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**THE MEANING OF MARKETS:  
HOW THE DOMESTIC FAIR TRADE ASSOCIATION UNDERSTANDS  
CREATING SOCIAL CHANGE USING MARKET INITIATIVES**

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, 2003

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Science  
in Environmental Studies

The University of Montana  
Missoula, Montana

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## ABSTRACT

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Environmental Studies

The Meaning of Markets: How the Domestic Fair Trade Association Understands  
Creating Social Change Using Market Initiatives

Chairperson: Neva Hassanein

Agriculture in North America has tended toward consolidation and industrialization in the past century. Responding to the narrowing of market advantage for small-scale organic farmers and the plight of farm workers, as well as to both the failures and potentials of international fair trade and organic initiatives, members of the nascent Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA) seek to insert social justice into the North American food system using a market-based initiative mediated by independent that conform to stringent criteria. This study examines the meaning of fair trade in a North American context; the challenges facing domestic fair trade initiatives, and the ways the DFTA confronts them; and the ways those involved with the DFTA intend to move ahead with a domestic fair trade initiative. I argue that through a strong collaborative approach both structurally and in its vision for a transformed food system, the DFTA may bring a new and productive element to the discussion of alternative agro-food initiatives in North America. Central to DFTA members' understanding of their goals is the formation of a coalition representing all the stakeholders in the food system, the creation of alternative economic models which embody social justice, the education and empowerment of the consumer as a political actor, and the role of policy in a complete transformation of the food system.

### **Keywords**

Domestic Fair Trade, Organics, International Fair Trade, Alternative Agro-Food Movement, Social Justice Labeling, Social Justice Market-Based Initiatives, Embeddedness, Social Change

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: PREPARING FOR A JUST LUNCH .....	1
CHAPTER TWO: MARKETS, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURAL MOVEMENTS .....	5
Introduction.....	5
A Vision of Equitable Organics in the Global North.....	7
Fair Trade Abroad and at Home .....	7
Is Organic Enough?.....	11
The Shape and State of Domestic Fair Trade to Date.....	15
Transformation and Tension: Examining Markets for Social Change .....	21
Defining Initiatives: The Multiple Goals of Alternative Food Initiatives .....	22
Creating Transparency: Toward a More Embedded Market .....	25
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	30
Introduction.....	30
Overview of the DFTA Organizational Structure.....	30
Membership .....	30
The Five Sectors .....	32
The Board of Directors and Executive Director .....	33
Research Design.....	34
Data Collection .....	34
Data Analysis .....	38
Strengths and Limitations of Study.....	38
CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC FAIR TRADE AS TRANSFORMING THE MARKET .....	42
Introduction.....	42
Defining a Movement: the Meaning of Domestic Fair Trade.....	43
Transparency and Authenticity along the Entire Food Chain.....	45
Empowerment of the Marginalized from Worker to Consumer .....	47
Sustainability for People and Environment .....	51
Defining Tension: Growing the Market while Maintaining Integrity .....	54
Guarding Against Weakening of Standards.....	55
Maintaining Consumer Confidence .....	58
Implementing Meaning: Creating a New Type of Market.....	60
Creating a New Space for Dialogue: Social Justice Coalition Building.....	62
Creating a New Way of Business: Co-operative Economy and Sustainability .....	64
Creating a New Consumer Conscience: Harnessing Purchasing Power for Justice .....	67

Creating New Policy: From Coalition to Collective Action.....	70
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: RENEWING AND EXPANDING THE ORGANIC AND FAIR</b>	
<b>TRADE VISIONS .....</b>	<b>73</b>
Introduction.....	73
Summarization of Data .....	74
Strengths and Limitations of the DFTA’s Approach.....	76
Building and Reflecting: DFTA’s Productive Potential .....	76
Overcoming Obstacles: Creating a Consumer Movement.....	81
Future Research for Domestic Fair Trade.....	91
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....</b>	<b>97</b>

## TABLES

1: North American Domestic Fair Trade Time Line.....	16
2: Domestic Fair Trade Principles and Descriptions.....	18
3: Study Participation by Sector Representation.....	35
4: Frequency of Quotations of Study Participants in Data.....	37

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PREPARING FOR A JUST LUNCH

With the development of national [organic] standards, we still must fight to ensure that the integrity of these standards is maintained and that they remain a “floor,” allowing more stringent standards – and ultimately a just food movement – to be built on their foundation... We are collectively responsible for shaping this and the next phase of organics... We must graft “just” food on this sapling: it’s not about just having lunch but about having a “just” lunch.

Michael Sligh (2002: 272, 281)

The Domestic Fair Trade Association is a grassroots coalition of farm worker organizations, small-scale organic farmers and farmer co-operatives, intermediary processors and marketers, retail co-operatives and consumer groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that seek to transform the agro-food system in North America to be socially and environmentally just, through market-based initiatives. Domestic fair trade is growing out of both international fair trade and organics, and seeks not to replace, but rather to build upon its predecessors. While international fair trade has increased the market share for many small producers in the Global South and raised awareness among Northern consumers of social justice issues, it does not deal with the marginalization of the small-scale family farmer or the farm worker that occurs within the Global North. While the social impacts of organic agricultural practices are far less severe than those of conventional agriculture, concerns about the livelihoods of small farmers and the rights of farm workers are conspicuously absent in USDA organic agriculture standards. As Sligh indicates above, domestic fair traders seek to meld the social justice principles of international fair trade to the environmental sustainability of



organics in order to both reinforce and deepen the impact they have on those involved with food—from farm worker to consumer—in North America.

Over the past three decades, the alternative agro-food movement—including international fair trade, organics, and local food initiatives— has responded to the increasing consolidation of agricultural production, food processing, and grocery retail around the world. Each of these initiatives expresses different interests—including environmental sustainability, personal health and safety, economic justice, and decreased proximity between producer and consumer (Howard and Allen 2006). Yet all of these initiatives share a vision of inserting non-market goals into a profit-driven market place that has little or no regulation or protection for small-scale participants and marginalized people. Domestic fair trade (DFT) could represent a synthesis of many of the components in the aforementioned strategies, as it seeks to go beyond them. More research on the specific goals of those promoting domestic fair trade initiatives is needed to understand how DFT may contribute to alternative agro-food networks. The members of the Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA), all of whom are deeply involved in one or more alternative agro-food strategy, are shaping the philosophical and functional framework of the nascent initiative. DFTA stands at a pivotal place in the history of the agro-food movement, poised to bring the question of social justice and equity to organic and local food conversations within North America, and propose a stronger and more resilient vision of fairly traded and environmentally sustainable food production.

The purpose of this project is to examine the emerging domestic fair trade initiative within North America and the ways those involved see it as a tool for social change. As Sligh, who is deeply involved with domestic fair trade, writes above, the

limits of organics must be surmounted so that human working conditions and livelihoods are understood as inseparable components of a sustainable food system. Likewise, the boundaries of fair trade must be broadened to include not just justice abroad, but at home as well (Jaffee et al. 2004). Specifically, this project examines how the DFTA members understand the meaning of fair trade and how it might change the way agriculture is practiced in North America. By interviewing the DFTA Board of Directors and Executive Director, as well as reviewing DFTA website materials and media articles, I describe and analyze what members of the Domestic Fair Trade Association understand their goals to be as a coalition of organizations that seek, as Jaffee et al. (2004:169) state, to “bring the moral charge home.” The specific objectives of this study are to understand (1) how DFTA Board Members articulate the meaning of domestic fair trade at the outset of this nascent movement; (2) how they perceive and intend to overcome the threat of corporate cooptation of social justice labeling seen in organics and international fair trade; and (3) what they hope the transformative potential of DFT will be in the market place.

