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**A NICHE FOR SUSTAINABILITY: FAIR LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTALLY
SOUND PRACTICES IN THE SPECIALTY COFFEE INDUSTRY**

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Before and especially during a worldwide coffee crisis in which prices have fallen to levels that do not support small-scale production or living wages for plantation workers, non-governmental organizations and specialty coffee companies are working to develop market exchanges that are sustainable. Though all express concern for farmers, workers and the environment, their emphases vary. This paper argues that in the specialty coffee industry these goals are mutualistic. To substantiate this point as well as to illuminate different pathways leading to similar outcomes, I compare business- and Fair Trade-oriented efforts aimed at furthering a continued supply of high-quality coffee.

On a busy Saturday in summer 1995, a group of protesters organized by the U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project (US/GLEP) picketed in front of Starbucks' recently opened 200th store in Seattle's historic Pioneer Square. Their signs and leaflets documented horrible working and living conditions on Guatemalan estates that were somehow known to provide coffee to Starbucks. The activists wanted Starbucks to stop purchasing from plantations where workers were treated poorly and not paid fair wages. Coffee buyer Dave Olsen appeared on the scene and earnestly conversed with some of the protestors. Later that day he had tears in his eyes when he told the store's manager how little regard the Central American elites he dealt with had for the plight of poor workers, how strange plantation owners found Starbucks' sponsorship of CARE projects to improve living conditions in coffee-growing areas... He wondered why activists chose to target him instead of the multinational corporations that control the vast majority of the coffee industry. Regardless, it would be impossible for Starbucks to meet US/GLEP's demand. The company almost always purchased beans through brokers rather than directly from producers, so there was no way to be exactly sure of where the coffee came from.

Fast forward to 2005. Dave Olsen has been one of Starbucks' Senior Vice Presidents (in various capacities including VP for Social Responsibility) for quite some time. The store manager, now a sociologist, is the author of this essay. US/GLEP no longer campaigns against Starbucks. The company has grown from 200 to over 8000 stores – an expansion process that included developing sourcing guidelines to address human rights and environmental concerns, establishing direct relationships with coffee producers, and introducing a code of conduct for suppliers. Meanwhile, socially

conscious coffee consumers can now buy beans certified “Fair Trade,” “Eco-OK,” “organic,” “shade- grown,” and/or “bird-friendly” almost everywhere – including major supermarket chains. Representatives of more than two-thirds of the coffee businesses in the U.S. and Canada claim that these certifications are important components of their enterprises (Giovannucci 2001:21). Worldwide, sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee increased by 40 percent in the past five years, adding millions of dollars to the incomes of small farmers (Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International 2005). The Fair Trade foundation Max Havelaar even sponsored a session at the 2005 World Economic Forum.

Readers should NOT take the above to indicate that the end of a global coffee crisis is at hand. Since the early 1990s, coffee production worldwide has increased twice as fast as consumption. The oversupply is a direct result of the coffee industry’s deregulation in 1989, when a quota system imposed under the International Coffee Agreement ended. This led to increased competition and production. Temporary spikes in the price of coffee resulting from crop damage in Brazil encouraged over-planting new trees (with little or no regard for environmental concerns) as well as new entrants in the market, notably Vietnam. Standard market prices have fallen precipitously. Many coffee farmers, the majority of whom are smallholders, are selling their coffee beans for much less than they cost to produce. The coffee crisis is “a development disaster whose impact will be felt for a long time” (Gressler and Tickell 2002:6). It has left many farmers in poverty, decreasing their families’ health and their children’s education prospects while encouraging migration to overcrowded urban areas where prospects are truly bleak. The crisis has also destabilized the economies of nations that are largely dependent on coffee.

Many researchers have documented the sources, extent and impacts of the coffee crisis (e.g., Gressler and Tickell 2002; James 2000; Lewin et al. 2004; Linton et al. 2004; Talbot 2002, 2004). Newspaper stories about related economic and social fallout abound, especially in producing countries. The crisis is summarized on the website of most every organization that promotes sustainable coffee production and/or socially responsible consumption. The social movements that produced these organizations and that they in turn engender are likewise well-studied (e.g., Levi and Linton 2003; Linton et al. 2004; Renard 1999, 2003; Schrage 2004; Simpson and Rapone 2000; Tarmann 2002). Research about the outcomes of and possibilities for sustainable coffee initiatives, however, is incomplete. Most studies focus on specific cases within a diverse universe of producing conditions, coffee markets, and national industry regulations (e.g., Aranda and Morales 2002; Bacon, forthcoming; Boersma 2002; Boot et al. 2003; Cabanas 2002; Garza and Trejo 2002; Lyon 2002; Méndez 2002),¹ or on market trends and consumer attitudes (e.g., Giovannucci 2001, Giovannucci and Koekoek 2003, Lewin et al. 2004, Rice and McLean 1999).

This paper is about many sustainability initiatives but only *one* market niche: specialty coffee. Specialty coffees are made from exceptional beans, the best of the world's *coffea arabica* crops.² They feature distinctive flavors that reflect the unique characteristics of the soil that produces them (Specialty Coffee Association of America 2005). Sometimes called 'gourmet' or 'premium, these are the beans that, when roasted, sell for around \$10/lb. in the U.S. or are the components of expensive brewed coffee or

¹ A notable exception is Taylor's (2002) synthesis of the field reports prepared by members of the Fair Trade Research Group

² *Coffea canephora* (known familiarly as robusta) originated as low-grade filler used in commercial blends and instant coffee.

espresso beverages. Specialty coffees are marketed for their taste. Roasters compete on this basis, not on price. I argue that the specialty coffee industry has come to *depend on* proactive responses to environmental and social concerns. Neither specialty coffee businesses nor non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will solve the coffee crisis, but together – in a time of crisis for the coffee industry as a whole – they have created a growing niche for sustainability. The paper is organized as follows: first I define sustainable coffee and describe the specialty market. Second, I discuss the actors and activities that comprise the ongoing efforts to produce and promote sustainable coffee. Next I consider some concerns that have arisen among activists, producers, and businesses with a stake in sustainable coffee (and those who study them). Finally, I present two cases to illustrate divergent pathways towards sustainability that have led to the same successes.

