

FAIR TRADE, SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, AND CULTURAL IMPACTS IN THE  
COFFEE INDUSTRY

A Thesis by

Margret Amelia Follmer

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Anthropology.

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Robert Lawless, Committee Chair

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Peer Moore-Jansen, Committee Member

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David Price, Committee Member (Outside Department)

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## ABSTRACT

Coffee production focuses on two species of the plant, *Coffea arabica* and *Coffea canephora*, also known as *Coffea robusta*. This plant is a tropical cash crop that has a wide range of quality and production standards, and provides a unique means for the study of economic, agricultural, social, and ecological issues.

Many works discuss groups of people who produce coffee as a cash crop, ranging from Verena Stolcke's (1988) monograph, which analyzed the Brazilian *colonato* system, closely linked to colonial slavery, to Daniel Jaffee's (2007) fieldwork in Oaxaca and discussion of democratically organized cooperatives, whose goals include organic and Fair Trade certification. The coffee industry has a rich and complex history that has played a vital role in the development of modern commerce.

This work discusses research concerning the roles of Fair Trade, organic, and other third-party certifications on societies that produce and consume coffee. While some data from the Far East and Africa are included, the majority of published literature focuses on Central and South American producer nations, and their relationships with the consumers of the North, namely North America and Europe. Certification of organic, Fair Trade, and sustainable agriculture standards by

third-party labelling institutions provides new niches for coffee producers to improve standards of living in developing nations, and offset the crisis imposed by wild market fluctuations related to deregulation. The majority of this work consists of literature review and discussion. The remainder pertains to the author's work experience at a specialty coffee retailer in Wichita, Kansas. This work concludes that the coffee industry acts as a part of the global economy, and changes in the production, trade, marketing, and consumption of this product can affect and be affected by cultural change at any point in economic exchange. Furthermore, it demonstrates that social and environmental responsibility in global commodity exchange benefits all members of that exchange and mitigates their ecological impacts, despite the critiques of Fair Trade and organic labelling initiatives.

## PREFACE

During my undergraduate and graduate studies at Wichita State University, I had the privilege of working for Robert Boewe at The Spice Merchant and Company, a specialty coffee roaster and gourmet retail store in Wichita, Kansas. My position as coffee roaster entailed making purchasing decisions concerning the geographic location, quality, cost, and certifications, organic and otherwise, of specialty coffees. In my six years at the Spice Merchant, I simultaneously roasted coffee and worked the retail counter, which allowed me to develop an intimate relationship with my customers' attitudes, knowledge and purchasing patterns; I was also able to elicit the experience and expertise of our coffee broker, John Cossette of Royal Coffee, Inc. in Oakland, California. Specialty coffee represents only a small fraction of the entire coffee industry, but it often fosters unique relationships between producers and consumers, and these situations allow for an investigation of the social and environmental impacts concerning both parties. Educating consumers is the first step to promoting sustainable agriculture and trade; this requires transparency and familiarity with producers on the part of importers, roasters, and retailers.

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Figure 1. "Specialty Coffees of the World." Used with permission  
by the Specialty Coffee Association of America. 2

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ NOMENCLATURE

ATO - Alternative Trade Organization

GATT - General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

ICA - International Coffee Agreement

NAFTA - North American Free Trade Agreement

SCAA - Specialty Coffee Association of America

FLO - Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Coffee production focuses on two species of the plant, *Coffea arabica* and *Coffea canephora*, also known as *Coffea robusta*. This plant is a tropical cash crop that has a wide range of quality and production standards, and provides a unique means for the study of economic, agricultural, social, and ecological issues. As a cash crop, coffee was spread globally through colonial expansion, which involved both the use of indigenous and slave labor. As colonial imperialism decreased in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the coffee industry began to feel the effects of market capitalism in the globalized world.

Many works discuss groups of people who produce coffee as a cash crop, ranging from Stolcke's (1988) monograph, which analyzed the Brazilian *colonato* system, closely linked to colonial slavery, to Jaffee's (2007) fieldwork in Oaxaca and discussion of democratically organized cooperatives, whose goals include organic and Fair Trade certification. Certification of organic, Fair Trade, and sustainable agriculture standards by third-party labelling institutions provides new niches for coffee producers to improve standards of living in developing nations, and offset the crisis imposed by wild market fluctuations related to deregulation. The majority of coffee