In Chapter Two, I set the stage with pertinent literature on the alternative agro-food movement related to market-based environmental and social justice initiatives, including brief histories of the DFTA, international fair trade, and organics. Chapter Three further describes the structure of the DFTA, as well as the methods for data collection and analysis used in this study. Chapter Four examines how the data collected during this study speaks to the research objectives above. Chapter Five discusses the potential of the DFTA to help create a new and reflexive response not only to the present industrial agricultural system, but also to the obstacles and tensions its predecessor initiatives have encountered. My hope is that the outcome of this study will contribute to

the articulation of the DFTA's vision of a transformed food system in North America, where the welfare of soil, animals, and people – from worker to consumer – are taken into consideration at every stage of the supply chain. I contend that the DFTA can offer a creative and pragmatic response to its obstacles while maintaining a stringent standard of social justice; and that the very structure of the DFTA, as well as the stringency of its vision, will lend itself to an authentic and reflexive movement for social justice that can learn from and build upon international fair trade and organics, deepening and expanding both.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**MARKETS, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND**  
**ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURAL MOVEMENTS**

**Introduction**

Domestic fair trade is not an isolated initiative. Rather, it belongs to the broader alternative agro-food movement, which seeks to transform the systems of food production, processing, and consumption so that they reflect social and environmental sustainability. Organics, international fair trade, and local food initiatives have sought ways to work within the market system, some by using third-party labeling programs and others by using direct marketing and branding to gain consumer trust and participation. Critics of alternative agro-food initiatives argue that using the market to transform the market is ultimately futile and non-transformative, while some advocates insist that incremental and pragmatic change using the structures that exist will ultimately create a new type of market.

The DFTA seeks to use the existing market to transform the food system so that it is socially just for farmers, farm workers, and consumers. Linking themselves to organic and international fair trade, domestic fair traders hope to employ a market-based strategy that includes acting as an oversight organization to any DFT label initiatives that are developed. While some scholars have criticized label initiatives as long-term trading social change for immediate gain in the market place, others see a great deal of potential for a consumer movement, such as fair trade, to bring about significant—if not complete—change to the current economic and political system (Jaffee and Howard 2009). The DFTA is positioned at an historic moment in the trajectory of organics and fair trade. As we will see, the DFTA members are intending not simply to create a new

social justice marketing initiative, but rather to build on what the existing movements have already accomplished in transforming the food system to be more socially and environmentally sustainable. As an emerging organization, the DFTA is creating its philosophical orientation and developing its vision for a socially just food system in North America.

Alternative agro-food initiatives reflect a variation of goals and philosophies regarding market initiatives and consumer movements. Referred to as market-driven or market-oriented actors, some seek primarily to increase the market share and degree of participation for marginalized producers in the globalized market. Others actors, described as movement-oriented or mission-driven, do not see the market as an end, but rather as a means to a transformed economic and political system. For some movement-oriented actors, the market is seen as a tool to educate consumers about the ill effects of conventional and consolidated agriculture, and to motivate them to become politically engaged in changing the food system— not just to “shop for a better world” (Carrigan et al. 2004:401). In other words, the aim of market initiatives is to inspire consumer action based on moral belief, that will shape the market to reflect social justice (Dubison-Quellier and Lamine 2008). In addition to recasting consumption as a doorway into political engagement, alternative agro-food market initiatives become a way to lessen the social distance between producers and consumers, leading to a more transparent and socially embedded market—a market that is subordinated to democratic will and social relationships that ultimately protect participants from the undulating free market (Raynolds 2000). Critics and proponents alike agree that market-based social justice initiatives alone could never ensure human rights (Friedmann and McNair 2008;

Wilkinson 2007). Broader social change and policy must be part of any initiative that seeks to truly create real change.

This chapter examines literature pertaining to social justice and environmental market initiatives that are relevant to the nascent domestic fair trade initiative. The first section gives brief histories of organics and international fair trade and the context in which the domestic fair trade (DFT) is situated. The second section reviews literature related to alternative agro-food initiatives. Discussing both the criticisms as well as the potentials found in the literature on alternative agro-food initiatives will provide analytical tools to examine how the DFTA understands the meaning of fair trade in North America, the challenges it faces in using the market to overcome the failures of the market, and the ways it hopes to accomplish the transformation of the market.

## **A Vision of Equitable Organics in the Global North**

### *Fair Trade Abroad and at Home*

International fair trade (IFT) is understood as an effort to alleviate the more onerous symptoms of neoliberal globalization on the peasant farmers of least developed countries, while providing them with means to both participate in the global market and work toward a more just economy (Jaffee 2007). IFT began over fifty years ago as a solidarity movement, largely among religious groups in the Global North, who felt a moral responsibility to marginalized producers in the Global South (Wilkinson 2007). During the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the 1980's, when markets were rapidly deregulated and small commodity producers in the Global South were exposed to the undulations of the free market, fair trade emerged as a strategy that used Northern consumers' ethical consciousness to provide a stable market for some commodities

produced largely by Southern peasant farmers. Wilkinson (2007:228) describes the idea of fair trade as redefining the workings of the price mechanism to reflect production costs and minimum living standards, rather than the undulation of supply and demand.

International fair trade is primarily a consumer movement in the Global North, especially in Europe, where an increased awareness of the conditions under which commodities are produced is becoming part of the social consciousness. IFT commonly uses a third party label system, wherein a product that was produced in accordance with fair trade criteria is given a certified fair trade seal. The label, in order to be meaningful to the consumer, must be trustworthy and transparently represent what it claims. In this way, a label increases the social proximity between consumer and producer, although it is limited as a strategy to embed the market at a distance and through a third party.

TransFair in the United States and Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) in Europe are the two largest international fair trade label certifiers. Both are described as market-oriented organizations, seeking to increase the market share for small farmers rather than the complete—if gradual—transformation of the market. Fairly traded products often receive a premium price in the market place, which reflects the cost of production rather than supply and demand. Fair trade is characterized by shorter supply chains, which are designed to return a larger portion of the profit to the farmers. Thus, the consumer and producer are “closer” to each other, through a more transparent trading system, if not in physical distance. While still a very small percentage of the overall market, fair trade certified products have achieved remarkable success, representing a growing market share for marginalized Southern farmers, as well as a place in Northern consumers’ ethical consciousness, and, as a by-product in some cases, a greater degree of

political empowerment for both. Coffee is the most common fairly traded good, but other commodities, such as chocolate, bananas, tea, latex, essential oils, and leather, are gaining the attention of consumers (Murray and Reynolds 2007). Fair trade represents one of the fastest growing markets in North America, as it has captured the attention of large corporations who see the potential for profits based on ethical consumerism (Jaffee and Howard 2009).