SUSTAINABLE COFFEE AND ITS MARKETS

The Coffee Research Institute (2005) defines sustainable coffee as “coffee grown in a manner that is kind to the environment and its people” (p. 1). Ways that this might be done include:

- ◆ reusing coffee husks as heating fuel instead of cutting down trees
- ◆ minimizing water consumption and water pollution
- ◆ replacing soil nutrients by spreading fertilizers and organic matter such as composted coffee pulp under and between the coffee trees
- ◆ engaging in practices such as shade growing, biodiversification, and organic farming

- ◆ providing decent wages and living conditions for workers, including medical care and education.

Much, though by no means all, of the coffee that can be described as sustainable carries one or more certifications.³ Organic coffee is produced without synthetic chemicals, using methods that preserve the soil. Shade or “bird-friendly” coffee is grown under shade trees in settings that preserve biodiversity. Fair Trade coffee is purchased directly from small farmer cooperatives at a contract price.⁴ The terms of Fair Trade Certification also encourage environmentally sound production and specifically prohibit the use of certain chemicals. The Eco-OK Certification is awarded to farms that meet site-specific criteria designed to balance ecological, economic, and social considerations. For example, “certified farmers plant trees along roads, around housing, and in areas not suitable for crops. To control erosion and to limit the need for agrochemicals, they also plant buffer zones of native vegetation along rivers and springs and allow ground cover to grow. And they manage all pollutants, from tractor fuel to coffee mill wastewater. These farms hire locally, pay fair wages, and ensure safe working conditions and access to clean drinking water and proper sanitary facilities” (Rainforest Alliance 2005:1). Yet another sustainability certification comes from the Utz Kapeh Foundation, a partnership between coffee brands, producers, and civil society that has developed a very comprehensive and detailed code of conduct.⁵ To qualify for certification, farmers must comply with all of

³ Though sustainability initiatives differ in terms of their criteria, in practice many of the categories overlap. For example, most smallholder coffee is grown in the shade, whether or not it bears a shade certification. Bird Friendly certified coffee is also organic, and Fair Trade coffee sometimes is.

⁴ The Fair Trade price is \$1.26/lb. of green coffee, \$1.41 if organic. This includes a \$0.05/lb. premium paid into community development funds. Currently the New York composite index price for arabica coffee is about \$0.82/lb. Smallholders for whose coffee importers pay this price receive about \$0.40/lb. because the route from farm to export involves several intermediaries.

⁵ The Utz Kapeh Code of Conduct is downloadable from www.utzkapeh.org/archive/downloads/utzkapeh_code1104eng.pdf

the code's "major musts" and 95 percent of the "minor musts." The foundation does not set coffee prices but does encourage buyers to pay a "sustainability differential" on top of the market price and normal quality differential (Slob and Oldenziel 2003).

Promoters of certified coffee have focused most of their efforts within the specialty coffee market, where roasters and retailers pay top dollar for their coffee beans and favor sustainable practices for many reasons – a foremost one being that a reliable supply of premium coffee is essential for their businesses. Though specialty coffee comprises less than 20 percent of the total coffee market, it accounts for more than 40 percent of coffee profits.⁶ The U.S. specialty coffee industry estimates a 5-10 percent yearly growth rate (Lewin et al. 2004: 116-118), making it the only segment of the coffee industry that exhibits "consistent and notable growth" (Giovannucci 2001:7). Much of this growth comes from increased out-of-home consumption of espresso-based beverages. U.S.-style cafés are already common in Europe and Japan and new markets are emerging in Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and several producing countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Vietnam (Lewin et al. 2004:118).

Table 1 summarized the criteria for each of the certifications discussed above. Certified coffees have become widely available. They are sold in stores and cafés that deal exclusively in such products as well, in specialty coffee chains and mainstream supermarkets, and via various websites. College campuses and religious institutions were early markets for certified coffee and continue to be important. City government offices

⁶ This figure is based on U.S. data and includes profits from brewed coffee and espresso beverages. European specialty industries are more integrated into the overall coffee business and do not provide separate, verifiable data (Lewin et al. 2004).

in the San Francisco Bay area buy Fair Trade coffee. In Europe it is served in most city halls, national parliaments, and in the European Union Parliament.

-Table 1 here-

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SUSTAINABLE COFFEE MOVEMENT

The universe of stakeholders in the sustainable coffee movement could be defined as “everyone who cares about coffee that tastes good and *is* good.” Within this universe are NGOs, businesses, producers, and consumers.

-Table 2 here-

NGOs promoting sustainable coffee

Table 2 is a comprehensive though not exhaustive list of NGOs involved in certifying or promoting sustainable coffee, and their primary goals. Some, such as EnterpriseWorks and TechnoServe, specialize in business development in poor rural areas. They aim to help producers *respond* to market demand by meeting buyers’ standards. They also work to link producers and buyers.⁷ In the specialty coffee market, these efforts lead to sustainability because (1) environmentally sound practices are very compatible with specialty production and are a component of the training and technological assistance that the NGOs provide; (2) increased revenues mean living wages for farmers, encouraging them keep growing premium coffee; (3) as farmer business groups become more aware of the various niches within the specialty market they may seek to qualify for one or more certifications which encompass community development initiatives.

-Figure 1 here-

⁷ TechnoServe is also involved in efforts to raise demand for high-quality coffee, and – in some cases – to assist farmers in transitioning or diversifying their produce.

The vast majority the NGOs concerned with sustainable coffee work from a different angle: Having established certifications, they must increase consumer awareness and thereby *create* market demand for the certified products. Their challenge is to get consumers to figure workers and the environment into their coffee-buying decisions. They are, in effect, marketing global social responsibility – teaching consumers that they possess the power to make a positive difference in the developing world through their purchasing behavior and then encouraging them to *act* on this knowledge. Various campaigns target coffee drinkers who are health conscious, are bird lovers, value biodiversity, or want to increasing social justice in the world. These interests of course overlap – in consumers’ minds, in NGOs’ mission statements, and in the actual practices that they inform. Regardless of their primary focus, certification campaigns attract media attention and help people see the connection between their daily beverage and the social and environmental conditions under which it was produced (Levi and Linton 2003, Linton et al. 2004).

