result of the debt burden for Coopabuena. R.L. and the continuing coffee crisis, the cooperative did not open its coffee mill (*beneficio*) for the first time in 42 years. Farmers searched for other places to sell their harvest, pulled out their coffee plantings, and also emigrated

from the community. As the community searched for viable alternatives, the group of fifty farm families who were committed to sustainable practices did an analysis of the direct sales and realized that they could sell 10% of their harvest in this way. This was enough incentive to create the new cooperative of Coopepueblos, R.L. that is actively engaged in the direct market, in participatory action research and in hosting field interns. While the direct market did not provide a solution for all 600 members of Coopabuena R.L., it did provide an opportunity to create a new farmer organization committed to broader principles of sustainability. The importance of this interplay between farming practices and economic motivation was stated in an interview with Carlos Yones, Director of Fundación Café Forestal, a Costa Rican NGO dedicated to supporting socioeconomic and environmental development projects. In Mr. Yones' view, CAN's direct marketing program is the primary incentive for producers in Agua Buena to transform their agricultural production practices by incorporating sustainable methods. He considered it a very good opportunity, especially because of the excellent payment that they receive for their coffee and that this is the incentive for people to join the new cooperative (García, 2004).

While Coopepueblos starts with the ideals and hopes of the direct market, it faces many challenges, including lack of capital and capacity to process the coffee. However, in conjunction with the CAN network, it has completed its second coffee harvest as a new organization and is initiating steps to build a *microbeneficio*. As Coopepueblos organizes, it is not only thinking about coffee production and harvesting. Members are also learning about the market and, in partnership with CAN's Santa Cruz office, they are beginning to take a more proactive role in shaping their market. They are also considering ways to diversify income in their community and they are engaging with an international community that wants to protect and regenerate the tropical rainforest in this region. Its success as an organization depends on building an interdependent relationship with its customers, so that both entities are aware of each other's needs and capacities.

The test will be to see whether a small cooperative can sustain itself through direct interactions with a relatively small network of consumers. And if it does, how will it influence the rest of the Agua Buena community? Is there a parallel here with the niche market created for small-scale vegetable and fruit farmers in the U.S. with the development

of local farmers markets? In other words, can an alternative agrofood network be developed that can sustain small-scale coffee producers? Only the first steps have been taken.

CAN's other network partners do not have national mail systems in which they can successfully send coffee from their cooperatives to a final destination in the North. In these cases, the farmer organizations and CAN have had to rely on the more conventional commodity chain to provide coffee to CAN's network of consumers. Tacuba, El Salvador and Matagalpa, Nicaragua ship coffee through Fair Trade channels to the Port of San Francisco, California. CAN has established a partnership with a local Santa Cruz roaster to custom roast this coffee. However, within the context and constraints of the certified Fair Trade and organic marketing system, CAN strives to create an alternative system that returns more to the farmers' organizations and supports transitions toward sustainability. The farmers are part of the CAN network and have access to CAN sponsored workshops on biodiversity conservation and alternative trade networks. They also receive a small number of interns that bring their ideas and much needed additional income to cooperatives and households. CAN has an agreement with the partner cooperatives in

Tacuba and El Salvador to pay them Fair Trade prices upon the shipping of the green beans, and then return half of any profit on top of that once the coffee has been sold. CAN tracks the costs to import, roast, package and deliver the coffee. The cooperatives receive a detailed report explaining all of the costs and how their coffee was marketed and sold. For the 2004 harvest, CAN was able to return \$2.00 per pound of green beans to these cooperatives compared with the Fair Trade certified price of \$1.26 per pound (\$1.41 for organic). Keeping the farmers informed about their market, the process and the finances, can support the farmers' empowerment processes and foster better decisions. CAN views this educational step as crucial to engaging the farmers in a more egalitarian trade network.