When discussing fair trade, one must keep in mind that it represents a strategy within a larger social movement for economic justice in the Global South (Reynolds 2000; Wilkinson and Mascarenhas 2007:129). It is not just a market initiative, but has become part of more localized movements within the Global South (Wilkinson and Macarenas 2007:130; Wilkinson 2007:220-1). Producers become increasingly empowered through participating in fair trade co-operatives that can also serve as social organizations and networks for social justice (Murray and Reynolds 2007:231; Wilkinson 2007). Wilkinson argues that the transformative future of fair trade will rest in the South, as producers are empowered to direct the movement for their benefit, even creating domestic fair trade networks that raise the ethical consciousness of middle-class and wealthy members of Southern society.

While international fair trade has improved the livelihoods of farmers, the extent to which they benefit economically has been debated among scholars (Jaffee 2007). Fair trade certification often demands that farmers to invest more time and resources into production in order to maintain the stringent environmental and social standards. Additionally, fair trade is often synonymous with organic production, which is also time and resource intensive. Therefore, evidence suggests that the fair trade does not improve



the livelihoods of producers to the degree that it claims (Jaffee 2007; Murray and Reynolds 2007). Even so, IFT is improving the livelihoods of Southern producers in both monetary and non-monetary ways. Producers are empowered to organize in co-operatives, employ other community members, and participate in community development projects such as education and health care improvements. In some cases participation in fair trade co-operatives reduces the incidence of emigration fair trade co-operative members to large cities and other countries in search of work (Jaffee 2007). Additionally, the more political outcomes of fair trade in the Global North have included an increased awareness among consumers about trade policy and reform, as well as increased market share for fair trade products.

As fair trade is becoming a meaningful strategy among Southern producers, a variation is underway in the Global North. Small-scale organic farmers, farm worker advocates, consumer co-operatives, and independent food processors have formed the nascent domestic fair trade initiative (DFT). Many see potential for international fair trade principles to be applied to small scale organic production and processing in the Global North, as corporate cooptation of organic farming has lead to decreasing profit margins for small producers and farm worker abuse has gained attention through media campaigns, such as the Immolokee Farm Workers Protests. As Jaffee et al. (2004:175) write,

If Fair Trade can indeed facilitate action at such a distance that it creates a moral and a material connectivity across continents, should it not also function similarly across shorter distances? If Fair Trade is so compelling and engaging a discursive construct for socially embedding Dutch consumer behavior in regard to Mexican coffee, might it not function similarly in shaping the choices a Wisconsin consumer makes in buying cheese...?

*Is Organic Enough?*  
*Social Sustainability and Proximity in Domestic Agriculture*

Organic and fair trade have become nearly indistinguishable to many commodity producers in the Global South (Wilkinson 2007:229). Similarly, the domestic fair trade initiative in the North is largely an extension of the ideals that guided the early organic movement. Indeed, many of the major participants in DFT are committed to organic as a necessary component to both environmental and social sustainability. Organics has been extraordinarily successful as a market initiative that, through consumer demand, led to the creation of the national USDA organic label in 2002. Allen and Kovach (2000) discuss the influence consumers had in shaping the USDA organic criteria, and the potential organics has as a transformational initiative that challenges, at least in part, the dominant food system by demystifying food production for consumers, thus creating a more transparent system. They argue that consumer participation in the organic rules helped to make visible the social networks that food production entails, which are not visible in the dominant conventional system (2000:225-6). For Allen and Kovach, organics is not simply a way of producing and buying food differently, but represents the articulation of new spaces for discourse around consumption that has potential for increasing awareness, growing civil society, and generating funds for future research and engagement among citizens.

The Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) of 1990 was implemented to assure consumers that products labeled USDA organic have come from farms and production facilities certified by state agencies (USDA 2002:1). The USDA organic certification standards that followed in 2002, however, make no provision for social sustainability, fairness, and good labor practices, which many early advocates had hoped it would

(Brown and Getz 2008). Jaffee et al. (2004:288) define fairness as “the ability to meet production costs with a little extra left over to support a family, save for the future, or fund community development projects.” As one farm worker advocate says, “Organic standards include all sorts of rules about how livestock need to be treated, but absolutely none for the human beings that are on the farm” (Greenaway 2008:np). Still, if organics represents the transformative potential to motivate consumers and businesses alike, as Allen and Kovach (2000) argue, then the initiative can and will be reformed by those deeply involved in a holistic vision of sustainability. Jaffee and Howard (2009:np) point out, however, that the potential for conscious consumers to go beyond labels to directing their activism toward the very administrators of the label is unclear, although the potential for reform may very well prove to exist.

The consolidation of farmland and seed genetics into the hands of very few corporate giants has created a hegemonic agricultural market, which many view as undermining democracy, the environment, and the economy (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Hassanein 2003; Niles and Roff 2008). Likewise, the markets into which farm products are sold have been consolidated into few corporate hands, so that producers become price takers, not setters. Organic agriculture has in the past been a way for a farmer to receive a greater return for his or her work, through price premiums in the market; however, as the organic market grows and becomes increasingly industrial, farmers are no longer guaranteed a higher price for their product and are left victim to an undulating free market (Brown and Getz 2008). Schreck et al. (2005) found that of the California organic farmers they surveyed, only 20% thought organic agriculture to be more economically sustainable than conventional; and only 40% described it as more socially sustainable. A

representative of a California organic growers Association said: “You go organic and get there and you’re still in a system set up for failure. It’s failing the farms and it’s failing the farm workers, and it’s failing the farm communities” (Schreck et al. 2005:np).

Of primary concern to those involved with DFT are the conditions under which farm workers labor. Because many organic farmers experience insufficient profit margins, few resources remain to provide a living wage to hired farm laborers, much less health insurance and other benefits. Schreck et al. (2005; 2006) found that, while the majority of organic farmers in their study agreed that paying a living wage and providing adequate health insurance was important, few of them were economically able to do so. Barriers for farmers who desire to pay their workers living wages include the decreased profit margin for organic producers due to increased participation by large-scale farms. The majority of organic farming operations the authors examined would not be considered socially sustainable from a farm worker’s perspective, yet some exceptions offer hope for an improved and fair environment for workers. Accordingly, Sligh (2002:281) calls for an alternative system of organic agriculture, wherein “fair trade and farmer and farm worker rights are essential ingredients” to the integrity of organics.

Another critique of the USDA organic certification system has been the watering-down of organic criteria under pressure by large corporations who seek to increase profit margins through lowering production costs. Jaffee and Howard (2009) refer to this corporate cooptation of organics as lessening consumer trust in the industry, as well as diverting attention away from a more holistic view of organics to a more guarded vision, based on permissible practices rather than transformative of the food system. They define cooptation in relation to market-based initiatives as “the efforts of powerful political and

economic actors, such as corporations, to maintain the status quo” (2009:np). Early organics represented the ideals of the small-scale farm, and distributed through food co-operatives and direct trade, such as farmers markets. With the creation of the USDA organic label, consumers are now asked to trust the national criteria based on the lowest permissible standards for organic production. Organic labels prior to the USDA rule were highly variable, but in many cases represented a higher criteria based on a more holistic vision of organic production that included not only environmental standards, but social as well. Consumers were asked to distinguish among differing labels in the marketplace, thus creating a sort of organic label competition for highest standards (Jaffee and Howard 2009). The industrialization of organic agriculture, along with the compromising of the standards, has weakened the depth and strength of the consumer-producer relationship. Sligh (2002:280) writes,

The lifeblood of organics is grassroots, consumer-based confidence in and demand for safe foods that are produced and processed using environmentally sound, humane, and socially just practices. These are based on public openness, honesty, and direct consumer access... Organic integrity cannot survive through allowing organic colonialism or any other historically unjust relationships.