Certification campaigns (especially Fair Trade) also direct their efforts towards businesses. Their strategy to solicit business participation is twofold: to encourage companies to act in a socially responsible manner (by embracing third party certification) and to strongly *discourage* businesses from neglecting their social responsibilities (by not offering certified products). NGOs such as TransFair and Max Havelaar forge contractual agreements with companies wishing to purchase certified beans. They promote a win-win situation: producers benefit while a company’s sales increase because it can now meet already existing consumer demand for certified coffee. There is also potential to create and profit from new demand. Offering certified products also bolsters a

business' socially conscious reputation. Other NGOs, such as Global Exchange, actively discourage non-participation. They use high-pressure tactics such as threats of demonstrations or boycotts in order to compel companies to purchase Fair Trade coffee. As acknowledged by a representative of Seattle's Best Coffee David Wickberg (2002), scare tactics have created tension between the Fair Trade movement and the business world, yet such strategies *have* been successful in increasing the supply side of the Fair Trade market by convincing roasters to purchase it (Linton et al. 2004).

-Figure 2 here-

Another prominent way that Fair Trade activists market social responsibility is by helping concerned students work within their colleges and universities. For example, Oxfam America provides a 'how to' guide to help students organize campaigns to get Fair Trade coffee into their campus cafés and dining halls.⁸ Global Exchange extends this institution-centered approach by offering a variety of 'Fair Trade Action Packs' suitable for campuses, community organizations, local schools, and faith-based groups.⁹

Sustainable coffee as good business

There are active associations of specialty coffee businesses in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Panama, and Brazil, plus an Australasian association. All of these organizations have now embraced promoting sustainable production as part of their mission. In doing so, they emphasize that to be sustainable in the specialty market, coffee must be of the highest quality. Survey evidence repeatedly bears out that, while consumers are willing to buy ethically and to pay a premium for certified coffees, they will only do so if they perceive 'ethical' coffee to be of equal or better quality than that of specialty coffees with

⁸ The Oxfam guide is available at www.oxfamamerica.org/pdfs/coffeeresourceguide.pdf.

⁹ See www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/fairtrade/coffee/actnow.html.

less-transparent origins (Giovannucci 2001, Giovannucci and Koekoek 2003, Levi and Linton 2003).

Some coffee companies have undertaken private voluntary initiatives (PVI) to address sustainability issues. PVI have been less developed in the agricultural sector than in other industries with global supply chains. This is because when there is a lack of direct relationship between producer and consumer, commodity price volatility, and seasonal change in demand for labor it is difficult to exert enough pressure or incentives within any part of the supply chain to address things like labor rights and environmental concerns (Schrage 2004). But PVI do exist in the specialty coffee market. Their emergence reflects the reasoning expressed by David Griswold, president of Sustainable Harvest Coffee. He writes, “To me, the companies that will be successful are the ones that commit themselves to a way of sourcing coffee that has transparency, traceability, and integrity. Then they figure out what parts consumers want to hear about, what parts their employees want to hear about, and what parts they do simply because it’s the way they’re going to maintain a sustainable supply of the coffee they want” (quoted in Foley 2004:9).

One example of a PVI is Starbucks’ “C.A.F.E. (Coffee and Farmer Equity) Practices.” This incentive- and performance-based program uses independent third-party verifiers to audit farms on environmental and social indicators. Suppliers who wish to apply to the program must first pass a quality profile and economic transparency requirements; their final scores on all the indicators determine their ranking of preference as a Starbucks supplier. There are premiums awarded for high performers (Scientific Certification Systems 2005, Starbucks Coffee Company 2004). Another example is

Allegro coffee's cultivation of long-term contractual relationships with the farms that supply the company's beans. This promotes sustainability because growers (who were already producing a very high-quality product) get a fair, guaranteed price and access to credit. "We continue to work with them to ensure the *sustainability* of their farms, the quality of their livelihood—and the longevity of their traditions" (Allegro Handcrafted Coffee 2005). Customers can visit Allegro's website and learn exactly where their coffee comes from.¹⁰

Yet another way that specialty coffee businesses have taken up the challenge of sustainability is by partnering with NGOs. The primary goals of these relationships fall into three main categories: promoting quality and fostering direct ties between producers and buyers, improving or sustaining the environment, and commitments to buy Fair Trade Certified coffees. Relative to the first goal, Miguel Valiente (2003), director of El Salvador's largest coffee producer organization, states that "in the past, coffee exporters sold their coffee under brand names. But the market has shifted in a generic direction and thus there has been less emphasis on quality. Today it would be better to return to distinct brands and pursue quality. Relations between producers and buyers were much more personal before. They would see each other at least once a year. Now business takes place in a different way. ...One way to revive the values of the past would be to promote client-producer relations with visits to the farms, and to encourage constant communication between producers and buyers." Many NGOs (especially the business-oriented and Fair Trade groups) are working with specialty coffee businesses to establish the differentiation and direct ties that Mr. Valiente seeks.

¹⁰ www.allegrocoffee.com/page.php/id/45

Conservation International (CI) is a good example of an environmental NGO that has successfully partnered with coffee businesses. Nineteen major coffee growing areas are in what Conservation International calls “biodiversity hotspots.” Coffee is thus a central commodity in CI’s efforts to conserve biodiversity. CI’s Center for Environmental Leadership in Business encourages coffee roasters to integrate environmental and social considerations into their purchasing. In partnership with Starbucks, CI developed the coffee industry’s first global green coffee purchasing guidelines and began certifying Conservation Coffees. Presently CI and Starbucks are working with the Colombian Coffee Federation to promote coffee production methods that “provide conservation opportunities, economic and social benefits for coffee farmers, and high coffee quality. In return, farmers receive a price premium for their coffee that is well above the local market price” (Conservation International 2001, 2003).

The larger specialty roasters are still cautious about long-term partnerships with Fair Trade groups. This is mainly because Fair Trade certification criteria do not include a statement on quality. As Donald Schoenholt (2001), specialties editor for the *Trade Journal Tea and Coffee* remarks, “A guaranteed premium price without a guaranteed premium cup is not sustainable.” Responding to Schoenholt’s assertion that – while the Fair Trade movement is laudable – it does not always provide laudable coffee is now fully on the agenda of fair trade promoters and is the focus of their efforts to facilitate producer-buyer relations. But many specialty roasters are, justifiably, still wary of a certification system that detaches price and quality.