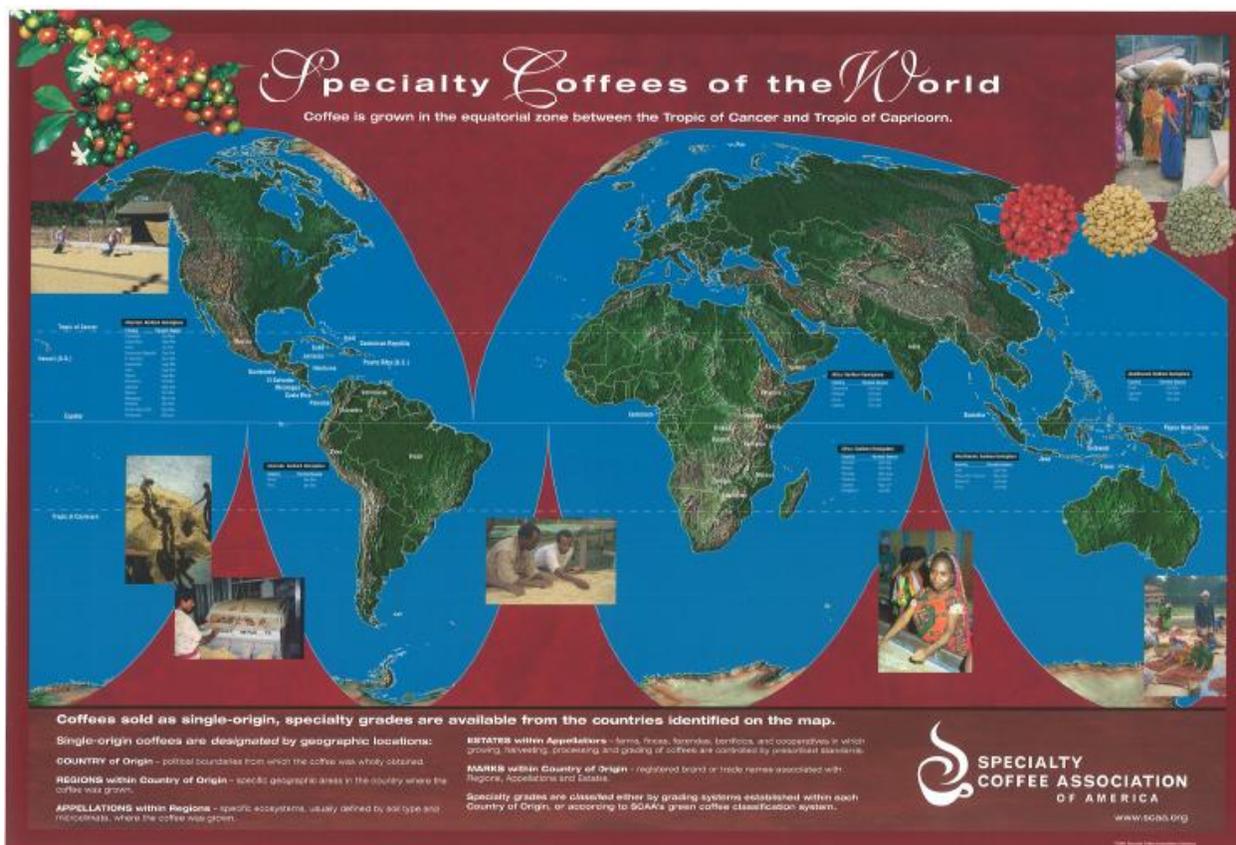


Fig. 1. Map showing specialty coffee growing regions throughout the world. © 2000 Specialty Coffee Association of America.

traded globally is controlled by large multinational corporations; its presence in global markets is impacted through applied economic principles in trade legislation and regulation by international bodies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Certifications exist through some organizations to promote biodiversity conservation, such as the Rainforest Alliance and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. While the original habitats may be destroyed, many species can live in the shade canopy forest under which coffee trees grow best.

While some discussion of coffee production in the Far East and Africa is included, the majority of published literature focuses on Central and South American producer nations, and their relationship with the consumers of the North, namely North America and Europe. This work focuses on research concerning the history of the coffee industry, and the roles of Fair Trade, organic, and other specialty certifications on societies that produce and consume coffee. Published discussion of the coffee industry has focused primarily on agricultural production and trade, but tends to neglect discourse concerning its distribution to the consumer (Topik et al. 2006:9). By examining retailers of specialty coffees and their customers, researchers are offered an intimate view of the relationships that arise between consumers and producers in the global marketplace.

The majority of this work consists of literature review and discussion. The remainder pertains to my work experience at The Spice Merchant, a specialty coffee retailer in Wichita, Kansas. Coffee culture in the United States has changed drastically in recent history. Coffee beans, as a commodity, rank second only to petroleum in terms of currency traded worldwide (Gouvea et al. 2009:1315), with the United States consuming almost a third of all coffee produced (Taylor 2007:7). In my experience selling coffee, I encountered many customers who were uninformed of the role that coffee plays in the global market, of its role in the

agricultural history of developing nations, or of the worldwide networks of trade which bring coffee from its origin to the local grocery. However, when given the opportunity, consumers can make the choice to invest in supporting sustainable agriculture in developing nations, and to pay farmers a living wage.

This work concludes that the coffee industry acts as a part of the global economy, and changes in the production, trade, marketing, and consumption of this product can affect and be affected by cultural change at any point in economic exchange. It also demonstrates that social and environmental responsibility in global commodity exchange benefits all members of that exchange and mitigates their ecological impacts, despite the critiques of Fair Trade and organic labelling initiatives.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Origins and History

*I had grown up with store-brand coffees, sometimes even Folgers® and Maxwell House®. My first experience with specialty coffee, beyond the occasional sip of cappuccino at the local college coffeehouse, was upon becoming employed at the Spice Merchant. Embarking on a crash course of geography and world history, I learned that coffee had a rich and diverse history, facilitating the economies of New World colonies. I learned about the methods of roasting and brewing that varied cross-culturally; from the sultry, thick, cardamom-spiced liquid fire favored by Middle-Easterners to the stove-top espresso of Italy, the sweet creamy iced drip coffee with chicory preferred in Vietnamese restaurants to the common paper-filtered drip in any American office, coffee is known and loved by poor and rich alike. But what Prometheus shared this elixir with mankind? And when?*

---

In order to critically analyze the coffee industry in modern times, a discussion of the plant's origins and history is imperative. Few commodities are as pervasive in Western culture as coffee, yet this crop was relatively unknown prior to the fifteenth century, when it became a popular social beverage in the Near East, changing the consumer habits of the early modern world (Cowan 2005:1). Native to the forest canopy of the mountains of modern Ethiopia (Martinez-Torres 2006:6), folklore claims that a goatherd, Kaldi, discovered the energizing qualities of coffee when his goats ate of the plant and became highly excited, prompting him to try the berries, after which he

found himself refreshed by the seemingly magical properties of the plant (Pendergrast 1999:4). The Oromo tribe of Abyssinia, the region where coffee grows indigenously, did not cultivate the plant; the Islamized peoples of southeastern Ethiopia consumed wild coffee, domesticated the plant in the Arab province of Harar, and brought it to the Yemeni port city of Mocha (Wild 2005:70). Upon bringing coffee to Yemen in the sixteenth century, Arabs created an export market for the crop (Ukers 1935:1, Tuscherer 2003:50-51). Sufi orders in the region particularly favored the beverage, as it promoted wakefulness (Hattox 1985:14-15). The origins of the name "coffee" are also uncertain, ranging from the region in Ethiopia from which it hails, Kaffa, to the Arabic word *qahwa*, which can mean "wine" or "to lessen desire for something":

The word "coffee" itself is the best example of this dubietous panorama of the fabulous and the real. The word enters English by way of the French "*café*," which, like the words "*caffé*" in Italian, "*koffie*" in Dutch, and "*Kaffee*" in German, derive from the Turkish "*kahveh*," which in turn derives from the Arabic "*qahwa*." Of this much we may be sure. But once we inquire into the origin of the Arabic word, we are quickly lost in a labyrinth of tantalizing, mutually exclusive etymological conjectures (Weinberg and Bealer 2001:24).