While uniform and dependable organic criteria can lead to positive outcomes, the lowering of the organic standard so that it does not prohibit large corporations, who would seek to compromise organic integrity for capital gain, has led to the marginalization of the small-scale organic farmer and to the deterioration conditions for farm workers (Schreck et al. 2006).

As Richard Mandelbaum, a farm worker advocate and member of the DFTA, says, “Consumers are increasingly dissatisfied with anonymous products, and really want to know how their food is made—environmentally of course, but also increasingly

socially” (Greenaway 2008:np). A study of California consumers supports the claim that shoppers desire ethically and socially sustainable food, and a labeling mechanism that can be trusted to deliver it (Howard and Allen 2006:439). Howard and Allen (2006:445), however, show that consumers who participated in their study desired labeling schemes that ensured humanely produced and locally grown products over living wages for farmers and farm workers, indicating that a potential barrier to domestic fair trade may be increasing consumer interest in social justice for those who work on the farm. Rousou and Carrigan (2008) show that claims made by labels need to be transparent and trustworthy in order for consumers to alter their purchasing behavior in a lasting and significant way. Therefore, labels that adequately inform consumers about the environmental and social conditions under which a commodity was produced have at least some potential to be recognized in the market place and alter the way food is produced and consumed.

### *The Shape and State of Domestic Fair Trade to Date*

Domestic fair trade emerges from common concerns among small-scale organic farmers, farm worker advocacy groups, and conscious consumers. Many “proto-fair trade” initiatives in North America have existed for decades, such as direct trade, farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), among other more nuanced operations (Jaffee et al. 2004). The growing momentum to codify standards by which domestic fair trade initiatives would be measured is a new and evolving process, not without challenges. Begun as a strategy to remedy the dearth of social criteria in the USDA organic standards, domestic fair trade is gaining traction as it seeks to provide

ways by which a transparent and just supply chain may be created. Table 1 gives a summary of the timeline of the domestic fair trade initiatives since 1997.

**Table 1: North American Domestic Fair Trade Time Line**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Significance</b>
1997	Red Tomatoes alternative produce trade begins between producers in the Southern United States and consumers in Boston
1999	Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) is formed to certify international producers North American Domestic Fair Trade Movement begins, as social sustainability is left out of organic certification dialogue
2001	Agricultural Justice Project begins UFW Fair Trade Apple campaign begins in Washington State
2003	Comercio Justo, Mexico's domestic fair trade label, is established Various alternative and unofficial fair trade mechanisms are in place across the country AJP releases its Executive Report on social and economic justice in the food system
2005	Domestic Fair Trade Working Group (now Domestic Fair Trade Association- DFTA) holds first meeting, releasing "Principles for domestic fair trade: For Health, Justice, and Sustainability"; participating members are AJP, Equal Exchange, RAFI-USA, and the Local Fair Trade Network, along with several farmers
2006	DFTA holds second annual membership meeting
2007	Domestic fair trade pilot project begun by AJP in Wisconsin and Minnesota AJP releases final draft of "Social Stewardship Standard in Sustainable Agriculture"
2008	Equal Exchange releases line of domestic fair trade products Farm Workers Conference on Fair Trade meets to discuss workers' rights DFTA bylaws are drafted and released
2009	DFTA releases policy position on comprehensive immigration reform in the United States TransFair USA and IMO show interest in developing a DFT label

In 1999, El Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA), the Rural Advancement Foundation International- USA (RAFI-USA), Equal Exchange, along with several organic producers and farm worker groups organized to argue for including social criteria in the USDA organic labeling criteria (Greenaway 2008). Failing to persuade the USDA, they formed the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP), which was followed by the creation of the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group, now the Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA). In 2003, AJP issued an executive report, "Toward Social Justice and Economic Equity in the Food System: A Call for Social Stewardship Standards in

Sustainable and Organic Agriculture,” which set the groundwork for farmers’, farm workers’, buyers’, retailers’, and value-adders’ responsibilities and rights in a socially just and environmentally sustainable food system. The document discusses the value and limitations of a standardized labeling system to ensure social sustainability. It states, “Private labeling programs must never be viewed as a substitute for improvements in public policy. It would be a grievous error to imply that the market place alone could adequately ensure social justice or the protection of human rights” (Henderson et al. 2003:8).

From its inception, the DFTA has taken a mission-driven approach—focused on broader and lasting social and political change, as opposed to a “market-driven” approach—aimed at primarily increasing market shares for fair trade producers and businesses (Brown and Getz 2008:17; Jaffee 2007). Even so, there is legitimate concern that a codified domestic fair trade labeling system is inextricably linked to a market economy in its attempts to provide access to a consumer-driven market (Brown and Getz 2008; Guthrie 2007; Jaffee et al. 2004; Wilkinson 2007). With this in mind, the DFTA is realistic about the necessity and potential for a consumer-driven market strategy to create a more just situation for farmers and farm workers in the short term, while working toward more just agricultural policy and consumer culture in the long term (DFTA website 2009).

In 2005, the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group released its “Principles for Domestic Fair Trade: For Health, Justice, and Sustainability.” Table 2 below gives a summary of the fourteen principles, many of which overlap with international fair trade’s principles. In 2007, the Agricultural Justice Project launched a pilot DFT labeling project