Specialty cafés that use only Fair Trade coffee do not always make this a focal point of their business. The coffee served at Seattle’s Caffe Ladro is 100 percent Fair

Trade, organic, and shade certified. This information is available from the baristas or on the company's website. But the customer experience at Caffe Ladro is not about helping distant farmers or protecting habitat. Rather, it reflects this mission:

To provide coffee and stuff that goes with coffee to the Seattle public. Actually, when we say "coffee", it includes espresso drinks, like lattes and those cappuccino thingys. And by "stuff" we mean desserts and baked goods, which isn't easy because flour and eggs are kinda messy. And when we say the Seattle public, we don't mean the entire Seattle public. At least not all at once. Not with only seven stores. That would be a heck of a long line. But we could get everyone to come in at different times. Maybe have some kind of lottery system, or you know, kinda stagger it... or whatever. Then we could handle it. Then everyone in the whole city could say "hi" to each other. It would be one big happy Seattle, synchronized perfectly with Ladro coffee and stuff. Heck, with Seattle being so important and all, maybe the whole world would be happier. Yeah. That would be cool. (Caffe Ladro 2005)

The Fair Trade presence is likewise muted at Espresso Vivace, one of Seattle's premier coffee houses. The reason, as reported by the café's owner, is that he wants to sell good coffee without belaboring the issues (Mulady 2001).

Producer perspectives

Sustainable specialty coffee producers may be vested smallholders, or the owners and workers who maintain socially and environmentally conscious estates. Among the certified coffees, organic is definitely the most differentiated in terms of what it means to be a producer because organic farming requires frequent, intensive, hands-on involvement. One cannot become an organic producer simply by joining a group. By contrast, shade certification has mostly rewarded farmers who were already growing their coffee in the shade of bigger trees by default. Most of the successful Fair Trade cooperative organizations have histories that predate the Fair Trade movement *and*

produce excellent coffee.¹¹ The less-successful cooperative groups (which sell only a fraction of their coffee on Fair Trade or comparably rewarded terms) usually include members who do not produce specialty-grade coffee and would probably be better off transitioning to other crops.

Farmers' reasons for forming cooperatives and pursuing certifications are not uniform. Some cooperatives were organized as part of government-led land redistribution programs. Others emerged with the assistance of religious organizations or foreign aid programs. Field work and interviews with leaders of NGOs involved with linking cooperatives to Fair Trade buyers often indicate that producers view their participation in Fair Trade and/or organic networks strictly as a business strategy – not as social movement involvement (Aranda and Morales 2002, Bray et al. 2001; Garza and Trejo 2002, Lyon 2002, Méndez 2002, Stewart 2005). But others show evidence that cooperative members did factor social goals into their decisions to become part of the Fair Trade network. In the case of the Mexican cooperative UCIRI, Boersma (2002) documents farmers' desire to undertake community-based projects as one of the reasons they joined forces with European Fair Trade organizations. Discussing the same cooperative, Simpson and Rapone (2003) note an accumulation of “organizational capital” which is directed toward development projects as well as toward coffee production. Similar goals and results are evident within the cooperatives that form Manos Campesinas in Guatemala (Bollen 2003).

Original motives notwithstanding, there is a strong link between successful producer participation in certification-based initiatives and positive community development outcomes. This is the case even when a certification does not require a

¹¹ An exception to the criterion of long history is presented later in this paper.

portion of a group's profits to be directed towards community projects (as Fair Trade certification does). For example, David Bray and colleagues (2001), who surveyed organic farmers in Mexico's *La Selva Ejido Unión*, note that the farmers "do not see the [financial or environmental] benefits of organic coffee in isolation, but as part of a 'basket of benefits' they receive from the organization that includes credit, housing, emergency food, health programs, more production infrastructure, and trips to Mexico City for their children" (p. 440). Producer testimonials found on the websites of Fair Trade and business-centered NGOs almost always mention community benefits as well as improved livelihoods for individual farmers and their families. In some cases, a focal benefit is that the community still exists; its members have not all migrated to urban centers or abroad.

[Here it would be great to add something about plantation owners' responses to PVI sourcing guidelines.]

Consuming Globally

Who is most likely to factor the welfare of distant farmers and plantation workers and global environmental preservation into their coffee-buying decisions? Using 1997 data on European consumers, Linton et al. (2004) looked at social and demographic factors that are related to people's *knowledge* about Fair Trade products and their *purchases* of these products. They found that people who know about Fair Trade are somewhat younger and wealthier than average. Not surprisingly, the length of time that a Fair Trade certifier has been active in one's country is positively related to consumers' knowledge of the products. In addition to these factors, people who *buy* Fair Trade

products are more left-leaning politically.¹² Similarly, TransFair USA identified the core market for Fair Trade coffee as individuals who are between 25-45 years old; have an annual income of \$35,000 or more; are college educated; live in 'liberal' towns, particularly in the Northeast, Midwest and Northwest; and are not put off by high prices (TransFair USA 2002). This was the core market for specialty coffee as well, though the niche has certainly grown beyond it.

Consumers who buy specialty coffees to brew at home or enjoy espresso beverages that cost several dollars expect high quality. Among them, more and more are now well aware that their "morning cup of coffee happens to be an ideological battleground over the ethics of the global economy" (Walker 2004:38).¹³ These are the people who *ask for* certified coffees. They may participate in campaigns encouraging businesses and institutions to stock and/or serve these coffees or to serve more of them, more often. A second group of specialty consumers is generally conscious of the social and environmental issues around global trade in food commodities. Business survey evidence from the United States shows that, given equal availability and perceived quality, these customers will choose certified over non-certified coffee, even if it costs more (Giovannucci 2001). Yet other consumers first learn about the issues and the certified (or other sustainably produced) coffees from businesses that sell them.

¹² The strongest predictor of both knowing about and buying Fair Trade products was residence in the Netherlands. The authors suggest four reasons why this is the case: (1) Fair trade groups have been active there since 1959 – long before Fair Trade certification existed. (2) With control for country size Max Havelaar Netherlands spends much more on promotion than other Fair Trade organizations (Exception: Max Havelaar Luxembourg comes close.) (3) It is exceptionally easy to locate Fair Trade Certified coffee in the Netherlands. (4) There is a comparatively wide variety of Fair Trade certified coffee to choose from there (Contrast the U.S. where the vast majority of the Fair Trade coffee comes from Mexico and Central America.).