Information gained through close contact with farmers and their cooperatives serves as a tool for educating people in the North as well. University students have played a central role in building this direct market. Since Spring 2003 a group of students has met weekly at the University of California Santa Cruz campus in a form of action education where they learn together and plan projects in support of the initiatives led by CAN's network of partner organizations. A major goal of this

group has been to build an educated consumer base for the coffee being mailed directly from the farmers in Costa Rica. They have done this by engaging a network of people who in turn bring in others to the network. Some of their initial strategies included tabling, presentations, a quarterly newsletter, and holding an annual Holiday Campaign to encourage members of the network to send coffee as a gift to their friends, relatives and colleagues. As the students developed their own understanding of globalization and the commodity chain, they considered how they could change things within their own educational system. They began meeting with and educating the administrators of the UCSC food system. After organizing in support of Fair Trade coffee on the campus, CAN offered a more direct alternative to the administrators. Once the administration understood the potential impacts they could have on this community of farmers and how they could make a direct link to the students' academic learning as well, they found ways to incorporate the direct market coffee into the campus' dining halls.

This student campaign resulted in over 50% of UCSC's coffee being purchased directly from the CAN Network. This contract doubled CAN's direct market volume and gave an economic boost to the three

partner communities involved in the sale. Furthermore, it has been an impetus for the campus dining halls to develop a sustainability program and is providing a model for students, campus administration and local farmers to work together to serve local, organic fruits and vegetables in the dining halls. The creation of a direct relationship to the specific communities, reinforced by linkages to academic learning, field internships and research, has deepened student and administration understanding of the connections between globalization and campus food choices.

### Challenges and Continued Learning

When farmers and cooperative leaders from El Salvador visited Nicaragua to learn from small-scale farmers in Matagalpa who had successfully developed their own second level cooperatives capable of exporting coffee and returning higher prices to farmers, they asked the hard questions about getting started: How did they deal with issues like changes in leadership? Where did they get the capital to start? What about competition from the private export houses and larger farmers? CAN is not the only organization seeking strategies to confront the coffee crisis; in

fact, many small-scale and some larger roasting companies, international development organizations, governments and others have made much larger efforts. However, we are not aware of any other organization that attempts to mix a primarily educational agenda with participatory action research and a small direct market. Accordingly, we feel that it is important to share some of the challenges of building this still young organization and reflect on both obstacles and possible limitations.

We have encountered both logistical and attitudinal challenges related to the ideas of exchange and empowerment within the existing trade system, in cross-cultural exchange with the communities, and in organizational development. We have been surprised to discover how difficult it is for farmers to export their own coffee, especially in small volumes. Even in countries with more effective mail systems to the USA, such as Costa Rica, many actors have invested significant efforts and thousands of volunteer hours in moving the coffee. Each individual bag of roasted coffee sent from Costa Rica to the USA requires a separate registration code from the United States Department of Agriculture. To be done effectively, high-speed Internet access and capacity to complete U.S. government forms in English are needed. It is the same paperwork

completed by the shipping importers for each container of food-related imports. However, CAN and the cooperative have had to complete the same paperwork for each one-pound order mailed to a household in the U.S.

We also faced logistical challenges in importing small amounts of unroasted coffee from El Salvador and Nicaragua. The current trade system is set up for importing in container unit sizes. It is complicated for importers to work in smaller allotments. CAN spent nine months researching ways to be able to bring in partial containers. Shippers wanted to charge exorbitant amounts. This hurdle was finally solved for both El Salvador and Nicaragua through contacts with alternative importers who were willing to support CAN's efforts. However, we are still working with the partner cooperative in Huatusco, Mexico to find ways to ship small amounts of their coffee to the U.S. Developing these alternative and more direct trade systems also requires meeting the consumer demand for quality and service. From regular, on-time deliveries to packages arriving undamaged, CAN and the cooperatives have to engage with the consumer to ensure that the needs of all participants in the network are met. Together we have many business lessons to learn as we strive to educate

and develop alternatives to move this to a scale that can market more of the communities' coffee.

We have also encountered organizational challenges with the different partners in the network. While a small group of both paid and volunteer staff work to address the many financial and administrative challenges inherent in establishing a new non-profit organization, farmers and their cooperatives must respond to very different circumstances. During the coffee crisis, coffee cooperatives were primarily concerned with the survival of their organizations. Thus their work centered around the logistics of selling more coffee at better prices, providing pre-harvest credit to their members and making the minimum payments to continue operations. The cooperatives tied into Fair Trade and organic markets have received better prices, but they have faced the challenges of balancing increasingly large investments in their marketing programs and closer integration with the Northern markets with the need to move with the logic of their small-scale farmer members and maintain transparency and accountability. Although, cooperative principles focus on the importance of education, the educational and research agendas promoted

by CAN staff are secondary to the core operations for each coffee cooperative.