**Table 2: Domestic Fair Trade Principles (Information Source: DFTA Website 2009)**

<b>Domestic Fair Trade Principle</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Family-Scale Farming</b>	Fair Trade focuses on reinforcing the position of small and family-scale producers that have been or are being marginalized by the mainstream marketplace, as a means of preserving the culture of farming and rural communities, promoting economic democracy, environmental and humane stewardship and biodiversity, and ensuring a more healthy and sustainable planet.
<b>Capacity Building for Producers and Workers</b>	Fair Trade is a means of developing the producers and workers independence, strengthening their ability to engage directly with the marketplace, and to gain more control over their futures. The resources from trading relationships are directed toward this purpose in a participatory manner by those who will benefit from them.
<b>Democratic &amp; Participatory Ownership and Control</b>	Fair Trade emphasizes co-operative organization as a means of empowering producers, workers and consumers to gain more control over their economic and social lives. In situations where such organization is absent, mechanisms will be created to ensure the democratic participation of producers and workers, and the equitable distribution of the fruits of trade.
<b>Rights of Labor</b>	Fair Trade means a safe and healthy working environment for producers and workers and conforms to all ILO Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The participation of children (if any) does not adversely affect their well-being, security, educational requirements and need for play and conforms to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as pertinent local/regional laws. Fair Trade ensures that there are mechanisms in place through which hired labor has an independent voice and is included in the benefits of trade through mechanisms such as living wages, profit-sharing, and co-operative workplace structures. Programs of apprenticeship are promoted to develop the skills of the next generation of farmers, artisans and workers.
<b>Equity &amp; Opportunity</b>	Fair Trade emphasizes the empowerment of women, minorities, indigenous peoples and other marginalized members of society to represent their own interests, participate directly in trade and to share in its economic benefits.
<b>Direct Trade</b>	Where possible, Fair Trade attempts to reduce the intermediaries between the primary producer and the consumer, delivering more of the benefits of such trade to the producer and connecting consumers more directly with the source of their food and other products, and with the people who produced them.
<b>Fair &amp; Stable Pricing</b>	A fair price is one that has been agreed upon through dialogue and participation. It covers not only the costs of production but enables production which is socially just and environmentally sound. It provides fair pay to the producers, fair wages to laborers, and takes into account the principle of equal pay for equal work by women and men. Fair Traders ensure prompt payment and stable pricing that enables producers to plan for the future.
<b>Shared Risk &amp; Affordable Credit</b>	Farmers often bear the greatest risks of agriculture and an unstable marketplace. Fair Traders work to share these risks among producers, processors, marketers and consumers through more equitable trade partnerships, fair and prompt payment, transparent relationships and affordable credit. In situations where access to credit is difficult, or the terms of credit are not beneficial to producers, Fair Traders provide or facilitate access to such credit, or assist producers in creating their own mechanisms for providing credit.
<b>Long-Term Trade Relationships</b>	Fair Trade fosters long-term trade partnerships at all levels within the production, processing and marketing chain that provide producers with stability and opportunities to develop marketing, production and quality skills, as well as access to new markets for their products.
<b>Appropriate Technology</b>	Fair Trade emphasizes a holistic approach to agriculture, as defined by Via Campesina to include fishing, hunting and gathering and other means of sourcing food. Fair Trade supports sustainable agricultural strategies such as Organic, Biodynamic, non-toxic Bio-intensive Integrated Pest Management, farm diversification and small-scale farming that protect the environment, sustain farming communities, and provide consumers with quality, healthy food. Fair Trade emphasizes the biodiversity of traditional agriculture, supports the rights of farmers to their own seed, and preserves cultural diversity. Fair Trade also emphasizes sustainable business practices through the entire supply chain which can include green office operations, use of alternative energies or other sustainable practices from farm to consumer.
<b>Sustainable Agriculture</b>	Fair Trade supports the use of traditional technologies, which are openly and freely shared in the public domain, and excludes plants and animals, and biological processes, which have been genetically engineered or modified. Further, fair trade discourages the use of machinery that threatens the health, safety and employment opportunities for farm workers and farm families.
<b>Indigenous Peoples' Rights</b>	Fair Trade supports indigenous peoples' rights to land for cultivation, fishing, hunting & gathering in customary and traditional ways; to freely exchange seeds and to retain rights to their germplasm. These rights are congruent with the Convention on Biological Diversity. We fully support the right of indigenous and all peoples to food sovereignty.
<b>Transparency &amp; Accountability</b>	The Fair Trade system depends on transparency of costs, pricing and structures at all levels of the trading system. Fair Traders are accountable to each other and the wider community by openly sharing such information.
<b>Education &amp; Advocacy</b>	Fair Trade emphasizes education at all levels of the agricultural chain, engaging farmers, workers, traders and consumers in advocating for a more equitable, democratic and sustainable economy. Fair Traders in particular educate consumers about the inequities of the trading system and the need for alternatives, while sharing information with producers about the marketplace. Education strengthens the Fair Trade movement and empowers its stakeholders in creating a better world for everyone.

with several producers and consumer co-ops in Wisconsin and Minnesota, through the Minneapolis-based, Local Fair Trade Network. AJP released concrete standards for a domestic fair trade label, entitled “The Agricultural Justice Project: Social Stewardship Standards in Organic and Sustainable Agriculture” (AJP 2007). The project has not been endorsed officially by the DFTA. In 2008, the DFTA drafted and ratified by-laws, which include the above principles and outline a corporate structure, and incorporated as a not-for-profit organization. While the DFTA is not directly involved in the creation of a social justice label, they seek to evaluate and endorse market initiatives, which reflect their values and principles in action, as well as discredit market claims that do not meet DFTA criteria (DFTA Website 2009).

The Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA) is a grassroots, not-for-profit organization comprised of members from five sectors of the food industry: farm worker groups; family scale farmers and farmer co-operatives; processors, marketers, and intermediary trading organizations; retailers, food co-operatives, and farmers’ markets; and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. Inclusion of multiple sectors mirrors how the DFTA articulates its vision (DFTA website 2009):

The food system functions like a healthy community where neighbors look after and support each other, everyone feels safe, and all contribute to a clean and harmonious environment. Family-scale and community-scale farms thrive. All participants in the food system understand the realities, challenges, and effects of food production and distribution and choose to support fair trade in every way they can.

At the base of the DFTA’s vision is collaboration and coalition building. The DFTA’s vision for the transformation of the food system includes all stakeholders working with one another to understand the issues faced by different – and sometimes disparate – interests. Similarly, the DFTA mission statement – to “Promote and protect

the integrity of Domestic Fair Trade Principles through education, marketing, advocacy and endorsements” – represents a multifaceted approach to action (DFTA website 2009). The DFTA’s Mission Objectives include working to promote farm worker justice, creating markets for small-scale family farmers, providing transparency in the market place for consumers, and taking policy positions on issues pertaining to labor and agricultural production. The DFTA views itself primarily as an organization that promotes collaboration and communication among stakeholders, and as a verification organization that maintains the integrity of domestic fair trade initiatives by holding them to high standards.

The DFTA is in the midst of defining what domestic fair trade will look like in North America. Many questions arise, some of which are very familiar to the international and organic initiatives. What is the meaning of fair trade in the North American market place? How can markets become embedded in relationships across distance and time and within a capitalist market? Can a market-based initiative insert values into economic exchanges successfully to create social change? What is the trajectory for domestic fair trade to transform the agro-food market in North America? The answers to these questions are unclear since domestic fair trade is nascent; however, the ways DFTA actors understand these questions may give insight into the potential for DFT to bring a constructive response to the discussion of agricultural production in North America.

Much scholarship on the alternative agricultural movement over the past two decades has analyzed how the market is being used in an attempt to create equitable conditions for producers of commodities, as well as the tensions that arise in using a

consumer and price-driven market to effect social change (Jaffee et al. 2004; Jaffee 2007; Murray and Raynolds 2007; Raynolds 2000; Renard 2003; Rousu and Corrigan 2008). International fair trade has been described as one working both “within and against the market” by attempting to insert social justice for producers in the Global South into the market economy (Jaffee 2007; Murray and Raynolds 2007). The DFTA is clear in its intent of using the market economy in a similar way. The DFTA website reads, “By creating businesses committed to principles of fairness and equity and leading by example, we hope to create positive change in the mainstream market place by influencing the conduct of conventional corporations” (DFTA website 2009:np). The next section reviews literature that examines the alternative agro-food movement, including international fair trade and organics.

### **Transformation and Tension: Examining Markets for Social Change**

The alternative agro-food movement—to which fair trade and organics belong—reflects collective action of groups that are trying to change the way agriculture is practiced. An extensive body of literature examines the ways these different initiatives work, and how they understand the shared—if vague—goal of challenging the way food and agricultural products are traded. Two commonly discussed themes in the literature are (1) the goals of different alternative agro-food strategies, including what they hope to accomplish and what they represent in the market place; and (2) the degree to which an initiative “re-embeds” commodity production in society by creating more direct and transparent links between producers and consumers, thus motivating consumers to become engaged in shaping the food system. This section looks at these two themes in relation to organics, international fair trade, and to a lesser degree local food strategies.

The body of literature on domestic fair trade is limited, as it is a very new initiative. Consumers play an important role in these initiatives, as market-based strategies depend on consumers to create change by demanding socially and environmentally sustainable products. Goodman and DuPuis (2002) suggest that consumer-oriented initiatives be taken seriously as strategies for transformation not just in the market place, but in policy as well.