¹³ Linton et al. (2004) discuss the many ways that Fair Trade organizations educate consumers. Environmental groups and those who promote organic products have member bases and/or target audiences to whom they promote organic and shade certified coffees.

TENSIONS TO REMOVE, OR TO TOLERATE

This section addresses issues within or pertaining to the movements for sustainable production within the specialty coffee niche. It encompasses observations and concerns expressed by representatives of NGOs and businesses, producers, consultants, and academics. Consumers are excluded because the best consumer surveys, conducted by businesses and trade associations, are proprietary. Most publicly available research relies on business representatives to articulate their customers' interests.

There are two visions within the Fair Trade movement: one proposes an alternative economic model¹⁴ and the other aims to work within the existing framework. The latter groups have become more prominent due to the volume of transactions that fall within the mainstream framework's parameters, but alternative trade organizations (ATOs) continue to achieve their goals on a smaller scale. "Militants" within the movement are concerned that as Fair Trade Certified coffee gains more presence in the market, the values of alternative trade will be lost. More coffee will be sold under Fair Trade terms, but this does not necessarily guarantee that all actors involved will adhere to the ideological principles of the movement (Renard 2003:92). Producers (who are excluded from such discussions), however, are more interested in their economic sustainability than in upholding purist positions. Many Fair Trade producers do not sell all of their coffee via Fair Trade channels. They view certifications as a way to gain access to particular markets, not as limits dictating to whom they should sell.

¹⁴ Alternative trade organizations that link producers and consumers via dedicated shops have existed at least since the early 1960s. The U.S. coffee ATO Equal Exchange was active before Fair Trade certification was established.

At the same time, Fair Trade cooperatives and the second-tier organizations that represent them are fighting against the possibility that larger, owner-operated farms could qualify for Fair Trade certification. They argue that estates already have better access to credit and receive more of the export price for their coffee. Larger producers could capture the Fair Trade market because it is easier for buyers to deal with a few big farms than with many small ones (Ascensio 2003). It is thus unlikely that a Fair Trade certification for plantations will emerge, even though this could potentially raise workers' living standards. Other certifications, however, are available to larger farms as well as to smallholders and their cooperatives.

NGOs that promote certification are wary of sustainability-focused PVIs. While sourcing guidelines are clearly a step in the right direction, it is hard to assess the degree to which they are being followed, or what the penalties for breaking them are. Critics assert that sourcing guidelines are simply “bluewash”¹⁵ – the social justice equivalent of “greenwash” (Talbot 2004:11). Large specialty roasters' first response to such criticism is usually to point out that their businesses are much more socially and environmentally responsible than the transnational corporations (TNCs) controlling the non-specialty coffee market. This is undeniably true. Furthermore, though the steps they have taken toward incorporating the promotion of long-term sustainability into their buying practices may seem slow or small to some, they have real impact simply due to volume. A ‘drop in the bucket’ purchase by Starbucks is gigantic compared to what a small roaster dealing exclusively in certified coffees could buy.

Business leaders within the specialty coffee industry have their own issues with the certifying NGOs. Here Allegro's coffee buyer Kevin Knox explains why he and

¹⁵ derived from the color of the U.N. flag

others do not believe that certification initiatives are the right route to sustainability:

The first issue of sustainability at this point seems to be getting a price above the cost of production. That aside, sustainability should be defined, country by country, by the farmers who grow the coffee, otherwise it's cultural imperialism. The voice of the producer has been the one noteworthy for its absence in these discussions. Consumers and roasters that are far removed from production have been defining sustainability. Perhaps the sustainability that's really being addressed is that of the NGOs that have been proliferating and selling various seals and certificates. (quoted in Castle 2001)

Other concerns, mentioned earlier, are the certifications' lack of explicit statements about quality and the fact that by directing aggressively negative and at times poorly informed campaigns at specialty roasters and retailers, activists alienate potential partners who have the will and the resources to promote sustainable production of the product that keeps them in business. These are, for the most part, historical rather than current critiques. Certifying organizations and other NGOs realize the importance of providing specialty buyers with the quality they demand, and where possible are working with producers to achieve this. And groups that want to see more changes in specialty coffee businesses' buying practices are launching letter-writing campaigns and consumer education efforts rather than demonstrations or boycotts.

Are the many coffee certifications effectively attracting customers by offering them a variety of ways to be socially conscious shoppers, 'voting' to protect bird habitat, preserve biodiversity, or improve the lives of small farmers? Or are multiple certifications confusing customers? Giovannucci and Koekoek (2003:36) predict that "the industry is clearly headed for a shakeout of the many initiatives. It is likely that the survivors will a) have true international credibility with farmers, their representatives, and consumers; b) be verified by independent certification; and c) will be simple and

accessible enough to satisfy both the farmer's and the corporate bottom line.” This conclusion is based on their surveys of representatives of wholesale and retail coffee businesses, who demonstrate considerable confusion about what various certifications actually mean. In Giovannucci's (2001) U.S. and Canada survey, 66 percent of the respondents favored the idea of a 'super seal' that would encompass all the issues at once (p. 21). On the other hand, Levi and Linton's (2003) interviews with coffee retailers did not yield evidence that multiple certifications confuse *customers*.¹⁶ Some coffees already have two and even three certifications. It is possible that if a super seal does emerge, it will exist alongside existing labels rather than replace them.

Further insights come from academics. In regard to the Fair Trade movement, Renard (2002) concludes that it is “vital not to lose sight of the *social interactions* on which Fair Trade was built and which legitimize it, and of the importance of mobilizing them (p. 96, italics added). Bray et al. (2001) note that while those seeking to promote shade grown coffee often look to the organic movement for guidance, they neglect to look at the history and social factors that have influenced the production and marketing of a biodiversity oriented product. The conversion to organic coffee by small farmers in Mexico arose not only because of the emergence of the certification or of consumers committed to organic foods, but also “from over a decade of populist agrarian organizing and accompanying organizational innovations. ...[It] depended on upon the substantial amount of preexisting '*social capital accumulation*' in the Mexican countryside, a process of self-organization and institutional learning, and the existence of significant

¹⁶ It should be noted that Levi and Linton's survey was small and conducted in Seattle, where 'coffee consciousness' is quite high.

subsidies” (p. 431, italics added). These observations suggest that coffee activists should pay attention to the relationships within which their activities are grounded.