We have also struggled to reach a collective agreement among all network partners regarding issues of empowerment and exchange. The primary challenge concerns the economic inequality between the North, represented in this case by relatively wealthy coffee drinkers, researchers and students in the USA, and the relatively low income coffee farmers and their communities in the South. Working across these differences is not a simple task. Even after preparation, many students arrive to their field internships hoping to “help” and to immediately plug into meaningful projects that will support the community. Unconsciously, they seem to expect that the community’s time, which is tied to agricultural and religious calendars, will match their academic calendar. At a deeper level, we are recognizing that empowerment processes originate from within groups and individuals and that to build a more egalitarian network takes ongoing communication, listening and building of common goals based on mutual values. We are also realizing that significant investments are necessary with our Latin American counterparts in order to support Northern interns during their visits. We recognize that

students and researchers have benefited from the knowledge, research and publications and that the workshops and direct marketing links are only a partial payment. We look forward toward the day when it is equally as easy for a coffee farmers' daughter to enjoy a three-month internship in the North as it is for a coffee consumer's son to visit Costa Rica.

As the Community Agroecology Network grows, several questions of scalability arise: First, can CAN's network grow to make an impact in linking improved livelihoods with environmental sustainability in the five communities that are part of the network? And, second, can this type of network be expanded to other communities? In response to both of these questions, we are beginning to see positive evidence. The recent involvement of Oxfam America and United Students for Fair Trade in supporting and promoting the field internship program provides an opportunity for exploring how this network can incorporate other university campuses. In addition, there are other examples of individuals, organizations and companies that are establishing direct relationships with cooperatives and communities. These efforts that focus on developing direct relationships can be the foundation for an international

alternative agro-food network that involves multiple universities, small-scale cooperatives and researchers. Key to the successful scaling up of this model will be connecting to an emerging web of networks to further the exchange of research, education and innovative trade ideas.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The main focus of this paper has been to explore the merits of this attempt to create an alternative coffee trade network and overcome the limitations associated with mainstream certified coffee markets. The certified markets, while creating consumer awareness of the inequities of coffee production and offering price premiums to the farmer cooperative, often operate within the traditional coffee commodity systems, which continue to be controlled mainly by large scale roasters and retailers. This paper examines how the awareness developed through the promotion of certification can be expanded to create an alternative producer-consumer relationship. If farmer's markets and community-supported agriculture have created niche markets for small-scale farmers growing multiple crops (Allen *et. al.*, 2003), can international alternative networks develop that support sustainable livelihoods for small-scale coffee farmers and

promote biodiversity conservation? The Community Agroecology Network is presented as an example of an organization constructing these alternatives. Its three-fold focus on participatory action research and training in coffee communities, action education for university students, and consumer education and direct market exchange represent an attempt to look beyond the market toward the development of knowledge exchanges and long-term relationships with communities. The following section analyzes CAN's incipient efforts in relation to five of the core elements common to alternative agrofood networks. (Kloppenburg et. al., 2000).

*Empowerment:* There is potential empowerment for both the farmer and the coffee drinker in breaking down the barriers of trade. Our ideas about empowerment follow those of Freire, Rowlands and others (Freire, 1985; Rowlands, 1997; Fals-Borda, 1991), that concern the ability of individuals and groups to achieve their self-defined goals. This is a process-based approach to empowerment that considers not only what actions are taken (outcomes), by whom (men, women, youth and groups), but also evaluates how it was done (nature of the action) (Zenz, 2000). We have found that providing more information and closer connections

between farmers, students and coffee drinkers can be mutually empowering (Wilkins, 2005). As discussed previously, in Costa Rica, the farmers have used funds from interns and coffee sales through CAN to launch a new cooperative.