*Defining Initiatives: The Multiple Goals of Alternative Food Initiatives*

The goals of alternative agro-food initiatives are not monolithic, but represent a continuum— from creating a space within the present system for small producers to participate, to complete transformation of the system to be more sustainable. Wilkinson (2007) discusses the three components of international fair trade. The first is a market-based approach that seeks to increase the degree of participation small producers have in the larger market. Represented by TransFair, the largest fair trade labeler in North America, these initiatives invite participation by large corporations (such as Starbucks, Wal-Mart, and McDonalds), and often do not require a commitment from businesses to fair trade principles or 100% fair trade practices. Market-based initiatives have fallen under heavy criticism by many scholars as undermining the movement toward a more just agricultural trade landscape by trading long-term transformation of agricultural and trade policy for immediate market gain under the prevailing neoliberal governance (Guthman 2007; Jaffee 2007; Murray and Reynolds 2007). These criticisms are valid and well-placed but, as Wilkinson points out, the market-driven approach to fair trade represents only a visible portion of the whole of fair trade initiatives.

Those involved in second and third components of fair trade are interested in

increasing the market for fair trade not as an end, but rather as a means to a more just food system. Movement-oriented fair traders seek not only to implement fair trade in the market place, but also to create other channels for fairly traded goods to reach the consumer, through alternative trading organizations (ATOs) and direct trade. Politicized fair traders, however, take transformation of the market a step further, hoping to engage consumers in becoming actively engaged in shaping economic policy so that all trade is fair trade. They also seek to influence institutional buying practices, so that governmental and industrial purchasing bodies are required to source goods used in their operations ethically.

For instance, Dubisson-Quellier and Lamine (2008) studied how politicized fair trade in France, where a weakened, state-regulated fair trade criteria, has led to a response by movement-oriented activists to strengthen and deepen fair trade initiatives. The result has been the emergence of closely linked local trade relationships and international fair trade practices. The aim ultimately becomes transforming all trade—whether local or global—to reflect equity and social justice. Dubisson-Quellier and Lamine’s discussion of consumer empowerment implies that fair trade should go beyond purchasing fairly traded goods to civic engagement that ultimately shapes policy and economics. Fair trade, therefore, should empower the consumer to be an active shaper of the economy.

Wilkinson (2007) challenges us to think about these tensions not as dichotomies between the market and the movement, but rather as interconnected strategies. Fair trade is visible through labeling initiatives to many consumers who do not shop at alternative trade organizations (ATOs) or consumer co-operatives. Even though the success of fair

trade in the mainstream market opens it up to the threat of cooptation by large corporations seeking profit through weakening criteria, the movement-driven side of fair trade is still very active, and pushes back against the temptation to override strong principles for immediate market gain. Furthermore, Jaffee and Howard (2009:np) suggest that a potential way for surmounting corporate cooptation and weakening of standards lies in the very structures of organizations at the helm of alternative agro-food initiatives. Incorporating the values and principles of transformation in the very “DNA” of a movement may protect future initiatives, such as domestic fair trade, when profit-driven interests seek to thwart an initiative in favor of market gain. As Dubisson-Quellier and Lamine (2008) point out, a main goal of fair trade is to educate the consumer and invite him or her into political engagement.

To movement-oriented fair traders, the label educates the consumer about agricultural trade and economic marginalization of producers, and invites a deeper engagement in the food system (Wilkinson 2007). Similarly, Hassanein (2003) discusses food democracy as a non-prescriptive and pragmatic approach to incremental change that depends on citizen participation in the shaping of the agricultural system. She writes (2003:85):

Food citizenship eschews the passive and confining roles of “consumer” or “producer” or “worker.” By contesting the commodification of food in this way, the pressure by social movements to democratize the dominant food system challenges the forces seeking control of the food system and the very structure of capital itself. Therein lies the transformative potential of the alternative agro-food movement.

Hassanein places knowledge about the food system as central to this democratization of processes. Likewise, movement-oriented advocates of fair trade place transparency between producers and consumers that strengthens mutual understanding of process,

place and product (Murray and Raynolds 2007). In this context, fair trade becomes not simply a consumer movement mediated by a label, but ideally an impetus for direct action to effect change in policy that reflects a grassroots food democracy. Thus, a more reflexive and engaged citizenry of both producers and consumers potentially works together for a transformed and equitable economy.

### *Creating Transparency: Toward a More Embedded Market*

Conceptually, embeddedness is the degree to which gain-motivated economic transactions are secondary to social relationships and institutions (Granovetter 1985; Polanyi 1944). Karl Polanyi argued the impossibility of a purely free-market because there will always be “countermovements” of self-protection in which all levels of society partake, to stabilize and prevent the complete “disembedding” of the market from society (Polanyi 1944:210-217). He proposed a third option to capitalism and communism, wherein the market becomes subordinate to democratic society, and is therefore “embedded” in social relations.

Embeddedness has been widely discussed in the literature on alternative agro-food initiatives, such as local food and CSAs, fair trade, and organics (Guthman 2007; Hess 2004; Higgins et al. 2007; Hinrichs 2000; Murdoch et al. 1998; Raynolds 2000; Sage 2003; Sonnino 2006; Walthne et al. 2001; Winter 2003). The use of labels in assuring consumers they are purchasing a product produced under certain conditions exemplifies an imperfectly embedded system of exchange, as the consumer is asked to trust the claims that the label makes, rather than knowing first hand the producer, or the conditions of production. The effectiveness of a label is determined by how much trust the consumer has in it, and therefore how reliable and transparent its claims are is a major



factor in how successfully it will accomplish what it is meant to do—raise consumer awareness, increase market share, or facilitate a more political outcome (Ilbery et al. 2005; Rousu and Corrigan 2008).

Many proponents of labels, such as Fair Trade Certified or USDA organic, see these third party regulatory measures as creating more embedded markets at a distance; while others are more critical of their usefulness in creating a true alternative to the current neoliberal paradigm (Howard and Allen 2006; Brown et al. 2000; Guthman 2007). This latter view is particularly true with the USDA organic label, as large corporations are now competing with smaller family operations, and the label has no way of conveying this to a consumer (Getz and Schreck 2006; Jaffee and Howard 2009; Sligh 2002). Since the DFTA seeks to adapt fair trade principles for the domestic organic market, both of which depend on labels, the concept of embeddedness may aid in understanding how movement actors view using a market mechanism to transform the agro-food industry by inserting non-market goals of “health, justice, and sustainability” (Howard and Allen 2006; DFTA website 2009:np).

Members of the DFTA are cognizant of the tensions between the “market” and the “movement” represented in the embeddedness debate. For instance, an article by two DFTA Board members states,

An impetus for the convening of the working group [now the DFTA] was a concern at the manner in which the organic and Fair Trade movements, while dramatically influencing conventional commerce, have been increasingly co-opted by the values and purposes of corporate and multinational interests. Therefore, a primary goal of establishing an organization would not be only to expand the impact of the movement, but also safeguard its principle ideals (Crowell and Sligh 2006:np).