By the sixteenth century, the beverage had become incredibly popular throughout the Near East, despite a long and intense debate concerning its status under shariah law as an intoxicant, which would have prohibited Muslims from consuming

it (Hattox 1985:3-7). As coffee was first produced on a commercial scale in Yemen, Arabs dominated coffee production until the eighteenth century by parching the beans before export in order to prevent germination (Ukers 1935:1, Martinez-Torres 2006:6), and coffee was dispersed as part of their spice trade (Topik 2009:81). Despite their efforts, the Arabs were not able to maintain their monopoly of the coffee trade:

Beans were smuggled into India by Muslim pilgrims who had easy access to the holy city of Mecca. Dutch coffee spies intent on profits finally succeeded in stealing plants from Arabia and cultivating them in Java, thereby giving the Western world its first informal synonym for coffee. Plants from the botanical gardens in Holland were freely distributed by the Dutch throughout Europe. The fruit of one sturdy five-footer that reached the Jardin des Plantes in Paris around 1714 contained the coffee future of all of Latin America (Schapira et al. 1996:12).

By the eighteenth century, the use of coffee as a social drug aided in the birth of a consumer society and the creation of a social sphere which transcended lines of rank in Europe and its colonies, fostering intellectual debate in taverns and coffeehouses, just as it had previously in the Near East (Cowan 2005:2-7). Coffee became the beverage of choice in North America after the famous "tea party" rebellion in Boston in 1773, as the Dutch, French, and Portuguese had successfully started coffee production in the colonies of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America by the eighteenth century (Pendergrast 1999:15, Jaffee 2007:39).

## **The Rise of Mass Coffee Consumption in the U.S.**

By the nineteenth century, the surge in production of Brazilian coffee, facilitated by slavery, boomed to match the ever-growing consumption by the United States and Western Europe (Topik and Samper 2006:133). Coffee had become a globally traded commodity, vulnerable to market speculation and boom-and-bust cycles (Pendergrast 1999:20). Throughout much of the century in the United States, green coffee beans were sold in bulk and people had to roast and grind them at home (Pendergrast 1999:46). With the invention of commercial roasters and inexpensive paper and tin packaging in the 1850s and 1860s, companies such as Arbuckle's in New York and Folger's in San Francisco were able to market roasted, ground coffee to American consumers (<http://www.folgers.com/about-us/folgers-history.aspx>, Pendergrast 1999:51-57). Coffee consumers from the Enlightenment through the twentieth century remained blithely ignorant of producers; likewise, producers had little or no contact with consumers. "Coffee is grown, packed, processed, brought to port, and then transmuted into money as the freighter sets off across the ocean to supply strangers" (Topik and Samper 2006:119).

A discussion of the labor structure in the coffee industry over time aids in the understanding of the complexity of commodity production.

## **Labor in Coffee Production**

*The clientele at the Spice Merchant frequently surprised me with their loyalty to a specific growing area or cooperative. For instance, several customers would only purchase a particular single-origin bean from the Mujeres de Guayata (Women of Guayata) Fairfield Cooperative of Colombia. This devotion led me to reflect on the people who toil to bring consumers their morning cup of coffee, and how their unique histories have contributed to the development of coffee-producer nations.*

---

As producers are the first hands in the global coffee commodity chain, studying labor organization can be central to recognizing how producers can achieve economic success and sustainability. The cultivation of coffee as a cash crop in Central and South America has had lasting visible effects on labor system structure in the region. By combining economic and social histories, comparative analysis of the cultures of coffee-producing peoples has allowed researchers to study peasant societies, class, gender, and ethnic identities, state government, labor strategies, and aspects of global commodity exchange (Topik 2000:225). It is in the cultivation and harvest of the crop that anthropologists can observe labor strategies cross-culturally in coffee production. Colonial coffee production involved a variety of labor schemes including slave labor, tenant labor, sharecropping, and forced indigenous labor (Daviron and Ponte, 2005:2-3).

J.C. Cambranes (1985) discusses the origins of coffee production, plantation economy, and peasant labor in Guatemala. While other colonial crops, such as cochineal and sugarcane, were important to the economy of colonial Guatemala, the country diversified its exports following near bankruptcy in 1852 and 1853 due to natural disaster (Cambranes 1985:43). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the country had largely transitioned to coffee as a major export (Cambranes 1985:47). After Guatemala gained independence from Spain in 1821, the Guatemalan economy retained the feudalistic nature of Spanish control by large-scale landowners, or *criollos*, with native and indigenous peoples receiving inadequate partitioning of their lands lost in the Conquest (Cambranes 1985:34). As a result of this, landless indigenous and mestizo populations were forced to work on the plantations, or *fincas*, of wealthy landowners (Cambranes 1985:50). The conservative theocratic Spanish ruling class gave way to an agrarian bourgeoisie, who similarly exploited the labor and communal lands of indigenous populations by implementing a system which gave the *finqueros* (landlords) control over indigenous peons. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German entrepreneurs immigrated to Guatemala to set up coffee farms on lands which had formerly been the communal lands of the Q'eqchi' Maya, appropriated and sold cheaply by the Guatemalan government (Wilson 1999:35-36) and continued the *finca*

plantation economy, which kept the peasantry in a "permanent state of semi-slavery" (Cambranes 1985:324).

Elizabeth Dore (2006) presents similar issues in Nicaragua, analyzing class, gender, and ethnic upheavals in the rural Nicaraguan peasant community with fieldwork conducted in the community of Diriomo. When discussing the shift from indigenous controlled common property to private property-owning mestizo population, Dore frames her analysis as the rise of a rural proletariat against an agrarian bourgeoisie (Dore 2006:2-7). Unlike the example of Guatemala and other Indians in Nicaragua, the *mestizo* and indigenous residents of Diriomo utilized the hegemonic Hispanic private property law to retain access to lands, despite its disdain for traditional indigenous common property law (Dore 1985:2, 97-109) and those countries' similar problems with debt peonage (Dore 2006:110-126).

Rather than rely on indigenous labor, early coffee production in Brazil relied on slave labor (Stolcke 1988:1). After abolition, plantation owners shifted their labor source to sharecroppers, which developed into the *colonato*, a task- and piece-rate labor system which was prevalent until the 1960s. The *colonato* allowed workers to grow food crops along with coffee crops, however, once coffee prices increased in the early twentieth century disputes arose over labor and food-growing rights (Stolcke 1988:38). After the worldwide market crash in

1929, Brazil witnessed land fragmentation and crop diversification until World War II. This resulted in the breakup of the colonial latifundia into smallholder plots. By the 1960s, the *colonato* system was replaced by wage labor, as urbanization and development of commercial food production made wage labor cheaper than allowing *colonos* (workers) land and time to grow subsistence crops, and also allowed landlords to avoid contractual agreements with workers (Stolcke 1988:120-125).