In Nicaragua, a US-based coffee company worked with small-scale farmer cooperatives to build coffee tasting labs. The cooperatives appropriated this project using these labs to improve their coffee quality, better target specific markets and earn quality-based price premiums. They now demand higher prices in recognition of the quality of the coffee they produce. The CAN researcher in Nicaragua participated in this project and has encouraged the export cooperative to continue training their farmer members through a series of workshops with farmers and youth from the coffee growing communities. In addition, coffee drinkers appear eager to learn about the faces behind the coffee and how they can make a difference through their advocacy, donations and purchasing (Wilkins, 2005). Where exploitation depends on lack of awareness, empowerment depends on exchange of ideas, building understanding and developing long-term relationships that transform ideas and practices.

*Diversity:* Coffee certification focuses on a standardized set of minimum requirements that may address issues including production methods, prices and trade practices. Taking certification as a starting point instead of a final goal, CAN uses research and education to reveal multiple relationships that move coffee from crop to cup. Agroecological research investigates the many ecological relationships involved in producing coffee, but also considers the subsistence crops such as corn, beans and other fruits. How do these ecological relationships affect biodiversity conservation and local water quality in shade coffee landscapes? How may diverse trade and international development networks connect farmers' cooperatives and their changing livelihoods and local ecologies? CAN's research and education focuses on strategies for diversifying production and linking farmer livelihoods to biodiversity conservation. CAN's partner NGO in El Salvador has accompanied more than 150 farmers as they have made the transition to certified organic production practices. In Nicaragua, the PAR research process supported an innovative process that has attracted more than 500 short-term visitors to a cooperative-led solidarity ecotourism program. Interns also pay families for providing home stays and hands-on agricultural education.

These small steps are part of an ongoing effort to support alternatives and resist the more chemically intensive coffee monocultures that any market centered program focusing on a single product promotes, even among smallholders.

*Interdependence:* In the current corporate-centered globalization, it is increasingly important and a viable counter-movement to develop closer international relationships and replace assumptions, generalizations and lack of knowledge with more people-to-people relationships. The integration of research, education and trade fosters this development and provides an important direction to create alternatives. There is a need for international alternative food networks that are based on developing relationships rather than just creating better markets. These models can be adapted from the alternatives used in regional areas. However, in the North-South exchange we have the tension of establishing these relationships in the context of a history of inequality and current disparities in socioeconomic standards. Thus building trust and transparency will take time and needs patience from all participants. CAN's field internship program is a valuable bridge for developing this understanding. It offers the opportunity for students to get a deep,

personal understanding of the impacts of globalization on individuals and communities in the global south while initiating cultural exchanges where the farm families in the communities become the teachers.

An interdependent alliance of researchers involved in participatory action research can make research and the learning process more useful for farmers and their cooperatives, and it also greatly contributes to the researchers' own development through academic exchange and linking research agendas in different places. As the CAN research group further develops their knowledge in collaboration with their liaison communities, they meet annually to share their experiences and insights with each other and enrolled participants in an international agroecology shortcourse. In 2004 and in 2006 these shortcourses were held in partner communities (Huatusco and Matagalpa) and incorporated the farmers' experiences.

*Harmony with nature:* In connecting sustainable livelihoods with environmental protection, farm practices are analyzed in a different paradigm. It is not solely how much coffee can a farm produce, but how can it be produced to obtain environmental price premiums. In connecting these farms with CAN's research program, farmers and researchers explore the larger landscape questions of the region and investigate how

to collaboratively design landscape management plans that include both farms and reserves. Thus the opportunity exists to create replicable models of coffee landscape management plans that protect the environment, support farmers' empowerment processes and provide viable income to farm families. CAN is implementing a workshop series in Matagalpa this year to engage farmer organizations in developing their own cooperative-led regional livelihood and biodiversity conservation management plan. Through farmers gaining their own understanding and formulating regional plans, steps are being taken to integrate conservation with farming practices.

*Community:* There are two aspects of community that can be explored in this discussion: (1) confronting the coffee crisis at the community level, and (2) forming a community of producers and consumers through a network. In discussing the former, CAN made a strategic decision to work for change at a community level while engaging with community-based organizations as network partners. CAN's development is occurring at a time when many of the coffee communities are disintegrating due to lack of economic viability. Yet, the community level appears to be the appropriate level to involve network participants.