As Jaffee and Howard (2009) write, the success of alternative agro-food initiatives has the potential to attract large corporations, leading to their cooptation for industrial interests which may not represent the social and environmental criteria the label is intended to communicate. The DFTA website indicates they are attempting to grapple with the dangers of corporate cooptation in the organic and international fair trade arenas. Likewise, the DFTA is committed to adhering to its principles while using a market-based initiative to accomplish its goal of transforming the agricultural landscape in North America. Understanding this tension conceptually may illuminate how DFTA actors view their work in light of these market-movement tensions, and how they understand their efforts to serve as a counter example to both the failures of past alternative agricultural initiatives and the dominant food system in North America.

Hinrichs (2000) points out that while a market, such as a farmers' market or a CSA, may be deeply embedded in social relationships, power and economic inequalities may still be at play among participants. While equitable relationships may form the spine of some embedded markets, social justice is not a requirement, and may not even be a goal of the actors in the market (Winter 2003). Jaffee et al. (2004) recommend equity be included in the analytical framework through which alternative agro-food initiatives are examined. They emphasize equitable exchanges between producers and consumers of all socio-economic strata as a potential safeguard against cooptation of the movement by corporate interests, as well as against other distortions that may threaten the initiative's validity. Jaffee et al. (2004:172) state:

Assessing the manner in which concerns for equity engage participants in alternative agro-food networks can illuminate the extent to which such networks might fulfill their promise as transformative vehicles, rather than fall prey to tendencies toward 'defensive localism.'

In this way, the intention of the fair trade initiative is to create a transformed market through incremental change in how relationships and markets are understood. Such change is not simply a more socially embedded market system, but a transformation of markets to reflect social justice and equity as the parameters to economic transactions. A vigilant turn to equity in alternative agricultural initiatives may be the best defense against cooptation by the abstract capitalist neoliberal market. Equity should not become simply another convention by which to frame the embedded economy (Murdoch et al. 1998), but the actual definition of embeddedness itself. Embeddedness, then, as a component of fair trade, is not simply producer-consumer proximity and relationship, but also social justice for all along the commodity chain, from farm worker to farmer to processor to consumer.

The DFTA is a movement-oriented and politicized group, seeking not only to gain a greater market share for small farmers and farm workers, but also to engage consumers to become advocates and to re-define what agriculture means. Brown and Getz (2008), in one of the only academic articles about DFT, neglect to bring this transformative agenda to the fore, focusing instead on the authors' views that domestic fair trade will be inextricably tied to market initiatives that are ultimately threatened by corporate cooptation and imperfect embeddedness. They emphasize that a market initiative for farm worker justice cannot replace the need for policy improvement, but neglect to recognize the ways that policy and economics are linked, and the potential for consumer pressure to influence policy, as with the case of organics (Allen and Kovach 2000). The DFTA website indicates it is well aware of these threats, and the need to forego mere market gain if it compromises lasting social change. The next chapter discusses in more depth

the structure of the Domestic Fair Trade Association, and outlines my method for data collection regarding how the DFTA understands the meaning of fair trade in a North American context, the obstacles it faces, and how it hopes to create a more transparent, embedded and ultimately transformed food system.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

While DFTA actors have a strong vision of agro-food system transformation, they desire to create a pragmatic understanding of how that transformation may come about. This theory of practical action is reflected in the way the DFTA is structured. Examining the structure of the DFTA as a grassroots organization seeking to implement concrete action in the food system will aid in understanding how the DFTA understands its vision, threats, and trajectory. My methods for data collection during this study include qualitative data collection and content analysis, based on in-depth interviews with DFTA members. In this chapter I first give a brief overview the DFTA's organizational structure, including membership, food system sector representation, and the role of the Board of Directors and Executive Director. I then discuss my method of data collection and analysis for this study as well as its strengths and weaknesses.

#### **Overview of the DFTA Organizational Structure**

##### *Membership*

Membership in the DFTA is available through an application process to businesses and organizations, which fall into five sectors, discussed below. The DFTA draws its financial support from annual membership dues, ranging from \$200 to \$12,500, based on the annual revenue of the applicant organization. An individual may become a Friend of the DFTA, which is essentially a non-voting supporter of the Association. The "Benefits to Being a Member in the DFTA" (DFTA website 2009) emphasizes the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in all areas from sharing best practices, to creating

socially just market chains, to educating the consumer about fair trade in the market place.

The application for membership in the DFTA is quite lengthy, and involves a process of self-assessment for organizations wishing to join, as well as peer review and verification of socially just practices. The DFTA Membership Application (2009:5) states:

While the Principles for Domestic Fair Trade provide a basic philosophy and guide for member organizations, we also need a system of verification of organizational commitment to the principles not just in word but also in practice. This will ensure that the organizations involved in the Association share a common commitment to the Principles as well as to ongoing improvement in their implementation. Our goal is to create a system that has integrity while also being practical. In a manner similar to the membership processes of other Fair Trade Associations, this system provides for self-assessment, peer review and ongoing improvement goals.

While any organization is welcome to apply for membership, the application process seeks to verify an applicant organization's claim of fair trade practices. As the Membership Application (2009:5) goes on to state:

Members of the Association must be committed to the concept of trade as a mechanism for social justice and sustainability. The mission and activities of the organization should speak to the goals of fairness, equity, sustainable agriculture and social justice in the food system, in keeping with the Principles for Domestic Fair Trade. For trading organizations (farmer organizations, processors and marketers, and retailers), there should be a goal of bringing 100% of their commercial activities into alignment with these principles. Advocacy organizations must likewise seek to enact the principles in their activities.

Organizations have been turned-down for membership in the past (Personal Communication with DFTA 2009). To date, thirty-five organizations hold membership in the DFTA (DFTA website 2009), and several others are undergoing the membership process. The DFTA membership meets annually in December, during which new membership applicants are voted upon for acceptance into the Association, and member

organizations are given the opportunity to take part in committees and discussion regarding the goals and tasks for the coming year. During the annual meeting, members also vote to adopt policy positions for the DFTA to take, and to elect new board members if vacancies exist.

### *The Five Sectors*

The DFTA membership is composed of five sectors representing major stakeholders in the food industry who are marginalized in the present system. The membership application states, “In launching the movement for domestic fair trade, we consciously reached out to a broad set of stakeholders in the food system. Rather than focusing only on trading entities, we decided that members of the Association should likewise be drawn from these key stakeholders” (DFTA Membership Application 2009:5). The DFTA gives working definitions of each sector, which are open for revision in the future if needed. As the need for new sectors emerges, the DFTA is committed to expanding the sectors to include new categories, such as food system workers, fishers, and small craft manufacturers (DFTA Memberships Application 2009:6).

A summary of the sector definitions as given on the DFTA Membership Application (2009:6) is as follows:

- **Farmers and Farmer Co-operatives and Associations:** Family and small-scale farmers and democratic farmers’ co-operatives that serve and represent them, committed to a vision of fair trade, food justice and sustainable agriculture.
- **Farm Workers’ Organizations:** Organizations representing agricultural workers that are dedicated to social justice and human rights for workers, and particularly those with an agrarian vision that includes farm labor and small producers.

- **Intermediary Trading Organizations:** Organizations whose main activity is trade with other organizations or enterprises, and who are committed to fair trade, sustainable agriculture, and social justice.
- **Retailers and Consumer Co-operatives and Associations:** Retailers and other organizations whose main activity is bringing [food] products to the end consumer, and who support fair trade, family farming, sustainable agriculture, and social justice.
- **Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations:** Organizations that do not fall under one of the categories listed above, whose main activity is not trade, and that work for one or more of the following: fair trade, social justice, human rights for workers, family farming, sustainable agriculture, food security, health, and conscientious consumption.