Recognizing and confronting the issues reviewed above has, in some cases, already produced positive outcomes. But the tensions around differing visions and priorities are not likely to be resolved, and there is no reason why they should be. Given the diversity that exists among producers and the conditions under which they work, many approaches to sustainability are more effective than one. The next section contrasts two cases to illustrate this point.

TWO PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

[I hope to make this three by including a plantation example.]

In the midst of the coffee crisis, some producers are doing better than ever. These include groups of smallholders who have successfully inserted themselves into the specialty coffee market. The accounts related here show how, for producers in Tanzania and El Salvador, the pathways depicted in Figures 1 and 2 have led to the same place.

“Everything’s broken – you have to fix everything.”

Paul Stewart (2005), TechnoServe’s Coffee Marketing and Finance Advisor, said the above when I asked him about TechnoServe’s goals and Tanzanian coffee farmers’ needs. Almost all of the approximately 400,000 coffee producers in Tanzania are smallholders. More than two-thirds of them grow arabica coffee at high altitude, in soil conducive to yielding a premium product. Between 1967 and the late 1980s, Tanzania’s economy was socialist. During this period all coffee growers were assigned as members of a rural cooperative society (also called a primary society). Each society encompassed about three villages. Rural cooperative societies aggregated into cooperative unions with

central pulperies for processing coffee cherries. The unions produced hundreds of tons per season. Farmers received cash advances and some fertilizers at the start of each season and a final payment at the end. But things started to go bad even before the International Coffee Agreement collapsed. The unions and cooperative societies became dysfunctional because there were no incentives for efficiency, no competition between unions, and no quality differentiation. The pulperies eventually collapsed due to lack of maintenance. Farmers started to process their coffee in washtubs at home (Baffles 2003, Stewart 2005).

In the 1990s, when coffee prices were still high, the government started allowing private companies (including TNCs) to participate in the national coffee industry. These companies bought the home-processed coffee, delivered it to the export auction,¹⁷ and bought it back. But big companies did not restore the pulperies (which would allow them to buy unprocessed coffee cherries and centrally process them, increasing their profits and diminishing farmers') because the policy environment was too unstable for such an investment. In 1997 farmers received about one dollar per pound of processed (parchment) coffee. In 2002 they got about 18 cents. There was still no price differentiation for quality. All except one of the arabica-producing cooperative unions had dissolved.

In 1998, TechnoServe, the "business solutions" NGO, started working with a few rural cooperative societies *as a group of individual farmers*. They did not have to sell within the cooperatives. Groups of thirty to forty farmers with a common business interest united to increase their bargaining power. To help producers meet the demands

¹⁷ Until very recently, all coffee had to leave Tanzania via the Moshi auction, conducted weekly during harvest season. This was a convenient way for the government to collect taxes but certainly did not facilitate direct producer-buyer relations.

of the specialty market, TechnoServe introduced better home processing with clean water and a shorter fermentation period, raised drying beds, and hand-sorting. But to implement these improvements farmers needed credit. To get banks to extend it, TechnoServe provided loan guarantees valued at 125 percent of the loan amount. By hand, farmers were only able to process a portion of their coffee to meet specialty standards, but that was better than nothing.

Thanks to USAID funding, by 2002 TechnoServe was working with eleven farmer groups in northern Tanzania, the newly formed Association of Kilimanjaro Specialty Coffee Growers (AKSCG). They acquired one pulping machine and then a business donation from the U.S. made it possible to buy four more.¹⁸ Efficiency gains accrued via collection of coffee, transport, and quality differentiation. With a loan guarantee from TechnoServe, AKSCG got financing to give farmers cash advances. Representatives of AKSCG sold its farmers' coffee at auction. These farmers received about 65% more than others. It has taken some time to learn how to get the best quality out of the pulperies, but progress continues. Having experienced the coffee crisis first hand, farmers are open to new ideas. AKSCG's list of customers currently includes Peet's, Starbucks, and specialty buyers in Germany and Japan (Stewart 2005).

Recently the farmers of AKSCG applied for and received Fair Trade certification. They made this decision not at TechnoServe's urging but rather because they wanted access to buyers within the Fair Trade market. The German Fair Trade group Gepa is already one of AKSCG's customers. Learning to abide by the standards of Fair Trade certification has improved the environmental sustainability of AKSCG farmers' practices, though to date they show no interest in converting to organic production.

¹⁸ One pulper costs about \$6000 and can accommodate about 30 tons of coffee cherries per harvest season.

The farmers mostly use their profits to pay their children's school fees (which certainly counts as community development in a place where many parents cannot afford to send their children to secondary school). Of late there is also interest in forming a credit union.

“We need social changes much larger than certifying farms.”

Despite (or perhaps in line with) this assertion – part of a response to my question about the possibility of larger farms obtaining Fair Trade certification – Alfredo Rumaldo Asencio (2003), Small Producer Coordinator for El Salvador's only Fair Trade group, the *Asociación de Pequeños Productores de Café* (APECAFÉ) is a firm believer in Fair Trade certification. He is convinced that organic and Fair Trade certifications give farmers and their families a way to stay on their land and enhance their wellbeing in a time when others have been forced to migrate. The benefits extend beyond members of certified cooperatives and into their communities.

The role of coffee in Central American economies is diminishing dramatically and rapidly. Abundant news articles and studies corroborate my interviews with coffee growers, exporters, and representatives of producer associations and NGOs – all bearing out that the coffee crisis is impelling major changes in every sector of production. In El Salvador, the plantation sector is the largest. Some estate owners have parceled out their lands for sale; others have turned their plantations into vacation resorts. Landless workers and small producers have the fewest options for diversification, but are most affected by the crisis. PROCAFÉ is El Salvador's government-based coffee organization. It offers technological advice and training in environmentally sustainable practices to coffee producers of all sizes, and supports farmers' efforts to raise the quality of their coffee and thus appeal to specialty

buyers.¹⁹ The country's five producer organizations express similar priorities. All of them have quality- and efficiency-centered goals and aim to forge and maintain relationships with high-end buyers (Zuijano 2003, Valiente 2003, Ascensio 2003). In the past, some producer organizations had the capacity to lobby for government assistance, secure low-interest loans for their members, or subsidize purchases of new machinery. This is not the case today. International donors are attempting to supply the resources that producer associations or Central American governments cannot. For instance, USAID supports initiatives to assist small- and medium-sized coffee farms to improve the quality of their product and form business linkages with the specialty coffee roasters. Specialty coffee represents only a small part of El Salvador's coffee production – 5 percent in 2003 (Cabrera 2003). [Update this figure.] Acquiring organic and/or Fair Trade certifications is here viewed as part of an overall effort to raise quality and thus expand access within the specialty niche.