In this way, organizations within a community work together on common goals and can be supported by other organizations and communities within the network. We work with representative organizations within these communities. In most cases, farmers' cooperatives are our primary partners.

The research liaison is key to CAN's involvement with a specific farming community. Both the community and CAN depend on the long-term relationships established by the researchers to work with community members and partner organizations. All seven of the CAN-affiliated researchers have long-term relationships with the partner communities, most preceding the establishment of CAN as an organization. Three have their primary residence in the region of the community they are working with and five are native to the Latin American country of their liaison CAN partner community. This connection is integral to the goal of developing an egalitarian exchange and attempting to overcome the disparity between South and North. As in any community, change is always occurring and different actors take on different roles. An important aspect of CAN's evolution will be to view the capacity to maintain the community relationship as roles pass from one individual to

another whether it be the cooperative leader, the researcher liaison, or changes in lead partner organizations.

CAN also strives to build a sense of community within the network. There are multiple pathways for this to be pursued. There are the potential relationships among network partners in different producer communities; the alliance that is being formed among researchers and their liaison communities, the South-North relationships among producers and consumers, and the network of students and consumers who become involved in CAN. In many ways, the foundation is just being formed for these relationships by developing awareness of each other among the individuals and partner organizations. In several cases, this is being extended to ongoing communication, exchanges and joint productive activities that further build this aspect of community.

Examples of this include: CAN researcher Ernesto Méndez traveled with farmers from the Tacuba cooperatives to Matagalpa, where they worked with coffee farmers and researcher Chris Bacon in demonstrating how to conduct tree diversity studies on coffee farms. CAN's International Agroecology Shortcourse has been hosted in Huatusco (2004) Santa Cruz (2001, 2003) and Matagalpa (2006), where CAN researchers, together with

network partners, provide outreach and education to course participants. In addition, there is the sense of community that is developed between university interns and their host families and communities. Through all of these network links, CAN hopes to break down barriers so solidarity can be formed. As these exchanges continue to develop, we need to acknowledge the socio-economic and cultural differences and emphasize ways to use these differences as a source of strength. We continually search for strategies to promote more equality. However, as time passes and relationships continue to deepen, we are all learning and in so doing, building community.

In this chapter, we have explored what it might look like to move beyond Fair Trade. While Fair Trade certification develops consumer awareness, it is focused on mainstreaming and thus becoming part of the transnational corporate system rather than changing it. What can be learned from the formative steps of CAN as a model for encouraging an international alternative agrofood network? CAN attempts to develop multifaceted interactions among partners where marketing represents just one component. Embedding the market in research and education creates a mutual commitment and exchange among actors. As a network it is

made up of many diverse players – both individuals and organizations. Each brings different aspects to the network and takes different components from it to share with their community. While there are infrastructure challenges to overcome from transport to quality control, there is strong commitment among participating organizations, students, universities, the farmers and their organizations to get involved in building an alternative institutional framework. And the results can be seen in the formation of a new cooperative based on the direct market and sustainability, as well as in campus dining halls purchasing through the alternative market. As a network our goal is to break down the isolation between and among farmers, students, coffee drinkers and universities. We believe that by consciously rebuilding these relationships all actors can support each other in transitions toward sustainability. As international organizations and networks committed to grassroots organizing of producers and consumers continue to develop, there is a possibility to form a movement that uses the communication and technology tools of globalization to further alternative trade. CAN is finding that by taking an interdisciplinary approach that integrates building the local economy with environmental conservation and

sustainable farming practices the viability of small-scale farming communities is enhanced. In the words of Costa Rican coffee farmer, Roberto Jimenez, "If I can get more money for my coffee, then I can plant less coffee and plant more trees."

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Table 13.1 CAN's Principal International Network Partners.