Many Latin American coffee-producing nations experience problems with emigration to the United States for employment. In Oaxaca, Mexico, the tradition of emigration has existed since the early 1900s, but has increased drastically in recent years. Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey (1992) examine the historical background of Mexican emigration to the United States, specifically among undocumented workers. Socioeconomic status of migrants is a major factor in emigration: the wealthy do not need to migrate for economic incentives, while the very poor lack the resources to finance the venture (Durand and Massey 1992:14). Remittances from workers in the U.S. provide a large part of these families' incomes. Because most emigrants are men, women have become increasingly active in coffee production and harvesting, in addition to intense domestic labor, exacerbated by severe lack of sanitation and electricity (Bezaury 2007:109-110). Cooperatives with democratic organization grew after

abandonment by the Mexican state coffee agency following a global drop in coffee prices. Low coffee prices cause insufficient incomes, resulting in emigration. Utilizing shade-grown coffee production methods, cooperatives have been able to increase prices, preserve biodiversity, and fight soil erosion (Bezaury 2007:110-113). Similar research from Bolivia discusses the coffee crisis during 1990s, resulting in producer emigration, increased day labor, and a cycle of low prices and poor management. This research (Hellin and Higman 2002:6-13) compares cooperative versus intermediary sales in Bolivia and details the challenges poor producers face, especially in terms of transaction costs with the transfer to organic and Fair Trade certification requirements, and calls for implementation of policy changes at the national level, including the development of farmer's associations, trade fairs, access to credit and technology, and advocates diversification of incomes in producer nations, just as Jaffee (2007) lauds diversification among Mexican coffee producers.

Jaffee (2007:69) describes Oaxacan coffee farmers utilizing reciprocal labor networks involving kin and neighbors, or *gonzana*, children, and hired *mozo* labor (Jaffee 2007:69). Just as labor strategies differ greatly between large, mechanized coffee plantations and smallholder farms, cultivation methods and the way producers interact with environment vary greatly.

The path from production to consumption illustrates how different production methods result in different grades of coffee for export.

### **Coffee as a Global Commodity: International Markets, Trade Policy, and Impacts on Producers**

*One day I found myself waiting on a robust middle-aged man who huffed and puffed his way up to the counter.*

*"Hello," I said. "What kind of coffee would you like?"*

*"I want coffee that's from America."*

*"I'm sorry sir, but the only coffee grown in the United States comes from Kona, Hawaii, and retails for much too high of cost for us to offer here."*

*"Well how much is it?" he asked, perplexed.*

*"Kona coffee sells for upwards of \$30 per pound online. Since I would have to buy a 70 kilo bag of it at a time, you can understand how that much of an investment would be risky."*

*"\$30 a pound?!" He exclaimed incredulously. "I'd never pay more than a couple of bucks for a big can of Folgers®."*

*Once again, I'm confronted with the problem of how to explain how specialty, single-origin coffees versus generic commodity market coffees, which make up the lower-graded robusta blends, and how they differ from each other. Many people don't realize that coffee only grows in certain climates, and each growing area has its own characteristics, analogous to the terroir of wine.*

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When traded in the global market, coffee is discussed in terms of the "C" price, which can fluctuate wildly dependent upon rainfall, temperature, estimated crop size, over-supply, and a host of other variables (IntercontinentalExchange Futures U.S. 2009). As Ephraim Leibtag et al. (2007) discuss:

Almost all of the coffee consumed in the United States is imported from abroad (a very small amount of premium Kona coffee is grown in Hawaii). U.S. coffee manufacturers

mostly purchase green coffee beans from Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala. In the United States, two main types of coffee are traded on the New York Board of Trade (NYBOT), Arabica and Robusta. Arabica is more expensive, but is generally preferred in terms of taste. Most U.S. supermarket coffees are a blend of Arabica and Robusta beans (2007:2).

The hegemonic control of trade policy by Northern consumers over Southern producers was cemented by the adoption of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, which carried on through several rounds of negotiations during the 1970s, and was eventually replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the global trade authority (Buckman 2005:41-45); meanwhile, environmental agendas were neglected: "with no real history or competence on environmental issues, GATT advocates found no reason to respond to pressure from environment organizations" (Audley 1997:43).

From the 1960s through 1989, global coffee trading was tightly regulated by the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), which imposed stringent export quotas and controlled prices among producer and consumer nations of the International Coffee Organization (Jaffee 2007:42). Intended to increase worldwide consumption and limit overproduction, the weak point of the ICA was its voluntary participation, allowing members to withdraw with ninety days' notice (Pendergrast 1999:277). After the demise of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, the coffee market has been the subject of intense deregulation, resulting

in decreased stability in pricing and surplus coffee production. While the International Coffee Agreement stabilized and increased prices, it collapsed mainly due to the focus of the United States government's interest in controlling the economies of Latin America, under the guise of the free market (Green 2003:114). The coffee market collapse of 1989 was also partially because of the debut of a new producer nation with remarkable output - Vietnam quickly became the second largest producer of *robusta* coffee in the world, after Brazil (Jaffee 2007:44). Vietnam's participation in *Doi Moi*, a state-sponsored migration into the Central Highlands, led to a dramatic increase in coffee production in Dak Lak province. The province has experienced a more than five-fold population density increase in four decades. Rapid agricultural transformation has raised environmental and social issues including concerns about substantial forest destruction and loss of biodiversity, as well as land conflicts caused by the massive influx of Kinh farmers into areas of ancestral importance to ethnic minorities (Ha and Shively 2008:312-314). This situation is exemplary of why coffee producers and governments need to cooperate globally to enact policies that stabilize and improve the market, rather than cause detriment. Trade liberalization in Brazil has led to similar results: "neoliberal reform, reflected in the specific

historical, geographical, and environmental context of Brazilian coffee production, has resulted in the increased marginalisation of small-scale farmers, the degradation of soils, and overall rural decline" (Watson and Achinelli 2008:223).

Much of the quality of coffee is determined by its geographical location, climate, altitude, and cultivation methods. Coffee connoisseurship is not a recent phenomena; Robert Hewitt, Jr.'s (1872) *Coffee: Its History Cultivation, and Uses*, Francis Beatty Thurber's (1881) *Coffee; from Plantation to Cup: A Brief History of Coffee Production and Consumption* and William H. Ukers's (1935) *All About Coffee* exemplify works produced long before those vilified as "'coffee fetishism'" or "trendy effort[s] to cash in on the 'Starbucks Revolution'" (Topik 2003:2). As opposed to those coffees produced for mass consumption discussed in the previous section, the "ability to identify with ever-increasing specificity, the source of coffee we import, roast, and brew is a hallmark of the specialty coffee industry" (Ferguson 2006:1).