The eleven cooperatives that now comprise APECAFÉ originally organized in 1980 as part of the country's agrarian reforms. In 1999 they decided to pursue the Fair Trade niche. Today all eleven produce Fair Trade Certified coffee and three have organic certification as well. The others are in the process of transitioning to organic production. APECAFÉ sells its coffee via organizations such as TransFair, Max Havelaar, and Equal Exchange. Their principal market is Japan, but the Neumann Group recently contracted to buy coffee from ten APECAFÉ cooperatives that participated in a Rainforest Alliance program (administered by the Salvadoran conservation group SalvaNatura) to help farmers improve the quality of their coffee and transition to organic production (Aucensio 2003; Beloso 2003). The group has received other NGO aid as well. For example, Oxfam has paid for representatives of APECAFÉ to travel to trade conventions in order

¹⁹ At low altitudes, PROCAFÉ recommends transitioning to other crops or to entirely different economic activities.

to promote their coffee. APECAFÉ's sales at Fair Trade prices have risen from two containers (66,000 pounds) in 1999 to six containers (198,000 pounds) in 2003 (Ascencio 2003). [Get 2004-05 amount.]

In addition to selling 90 percent of the group's coffee within the Fair Trade market.²⁰ APECAFÉ's goals are to help more cooperatives obtain organic certifications and improve health and nutrition in the cooperatives and the Achieving these goals will primarily entail improving coffee quality and extending producer-buyer relations. The members of APECAFÉ are optimistic given that they have already established a foothold in a market niche that in El Salvador is now over-promoted as a solution to the coffee crisis. Affirming their modest successes, they use their community development funds to improve local schools and bring clean drinking water to their villages.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has identified several ways in which interactions between NGOs, specialty coffee businesses, producers, and consumers have led to improved conditions for people and ecosystems. Two factors have contributed to these developments: the growth of the specialty coffee industry and the coffee crisis.

As the specialty coffee niche grew it became a more important force in the world coffee market. This in turn gave specialty roasters more leverage to promote high standards – of social responsibility as well as coffee quality. For example, when a specialty roaster has become large enough to be able to buy the entire crop of a large plantation at a price higher than what the plantation's owner could get elsewhere, the owner has a strong incentive to meet the prospective buyer's requirements. And

²⁰ In 2003 the figure was 30 percent.

mounting pressure from activists and consumers gave specialty buyers a strong incentive to care about the conditions under which their coffee was produced. Buyers' increased purchasing power allowed for greater transparency at the same time that their customers started demanding it. Certifiers also became more numerous, offering buyers the opportunity to purchase via brokers that offer social and environmental guarantees along with the coffee they sell.

By dramatically reducing sustainability (or threatening to do so), the coffee crisis produced a heightened sense of alarm and urgency. Estate owners stopped producing coffee, plantation workers lost their jobs, smallholders who were just getting by when the prices were high could no longer make ends meet. Fair Trade activists could now promote certification as a way to mitigate the crisis as well as a way to make sure that small producers earned a fair price. Specialty coffee businesses had more reason than ever to promote sustainability because without their help, growers receiving low prices would reduce their labor and environmental standards as well as the quality of their coffee – or stop producing altogether.

The crisis also gave more NGOs a reason to direct their efforts towards the coffee industry; they have further increased consumers' awareness and worked together with producers and businesses to establish multiple pathways towards sustainability within the specialty coffee niche. Two of those pathways were illustrated here. Tanzania's AKSCG originally focused on improving the quality of their product so that it would be attractive to specialty buyers. As they began to succeed, they learned that incorporating social and environmental sustainability into their practices would further increase their financial rewards. APECAFÉ in El Salvador started out with a commitment to Fair Trade and

environmentally sound production, but to be successful in the specialty market they had to pay more attention to its quality demands.

Solving the coffee crisis in a way that is equitable for growers and workers and healthy for the environment will require enforceable international standards. This means involvement by governments and international governmental organizations as well as NGOs, businesses, producers, and consumers (Bates 1997; Levi and Linton 2003; Linton, forthcoming; Linton et al. 2004; Talbot 2004). Only when this happens will global norms about acceptable practices along the coffee supply chain change. In the meantime, however, the specialty coffee industry is becoming a niche for sustainability, one that links good coffee and good causes.

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Table 1. Sustainable Coffee Certifications

Certification	Certifier	Criteria	Time involved, who pays costs
Bird Friendly/ Shade Grown	Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center	Provide good, forest-like habitat for birds by planting under a canopy of trees. Bird Friendly® coffees are also organically grown.	[information forthcoming]
Eco-O.K.	Rainforest Alliance	Conserve ecosystems, protect wildlife, provide legal wages and health care for workers, and much more. See www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/agriculture/pdfs/coffee.pdf	[information forthcoming]
Fair Trade	Fairtrade Labelling Organization	Purchase directly from small farmers organized into democratically managed cooperatives, guarantee a floor price when market prices are low, offer farmers credit (an obligation of the importer), promote long-term relationships between importers and farmer cooperatives.	about six months, buyers pay certification and monitoring costs
Organic	IFOAM	Forty-eight pages of ecological guidelines. See www.ifoam.org/standard/norms/iac.pdf	2-3 years or more, producers pay certification and monitoring costs
Utz Kapeh	Utz Kapeh	See www.utzkapeh.org/index.php?pageID=14 . The list includes socio-cultural, environmental, and economic standards.	[information forthcoming]