<b>CAN Partner Communities with PAR Researcher Liaisons</b>	<b>Agua Buena Costa Rica</b>	<b>Huatusco Vera Cruz Mexico</b>	<b>Matagalpa Nicaragua</b>	<b>Tacuba El Salvador</b>	<b>Yucatan Mexico</b>	<b>Santa Cruz, California USA</b>
<b>First Level Partners (Highest representation al Org. for CAN activities in community)</b>	Coope Pueblos <i>Farmers Coop.</i>	Universid ad Autonoma de Chapingo	CECO- CAFEN <i>3<sup>rd</sup> level Farmer Org.</i>	ASINDEC <i>NGO</i>	Universida Autonoma de Yucatan	University of CA Santa Cruz CAN student organization Agroecology Research Group
<b>2nd Level Partners</b>	Finca Loma Linda <i>Intern Liaison</i>	Coop Tepet- zingo <i>Farmers Cooperati ve</i>	CES <i>NGO</i>	ACOES <i>2<sup>nd</sup> level Farmer Org</i>	PROTROP ICO <i>Dept of Tropical Natural Resources UADY</i>	CAN network of supporters and subscribers including UCSC Dining Halls

<b>3rd Level Partners</b>	Damas Unidas Women's Group	AUGE <i>NGO</i>	UCA San Ramon <i>2<sup>nd</sup> level Farmer Org</i>	Coop Las Colinas <i>Farmers Coop.</i>	Solares Escolares <i>Community -based school gardens program</i>	UCSC campus organizations including: PICA GIIP Comercio Justo
<b>3rd Level Partners</b>	ASOP-RODE <i>Farmer Association</i>	UGOCEP-Café <i>2<sup>nd</sup> level Farmer Org</i>	Coop Organica <i>Farmers Coop.</i>	Coop La Concordia <i>Farmers Coop.</i>		Oxfam America United Students for Fair Trade
<b>3rd Level Partners</b>		Grupo de Ahorro de Mujeres Tepetzingo <i>Women's Group</i>	Coop. El Privilegio <i>All women's coop</i>	Coop El Sincuya <i>Farmers Coop.</i>		Evergreen State University, Washington
<b>3rd level partners</b>			Daniel Teller <i>Farmers Coop.</i>			Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Co.

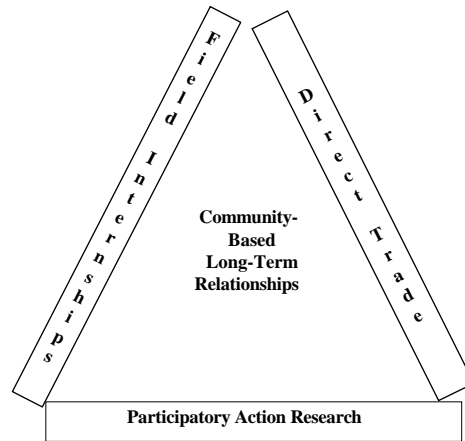


Figure 13.2 CAN Network Interactions

## Development of Alternative Coffee Market

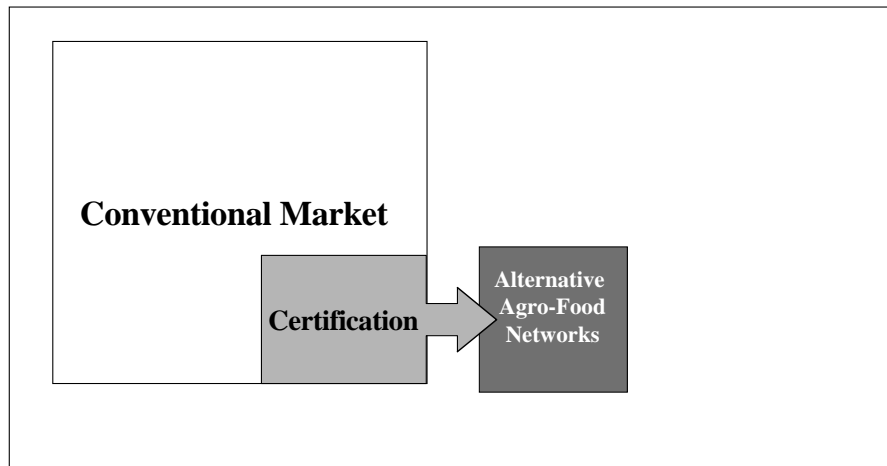


Figure 13.1: Transitioning from the conventional certified markets towards AAFNs