Origin visits and involvement are becoming increasingly more important to roasters and retailers, and raise awareness of the lives and problems of coffee producers, in addition to sourcing product. For instance, *Roast Magazine's* Macro Roaster of the Year 2009 Award went to Equator Estate Coffees and Teas, a company whose work starting its own coffee *finca* was inspired

by sharing information about coffee origins, and also possesses Organic and Fair Trade certifications (Janssen 2009:29-33).

### **Fair Trade**

*I heard the shop door bell clang as a young woman walked in, causing me to look up. "Great," I thought. "Another earth-mama type." The scent of patchouli filled the air.*

*"Hello! How may I help you today?" I chanted the familiar retail refrain.*

*"I want to buy some coffee." She said, pointedly.*

*"Well, you've come to the right place. We have over 70 varieties of coffee to choose from."*

*"I'm only interested in Fair Trade Organic coffees."*

*"Oh, well, I'm afraid I can't really help you there. I have several organic coffees to choose from, but I don't know that any of the coffees we have are 'Fair Trade'."*

*"Well they should be. The only good coffees are Fair Trade. I'll take my business elsewhere."*

*It was not my first experience with an acutely opinionated customer, but I was taken aback. I had worked at the Spice Merchant for a few months, but hadn't come across this "Fair Trade" issue that often. I was just starting to understand the subtle nuances of specialty coffee, and was somewhat familiar with organic gardening practices from childhood servitude under my mother's extremely green thumb. If there is one self-conscious feeling that I dislike, it is that of ignorance. Resolved, I set out to learn more about this "Fair Trade" coffee.*

---

The vast majority of the coffee industry is controlled by large multinational corporations such as Nestle and Kraft (Gresser and Tickell 2002:2). Though the huge inequities between producer incomes and retail prices for both specialty Arabica and Robusta coffees increase, alternative trade networks,

including Fair Trade organizations, gain market power (Rice 2001:41).

Most of the discussion of Fair Trade and sustainable agriculture in the coffee industry uses academic language, and is not in the realm of average consumers. Without extending an understanding of sustainable agriculture and production methods, consumers can not be expected to make educated decisions about these products (Kloppenber et al. 2000:178-182). Even with consumer education, many producers are unaware of sustainable agriculture techniques and the price premiums they can gain; often the infrastructure is not available to meet the demands of the certification process. Demands on smallholder farmers to increase quantity and quality control as global markets expand are difficult to meet, in addition to gaining the business acumen necessary for competing in the global market (Hellin and Hignman 2002:7).

One Fair Trade organization, TransFair USA, defines Fair Trade as "a market-based approach to sustainable development, seeking to empower millions of disadvantaged producers worldwide while protecting the environment for future generations" (TransFair USA 2009a). Fair Trade certifications are intended to democratically organize cooperative groups of farmers and set a bottom price per pound of coffee, regardless of market fluctuations, as well as additional premiums for organic

certifications. Fair Trade certifications also guarantee the farmers pre-harvest credit, which is often essential to the survival of producer families during the months before the harvest (TransFair USA 2009b). While membership to Fair Trade organizations is concentrated mostly in Central America and the Caribbean, almost a third of the world's small-scale growers are linked to Fair Trade networks (Raynolds et al. 2004:1112).

Another important factors of Fair Trade certification involves ensuring fair, safe, and freely-organized labor conditions, proscribing child labor, encouraging gender equality, and promoting direct trade between cooperatives and exporters, increasing producers' roles in the global market and reducing markups in price by middlemen (TransFair USA 2009b, Hutchens 2009:58-60). Fair Trade Labelling Associations International (FLO), an umbrella organization covering more than 20 Fair Trade Organizations, "provides independent, transparent and competent certification of social and economic development" (FLO Int'l 2006). Robert A. Rice (2001) describes how Fair Trade has grown from a charity started by Catholic youth in the Netherlands in the 1950s to the "trade not aid" market philosophy that guarantees floor prices of \$1.26 per pound, with a \$0.05 premium for organic coffees (2001:47). Frank Trentmann (2007) points out boycotts and other measures to insert morality

into trade have shaped global trade, but Fair Trade is more than a progressive narrative of morality:

...a simple progressive narrative ignores alternative, ambivalent moralities at play in the modern world. This has included an imperial project of caring for distant producers as well as free trade and progressive projects of international distributive justice. The roots of this blindness, I argue, can be traced to an intellectual tradition that has seen modern trade and consumption as opposed to an older customary form of 'moral economy'. Fair trade, in other words, needs to be placed in a longer and more troubled genealogy of consumption and power (2007:1080).

While large-scale roasters like Nestle and Kraft have committed to some social welfare protections, such as signing the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative, these multinational corporations have attempted to circumvent and even discredit the Fair Trade movement (Fridell et al 2008:16-28).

### **Sustainable Agricultural Practices**

Erosion, nutrient depletion in soils, and the demand for increased production of cash crops are major challenges to coffee producers. Related to these issues is the matter of chemical inputs, such as pesticides and fertilizers. Peggy Barlett (1982) points out that in Costa Rica, declining fertility of soils exacerbates farmers' needs to increase chemical inputs, resulting in a cycle of credit and debt (1982:143-148). Jaffee's (2007:139) discussion concerning high-yield state-sponsored coffee monoculture echoes her concerns

twenty-five years later in Mexico. Organic certifications aid trade certifications by enforcing stringent agricultural standards, prohibiting chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and eschewing open-field monoculture in place of shade-growth.

Shade-growth is a fundamental environmental factor in coffee production. During the colonial period, large farms utilizing open-field monoculture destroyed the natural forests. In Brazil, coffee was grown under the same conditions as sugar cane, and was responsible for the clearcutting of eighteen percent of the surface of Rio de Janeiro province during the first century of coffee production (Dean 1997:188).