Table 2. NGOs Promoting Sustainable Coffee

<i>NGO (acronym and) name</i>	<i>Predominant Focus*</i>	<i>Mission/Goals</i>
Coffee Kids	Children	"Improve the quality of life for children and families who live in coffee-growing communities"
Coffee Quality Institute	"All aspects of coffee quality and the lives of people who produce it"	Educate and conduct research, encompassing sustainability and service (an arm of the Specialty Coffee Association of America).
TechnoServe	"Business solutions to rural poverty"	Help small-scale coffee growers increase their incomes and living standards, link producers and consumers
EnterpriseWorks	"Helping our clients build small businesses"	Empower coffee farmers by helping them invest in new technology.
Utz Kapah	"Responsible coffee"	Ensure that coffee is grown decently, with respect for producers and the environment.
CI: Conservation International	Environment	Promote organic agriculture and other environmentally sustainable practices.
ECO-O.K.: Rainforest Alliance Eco-O.K. program	Environment	Implement comprehensive guidelines and certification criteria.
National Wildlife Federation	Environment	Protect wildlife and habitat.
SalvaNATURA (El Salvador)	Environment	Promote sustainable agriculture.
EE: Equal Exchange	Fair Trade	Directly market Fair Trade coffee.
Fairtrade Foundation (UK)	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
Fairtrade Mark (Ireland)	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
FLO: Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International	Fair Trade	Provide and monitor Fair Trade certification.
Föreningen för Rättvisemärkt (Sweden)	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
GX: Global Exchange	Fair Trade	Educate the coffee industry and consumers and increase demand for Fair Trade coffee.
Lutheran World Relief	Fair Trade	Promote sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee, especially among faith-based communities.
Max Havelaar Belgium	Fair Trade	Increase availability and awareness of Fair Trade Certified products.
Max Havelaar Denmark	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
Max Havelaar France	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
Max Havelaar Netherlands	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
Max Havelaar Norway	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
Max Havelaar Switzerland	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.

(continued on the next page)

Table 2. (continued)

Reilun kaupan edistämisyhdistys ry. (Finland)	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair Austria	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair Canada	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair Germany	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair Italy	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair Japan	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair USA	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
TransFair-Minka Luxembourg	Fair Trade	Increase awareness, availability and sales of Fair Trade Certified products.
Oxfam	Fair Trade	Educate the coffee industry, consumers, and producers and increase demand for Fair Trade coffee.
U.S./Labor Education in the Americas Project (US/LEAP)	Fair Trade	Back Fair Trade and other workers' rights initiatives
IFOAM: International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements	Organic	Coordinate the network of organic movements around the world.
IOAS: International Organic Accreditation Service	Organic	Accreditation to organic\ certification bodies.
OCA: Organic Consumers Association	Organic	Promote organic methods of food production.
OCIA: Organic Crop Improvement Association	Organic	Provide research, education and certification services to organic growers, processors and handlers in North, Central and South America, Africa, Europe and Pacific Rim.
ORCA: Organic Coffee Association	Organic	Promote standards of third party certification.
ABA: American Birding Association	Shade/Birds	Add a strong conservation voice to reflect interests of bird enthusiasts.
Audubon Society	Shade/Birds	Conserve and restore natural ecosystems, with a focus on birds.
SMBC: Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center	Shade/Birds	Foster understanding, appreciation, and protection of bird migration.
Songbird Foundation	Shade/Birds	Raise awareness of migratory birds and promote sustainable coffee farming.

***All of these NGOs acknowledge multiple aspects of sustainability.**

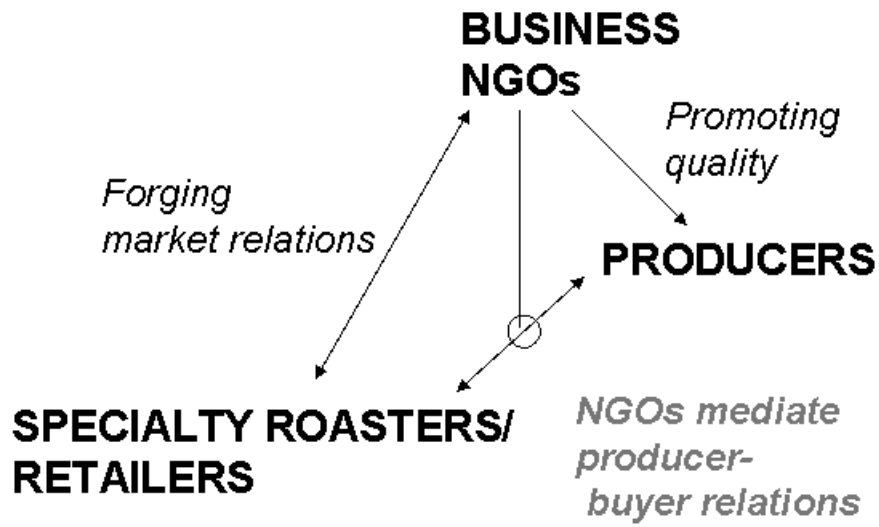


Figure 1. How Business NGOs Work

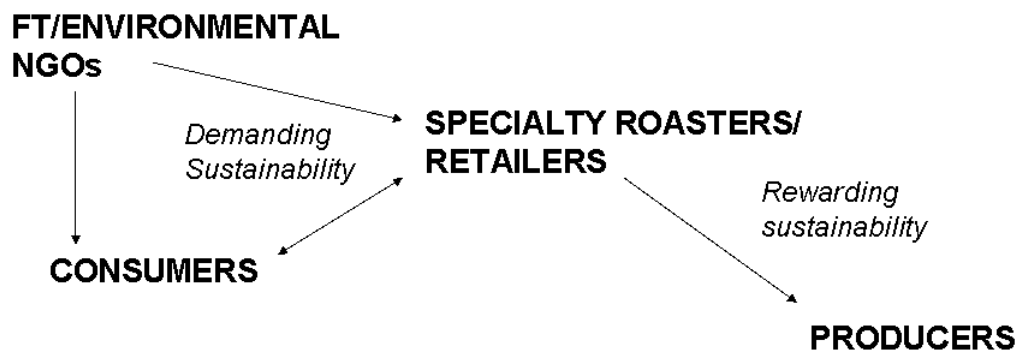


Figure 2. How Fair Trade and Environmental NGOs Work