

Development in Practice >

Volume 16, 2006 - [Issue 2](#)

4,609 79

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Original Articles

The future of Fair Trade coffee: dilemmas facing Latin America's small-scale producers

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Pages 179-192 | Published online: 18 May 2010

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520600562397>

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Abstract

Fair Trade has become a dynamic and successful dimension of an emerging counter-tendency to the neo-liberal globalisation regime. This study explores some of the dilemmas facing the Fair Trade movement as it seeks to broaden and deepen its impact among the rural poor of Latin America's coffee sector. We argue that the efforts to broaden Fair Trade's economic impact among poor, small-scale producers are creating challenges for deepening the political impact of a movement that is based on social justice and environmental sustainability. The study is based on two years' research and seven case studies of Mexican and Central American small-scale farmer cooperatives producing coffee for the Fair Trade market.

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Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Ernesto Méndez, Sarah Lyon, Franz VanderHoff Boersma, Josefina Aranda, Carmen Morales, Victor Pérezgrovas Garza, Edith Cervantes Trejos, Alma Amalia González Cabañas, and María Elena Martínez Torres who conducted the field research for the cases included in this study. We are also grateful for the helpful comments of Michael Conroy. The comments of the anonymous reviewers and the journal editor added several important sections and points to the paper, and the research assistance of Andrew Heller and Michael Long also strengthened this work. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the generous financial support for this research provided by the Ford Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Notes

1. More details on the FTRG, including the complete texts of the final report and individual case studies cited in this article, are available at: <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Sociology/FairTradeResearchGroup>.
2. See Murray et al. [2003](#); Raynolds et al. [2004](#); Taylor et al. ([2005](#)) for a more detailed discussion of the benefits of Fair Trade coffee for small-scale producers.
3. There is considerable debate within the USA and between US and European Fair Trade practitioners over the mainstreaming strategy, particularly the increasing reliance on large-scale corporate outlets for Fair Trade coffee. We explore this debate further in book due to be completed in 2005 that is part of the current phase of work by the FTRG, based on research being conducted by teams in Brazil, South Africa, the UK, and the USA, and covering a wide range of commodities.
4. The problems associated with cooperative governance within the Fair Trade regime are discussed in more detail in Taylor et al. (forthcoming).
5. Michael Conroy is Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Scholar at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.
6. There are many more examples beyond those associated with the case studies in this article, including the Juan Valdez shops due to open in New York and the Oxfam

coffee shop initiative in the UK, to name just two. It is likely this phenomenon will continue to grow, in part due to the success of Fair Trade and related campaigns.

Additional information

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