Throughout much of Latin America, peasants, usually indigenous peoples with or without ties to the dominant *mestizo* culture, tend to utilize traditional production practices which integrate coffee production with subsistence crops and other forest products, including shade coverage and manual labor; this preserves biodiversity, in contrast with modern, mechanical techniques which damage local ecology (Tucker 2008:177, Jaffee 2007:138-139). Arthropods, birds and other vertebrates are conserved through shade-grown coffee techniques as this method provides microhabitats for diverse fauna and flora (Perfecto et al. 1996:601-602). While these created habitats are not to be confused with naturally occurring forest habitats (Philpott and Dietsch 2003:1845), they are very important to the conservation

of thousands of species. By promoting biodiversity, shade-grown coffee also improves its own yields; coffee pollination by wild bees in forested areas resulted in significant yield increases, and decreases in peaberry production, where coffee beans are malformed inside the cherry (Roublick 2002:708, Ricketts et al. 2004:12579-12582). Light Carruyo (2008:37) points out how peasants are frequently blamed for environmental degradation, regardless that the real damage is usually caused by logging and agricultural corporations. Unfortunately, when small-scale producers focus primarily on coffee rather than treating it as a small part of a diversified agricultural strategy, their economic security is at risk. While coffee stands out for such importance to global markets, the myopic focus on it has entangled producer nations in underdevelopment. "Both the plantations and the government have invested significantly in research related to export crop production whereas little effort has been directed to peasant crops" (Beckford 1972:27). Jaffee's fieldwork in Mexico demonstrates how focus on coffee production as well as subsistence crops, such as corn and beans, provides increased quality of life for coffee farmers (2007:169). Peggy Barlett (1982:130-148) discusses changing agricultural practices in Costa Rica; even nearly thirty years ago, the effects of intensified agriculture and shifts to modernism are visible, including agricultural credit for coffee, tobacco, and cattle

production, as well as travel opportunities for trade, medical care, and education. Access to loans promotes agricultural growth, and has caused a shift in perspectives on social stratification, profit assessment, and land use. David Pimentel et al. (1992:354-362) addresses inadequacies of conventional agriculture to fulfill the needs of growing human populations without exploitation and unsustainable agricultural practices, but provides hopeful data regarding agroforestry programs, which involve growing subsistence crops with leguminous trees, a practice that also helps preserve biodiversity. The coffee market of today is increasingly volatile; since the global economic meltdown of 2008, the market has seen sheer drops and dramatic spikes in price in response to heavy rains, increased cost of petroleum fuels to transport fertilizers, and even an entire market restructure in Ethiopia (Fullmer 2009).

Catherine M. Tucker (2008) discusses the conservation of forests in Honduras. Honduras offers a unique research situation in that the residents of Tucker's study, conducted in La Campa, actively opposed state-led logging operations throughout the twentieth century (2008:3). The residents of La Campa were able to combine a complex knowledge of their indigenous forests with agricultural knowledge of following times (2008:69-71) as they increased their production of coffee for export.

## **Ethical Consumption and Purchasing Power**

*My employer, Robert Boewe, felt that giving back to the community was incredibly important, which he reinforced by donating to public radio and television, a plethora of social activism groups, and nearly anyone who came to him asking for help. Many customers would say that his devotion to the community is what kept them spending their money in his store. It intrigued me how frequently people would elicit a similar answer on the topic: that they supported their beliefs with their spending.*

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Consumers can express their concerns about ethical business practices by exercising ethical purchasing power. Ethical consumption benefits both the environment in which coffee is produced and the people who produce it. Patrick De Pelsmacker et al. discuss ethical consumption by utilizing opinion polls, but points out discrepancies between elicited attitudes versus actual buying behaviors (2005:363-364). Unlike boycotting, purchasing Fair Trade certified products focus on the positive aspects of trade, rather than the negative aspects of production methods. When discussing brewed coffee sales, as opposed to retail sales, Chris Arnot et al. (2006:564) discusses three types of ethical consumers: those motivated by moral values, those motivated by quality, performance, and brand names, and those who selfishly concern themselves only with price and traditional quality concerns and are not motivated by ethical trading or production methods.

Consumers often make their choices about coffee with the concern of geographic origin in mind, as geoclimatical attributes such as soil, air temperature, and elevation all affect the end product of coffee. Like Roquefort cheese and Idaho potatoes, some coffee-producing nations invest in geographic certifications for their product, such as Kona coffee from Hawaii. Many coffee producers cannot afford the prohibitive costs for maintaining geographic certifications (Jones 2007:48). The use of intellectual property trademarking, however, places no responsibilities on the producers and requires companies wishing to sell the product to pay a licensing fee (Faris 2007). Ethiopia explored a unique alternative to these certifications by filing for U.S. patents on the geographical names Sidamo, Harar, and Yirgacheffe, the three major coffee-producing regions in the country. By filing for these trademarks, a lawsuit resulted between Ethiopia and the Starbucks Corporation, who also attempted to trademark the name Sidamo. At the 2008 Specialty Coffee Association of America Conference, Ethiopian envoy Samuel Assefa spoke about his work with the Ethiopian Coffee Trademarking and Licensing Initiative - a global grassroots effort to encourage multinational corporations share profits with poor producers (Assefa 2008:3). As average Ethiopian coffee producer per capita income is about \$120 annually (Faris 2007), licensing initiatives aims to provide

brand security to importers and retailers and boost consumer awareness and demand, raising producer incomes. The trademarks on Yirgacheffe, Harar, and Sidamo would help to offset the increase of retail prices versus stagnation of export prices. Starbucks, a multinational corporation, signed a voluntary license agreement with the Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office (EIPO); while acknowledging Ethiopia's ownership of the regional names, Starbucks was not required to pay any royalties for their use (Schüßler 2009:166).

Ethiopia offers an example that all specialty coffee producers could follow. While the actual payout of royalties has yet to make a difference to producers, the autonomy asserted by Ethiopia offers a model for other producer nations to protect and capitalize from their unique agricultural export.

### **Critiques of Third-Party Certifications**

*"Don't spend too much time on the romance, just sell it." Bob Boewe once again reminded me that my focus on specialty certifications was not the priority for sales. Long before ever seeing it in print, both my employer and his green coffee broker assured me that the majority of coffee farmers did not have the time, knowledge, or infrastructure to attain certifications for their product. Their concern was for the quality of the product, not necessarily for the social or environmental ramifications of its making.*

---

While the goals of Fair Trade Labelling Organizations and other specialty coffee certification labelling initiatives to

advance producer autonomy and improve social and environmental conditions are commendable, it is not the purpose of this work to provide sanguine advertisement for these programs. The critiques of Fair Trade and organic agriculture include ecological damage, market price distortion, oversupply, and misrepresentation of actual benefits.

Consumers assume that seeing the word "organic" on a product means that it is better for the environment. While organic agriculture does not add harmful chemical fertilizers and pesticides into the environment, it does require land-fallowing time and complex composting techniques. The "Green Revolution" of the 1960s brought about the widespread use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, improving yields greatly. To achieve the same yields through organic agriculture, a great deal more land must be utilized for agriculture, which could counteract benefits for protecting rainforest (The Economist 2006:12). Fair Trade has its critiques as well. While the concept of creating a minimum floor price for an agricultural product would seem to benefit agriculturalists, the desire to earn extra income may lead farmers to overproduce the certified product; in addition to saturating the market with the excess coffee, primary focus on a Fair Trade product may lead producers away from the security of crop diversity (The Economist 2006:12). Some contend that these arguments are supported by

multinational corporations in an attempt to discredit Fair Trade and certified organic labels (Fridell et al. 2008:16-32).

Some critics have challenged the sustainability of alternative trade networks in contrast with the modern agrofood system. While some find issue with the organization of cooperatives (Rice 2001:52), others feel that third-party institutions' stringent requirements interfere with farmers' autonomy (Levi and Linton 2003:426). Some contend that certification emphasizes the integrity of what the label represents to consumers, rather than focusing on "how certification intersects with local spaces, cultures, and communities at the point of production" (Getz and Shreck 2006:499). Ultimately, the objectives of initiatives like Fair Trade and alternative trade networks must shift from a market-based strategy to governmental policy:

To take on this broader challenge, alternative trade initiatives must go beyond the realm of consumer politics, where individuals with discretionary income make positive purchasing decisions, to the realm of citizen politics, where people make positive collective decisions about the nature of acceptable production and trade practices (Raynolds 2000:306)

Ethical and green symbology and marketing language are appropriated by multinational corporations in order to boost sales (Fridell et al. 2008:17); while packaging may lead a consumer to believe they are supporting an alternative trade network, they are performing the opposite function. This may

discourage specialty roasters from basing their offerings on ethical consumption; consumers see the "fair-trade seal now appears on coffees offered at mass retailers Wal-Mart and Sam's Club, potentially making Fair Trade less appealing as the differentiating centerpiece for small roaster marketing programs" (Davids 2009:64).

### **Summary**

Besides offering a brief history of the coffee industry, the literature review of this work is intended discuss the relationships between producers and consumers in the global coffee commodity network, and elaborate on the benefits of specialty coffee certifications for participants. Most coffee producer nations are impoverished, and grow the cash crop for export, despite the economic peril they face in unstable markets. Cash crop labor systems often date back to colonial domination by northern consumers in Europe and the United States. As an important part of the global economy, the coffee industry's producers and consumers are influenced culturally through information and economic exchange. From Mexican farmers joining democratic cooperatives or American office workers opting for Fair Trade Organic Certified cappuccino, each decision along the line of production to consumption contributes to cultural expression through the power of exchange.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This research consists of a literature review and brief commentary from my personal experience working in the specialty coffee industry. Research was conducted at Wichita State University's Ablah Library, in addition to internet access of scholarly publications and trade journals. Personal experience in the coffee industry consisted of six years of employment at The Spice Merchant and Company, a specialty coffee roaster and retailer in Wichita, Kansas. By comparing trends in the coffee industry with research about producers and consumers, I hope to have demonstrated that social and environmental responsibility in global commodity exchange benefits all members of that exchange and mitigates their ecological impacts.

This research takes a secondary view of the coffee industry. While much of the literature cited here focuses on the impacts of producer nations, it is the vote of the consumer to economically advocate for or against certain products through standards such as Fair Trade and organic certification. The ability to assess consumers' willingness to be socially and environmentally responsible is crucial to achieve their participation in these economic niche markets.

For the purposes of reflexivity, it is necessary to note that my own biases cause me to encourage consumers to purchase coffees with special certifications. The official position of my employer, however, is to provide the best quality gourmet coffee, regardless of any social or environmental benefit. It was this dichotomy of interest that prompted my awareness of the relationships between quality of product and improvement of standards of living and agricultural sustainability.

My deepest regret for this work is that I must utilize secondary research concerning producer nations, as I was unable to travel abroad during my graduate studies. Those authors whose works were obviously motivated by personal political biases have been noted in the literature review.

Many studies quantify consumer trends and opinions about specialty certifications in the coffee industry. However, "people generally shun unnecessary interaction with strangers in their everyday lives" (Bogdan and Taylor 1975:42), yet retail workers interact with strangers, elicit opinions, and personal information, in order to understand their customers and better serve their needs. An in-depth analysis of consumer knowledge and opinion can be gained by observing purchasing patterns in the retail setting. Also, while quantitative studies can offer information about purchasing patterns and demographics about consumers, "qualitative methods allow us to know people

personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of their world" (Bogdan and Taylor 1975:4).

Frequently, feeling good about a positive contribution to society through purchasing specially certified coffee will prompt customers to purchase more and become repeat customers for that particular type.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This work concludes that the coffee industry acts as a part of the global economy, and changes in the production, trade, marketing, and consumption of this product can affect and be affected by cultural change at any point in economic exchange. Furthermore, it demonstrates that social and environmental responsibility in global commodity exchange benefits members of that exchange and mitigates their ecological impacts, despite the small body of literature which critiques efficacy of supporting third-party labelling.

On an ecological level, the coffee industry has a large role to play in the preservation of biodiversity. By reinforcing Fair Trade, Organic, and sustainable agriculture practices with ethical consumption, customers can affect the lives of coffee farmers and their families throughout the developing world. Families that utilize organic farming methods are not exposed to dangerous pesticides and other chemical additives, which have been linked to poisoning, certain cancers, birth defects, hypertension, and developmental problems in children (Rice and Ward 1996:17-19).

By investing in biodiversity, soil and water conservation, and improving standards of living in the developing world,

governments can invest in projects which promote tourism, further increasing incomes and choices in the lives of agricultural families. Coffee can offer more in terms of sustainability than conservation: coffee can be used to create biofuels. A recent study found that "coffee husks present an excellent potential for residue-based ethanol production (Gouvea et al. 2009:1317).

Future research needs to focus on the positive feedback loop of sustainable agrosystems. By supporting Fair Trade, organic, and other third-party labelling certifications, consumers invest in improving the health and well being of all consumers and producers of coffee. Conversely, the critiques of these certifications need to be addressed as the world population, and hence its consumption, continues to grow. Observation and documentation of producers' attitudes towards labelling initiatives will provide a measure of how well these programs serve the needs of producers, rather than merely stroking the egos of concerned consumers.

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*After spending so much time researching and attempting to comprehend the vast literature concerning the coffee industry, I had to appreciate my employer's ability to keep his business open, profitable, and visible to the public of Wichita. Bob Boewe balanced my activist-anthropologist tendencies with his nearly thirty years of experience retailing specialty coffees. Specialty coffee certifications can sometimes be faddish; the*

*reality is that the best coffees available on the market are frequently produced by those without certifications. I observed how giving back to the community of Wichita, educating customers about coffee, and donating to charitable organizations such as Coffee Kids made sustainable and ethical coffee sales a profitable venture in a local setting.*

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## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX

### THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATIONS IN THE COFFEE INDUSTRY

#### USDA Organic

The USDA organic seal can appear on any coffee product that contains at least 95 percent organic ingredients and that has been certified as organic by a certification agency accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The coffee may also carry a label saying "100 percent organic" or "Organic" (Organic Trade Association 2008)

#### Listing of Coffee Certifying Agencies:

##### BOLICERT

General Gonzales 1317  
Casilla 13030  
La Paz, Bolivia

##### IMO CONTROL

Calle Guillermo Vizcarra #125, Tupuraya  
Casilla Postal 1836  
Cochabamba, Bolivia

##### ECOCERT COLOMBIA

Cle 140#16-59 - Of. 201  
Bogota, Colombia

##### Eco-LOGICA

Montelimar 300 Norte, 100 Este y 250 Norte de la Bomba  
Shell  
San Jose, Costra Rica

##### BCS OKO-GARANTIE

Cimbernstrasse 21  
90402 Nurnberg, Germany

##### CERES

Vorderhaslach Nr. 1  
D-91230 Happurg  
Germany

##### MAYACERT

6a. Street 3-22 Zone 10  
Guatemala City, Guatemala

CERTIMEX

Certificadora Mexicana de Productos y Procesos Ecologicos  
S.C. (Certimex) Av. Oaxaca 210- A Fracc.San Jose La Noria  
Oaxaca, Oaxaca Mexico C.P. 68120

BIO LATINA S.A.C.

Av. Arenales #670  
Lima, Jesus Maria, Peru

Control Union

Av. Dos de Mayo 1205, San Isidro  
Lima, Perú

OCIA INTERNATIONAL, INC.

6400 Cornhusker Highway  
Suite 125  
Lincoln, NE 68507

QAI, INC.

9191 Town Center Drive  
Suite 5100  
San Diego, CA 92122

QUALITY CERTIFICATION SERVICES

PO Box 12311  
Gainesville, FL 32604

(Smithsonian National Zoological Park Migratory Bird Center  
[http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Coffee/certification\\_agencies.cfm](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Coffee/certification_agencies.cfm))

Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO)

Fair Trade certifications are intended to democratically organize cooperative groups of farmers, set a bottom price per pound of coffee with additional premiums for organic certifications, guarantee pre-harvest credit, ensure fair, safe, and freely-organized labor conditions, proscribe child labor, encourage gender equality, and promote direct trade between cooperatives and exporters, increasing producers' roles in the global market.

Listing of Fair Trade Labelling Organizations:

Fairtrade Labelling Australia and New Zealand  
PO Box 30, Flinders Lane PO  
Victoria, 8009  
Australia

Fairtrade Austria  
Neulinggasse 29/17  
A - 1030 WIEN

Max Havelaar Belgium  
Edinburgstraat 26  
Rue d'Edimbourg 26  
B - 1050 Bruxelles  
Belgium

TransFair Canada  
328 Somerset West  
Ottawa, ON K2P 0J9  
Canada

Fairtrade Mærket Danmark  
C/o WWF Verdensnaturfonden  
Ryesgade 3F  
2200 Kobenhavn N  
Denmark

Fairtrade Estonia  
info@fairtrade.ee  
www.fairtrade.ee

Fairtrade Finland  
Paasivuorenkatu 2A, 5th floor  
FIN-00530 Helsinki  
Finland

Max Havelaar France  
261 rue de Paris  
93556 Montreuil  
Cedex  
France

TransFair Germany  
Remigiusstrasse 21  
50937 KÖLN  
Germany

Fairtrade Mark Ireland  
Carmichael House  
North Brunswick Street  
Dublin 7  
Ireland

Fairtrade TransFair Italy  
Passaggio De Gasperi 3  
I - 35131 PADOVA  
Italy

Fairtrade Label Japan  
c/o St Paul Lutheran Church of the JELC  
5-3-1-Koutoubashi Sumida-ku  
J - TOKYO 130  
0022 Japan

Fairtrade Latvia  
[www.fairtrade.lv](http://www.fairtrade.lv)

Fairtrade Lithuania  
[www.fairtrade.lt](http://www.fairtrade.lt)

TransFair Minka Luxembourg  
2a rue de la Gare  
L - 6910 Roodt-sur-Syre  
Luxembourg

Stichting Max Havelaar Netherlands  
Postbus 1252  
NL - 3500 BG UTRECHT  
Lucasbolwerk 7  
NL 3512 EG Utrecht  
The Netherlands

Fairtrade Labelling New Zealand  
PO Box 33 1587  
2-31 Hurstmere Road  
Takapuna, Auckland 0740  
New Zealand

Fairtrade Max Havelaar Norway  
Storgata 11  
NO - 0155 OSLO  
Norway

Asociación del Sello de Comercio Justo (Spain)  
Gaztambide 50  
28015 Madrid  
Spain

Rättvisemärkt (Sweden)  
Åsögatan 115  
SE - 116 24 STOCKHOLM  
Sweden

Max Havelaar Stiftung (Switzerland)  
Malzgasse 25  
CH - 4052 Basel  
Switzerland

The Fairtrade Foundation (UK)  
3<sup>rd</sup> floor IbeX House  
42-47 Minories  
London EC3N 1DY  
UK

TransFair USA  
1500 Broadway, Suite 400  
OAKLAND, CA 94612  
USA

Fairtrade Label South Africa  
PO Box 52197  
Waterfront 8002  
Cape Town  
South Africa

(Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International  
[http://www.fairtrade.net/labelling\\_initiatives1.html](http://www.fairtrade.net/labelling_initiatives1.html))

#### Rainforest Alliance

"The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices, and consumer behavior" (Rainforest Alliance 2009).

Rainforest Alliance  
665 Broadway, Suite 500  
New York, NY 10012 USA

#### Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

Dedicated to protecting migratory birds and their habitats, the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's (SMBC) Bird Friendly® coffee program provides funding for research and education related to migratory bird conservation. Shade-grown coffee provides forest-like habitats for these species.

Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center  
National Zoological Park  
P.O. Box 37012-MRC 5503  
Washington, DC 20013

(Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center 2009a, Smithsonian  
Migratory Bird Center 2009b)