*The Board of Directors and Executive Director*

In 2008, the DFTA began the process of becoming a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. The Board of Directors, previously the Steering Committee, is comprised of eleven members (although at the time of this study, only nine positions were filled). Each sector is represented by two Board Members. One Board Member is not attached to a sector and is therefore considered “At Large.” Board members are elected by the DFTA membership, serve a two-to-three year voluntary term, and must be attached to a DFTA member organization. The Chair of the Board is elected by the Board Members. The DFTA Executive Director is a paid position, presently at one quarter of full-time.

Board Members serve on committees, which include: Membership, Criteria, Marketing and Member Services, and Draft (DFTA website 2009). The Board meets face-to-face twice annually, usually in June and at the DFTA Annual Meeting in December. Additionally, they hold monthly conference calls. Board Members are responsible for financial management of the DFTA, fundraising, communicating with



their sector membership, as well as supervising the duties of the Executive Director. The Board is involved with creating and modifying official DFTA documents and reports, as well as reviewing membership applications. All of the members of the Board of Directors are expected to have strong commitments to the DFTA principles, and are therefore required to be familiar with and understand the mission and vision of the organization, and to represent the DFTA in their communities and to their stakeholder groups.

## **Research Design**

### *Data Collection*

#### The Sample

In this study, my aim was to understand how those formulating and guiding the Domestic Fair Trade Association perceive the role of DFT in the market place. Accordingly, I attempted to achieve a cohesive sample (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006:73) and to interview the entire DFTA Board of Directors, as well as the Executive Director. The Board Members are deeply involved in the formation and articulation of DFT principles and goals, and were therefore able to provide insights into the DFTA vision of a transformed agro-food industry.

In order to make initial contact with the DFTA, I emailed the DFTA Coordinator, at that time the only staff person, in December 2008. She became my “gatekeeper” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006:241-2) for this study, placing me in contact with the whole of the Board of Directors over the coming months, as well as the Executive Director, when she was hired in May. I sent emails to each Board Member and the Executive Director, explaining the objective of my study, and asking them to agree to an hour-long telephone interview. Of the eleven Board Members I contacted, two had stepped-down

from the board due to changes in employment, leaving a potential for ten interviews, including the Executive Director. Eight of the current nine Board Members and the Executive Director responded to my request and agreed to interviews. For unknown reasons, a ninth Board Member did not respond to my request for an interview during this study, but has since been in contact with me and has agreed to participate in future research.

Among the eight Board Members are two representatives from each of three sectors: farm workers’ organizations, intermediary trading organizations, and NGO/civil society organizations. The other two Board Member participants include one representative from the farmer Associations/farmer co-operative sector and one representative from the retailer/consumer co-operatives sector. The Board Member “At Large” seat was not filled during the time of this study. Table 3 describes the study participants by sector.

**Table 3: Study Participation by Sector Representation**

Sector Representation	Number of Participants N=9
Farmer's Co-operative or Association	1
Farm workers' Association	2
Intermediary Trading Organization	2
Retailer or Consumer Co-operative	1
Non-Governmental Organization or Civil Society	2
Executive Director (Does not represent a sector)	1

### Semi-Structured Telephone Interviews

In order to gain insight into how those deeply involved in the DFTA understand of the role of DFT in the market place, I used a semi-structured interview format (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006:125-126). This approach to data collection enabled me to ask questions about how the participants think about domestic fair trade, while allowing them to elaborate on the areas they found most important in their work. I designed an interview guide that included four main topic areas: (1) the participant's history and background in agricultural and food trade issues; (2) the role of values in the market place; (3) the role of domestic fair trade in the market; and (4) the obstacles facing domestic fair trade. For the complete interview guide, see Appendix A. The interview guide focused the conversation in the direction of my study objective. I also allowed the participants as much opportunity as possible to talk about the things that are important to them in their work with fair trade and organic issues, as well as the opportunity for me to follow-up on questions and topics during the interview. In each interview, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, while maintaining a natural flow of conversation guided by the interview topics (Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Since the DFTA is an organization with membership across the United States and Canada, the most convenient method of conducting interviews was over the telephone. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for coding and content analysis (see Data Analysis section below). At the beginning of each interview, I told the participant his or her identity, and the identity of his or her employer (which is a DFTA member) would remain confidential. Additionally, I gave the interviewee the opportunity to voice any of his or her wishes regarding the data collection process, as well as the opportunity to

clarify my objectives for the study or pose any question he or she wished to ask. Interviews lasted between thirty-minutes and an hour and fifteen-minutes. At the end of the interview, I asked the participant if I might return to him or her for clarification or for future research. Each participant consented. In the data analysis in Chapter Four, I often use direct quotes to illustrate topics more fully. When doing so, I have left the speaker's identity confidential. Table 4 gives the frequency of quotations in Chapter Four for each study participant.

**Table 4: Frequency of Quotations for Study Participants**

Participant	Frequency of Quotation
1	12
2	7
3	2
4	13
5	9
6	5
7	7
8	4
9	10

Review of DFTA Website Information and Media Articles

In addition to collecting data through interviews, I used extensive public information about the Domestic Fair Trade Association supplied on their official website, [www.dftAssociation.org](http://www.dftAssociation.org). Included on the website are the DFTA vision and mission statements, objectives, and principles; a history of the “Domestic Fair Trade Movement”; a rationale for the importance and appropriateness of a fair trade initiative within the Global North; the current membership, Board of Directors, and standing committees;

membership information; links to news articles related to domestic fair trade; and policy statements put forth by the Association. I was also provided by the Board of Directors with a draft copy of the DFTA Certification Criteria, which is not available through their website. I used this information to inform the data collected in the interviews and to provide the formal context within which the DFTA is situated.

To complement the data, I used newspaper, radio, and internet articles written about the DFTA from 2003 to 2008. These included articles published in magazines and newspapers by DFTA Board Members as well as interviews by journalists. I treated this data as secondary to the interviews and used it to provide a context and in some cases examples of the DFTA's work.

### *Data Analysis*

Data collected for this study is qualitative in nature. In order to analyze it, I employed a content analysis approach outlined in Hesse-Beber and Leavy (2006:348-359). Through the open-coding process, I developed open-ended descriptive codes, and then larger categories, which became the topics used for discussion in next chapter. Under the categories, I used sub-categories, which further break down and illustrate the meaning of the data. The website and media data were analyzed and coded in the same manner as the interviews.

### **Strengths and Limitations of Study**

One of the strengths of this study is the response rate of the participants. Of the ten possible interviewees contacted, nine responded and agreed to an interview, a 90% response rate. Another strength is the saturation of information provided in the

interviews. That is, by the end of the interview process, much of the information given by the participants echoed themes from earlier interviews. This gives confidence that the information gathered represents the views of the DFTA Board of Directors elaborated in the next chapter. To further reinforce this claim of validity, I attended the DFTA Annual Meeting after I had collected, coded, and analyzed the data, and found many of the same themes, ideas, and conclusions that came out in my data were reiterated among the DFTA membership during formal discussions and informal conversation. A third strength of this study is the amount of in-depth information provided during the interviews, and how this speaks to the textual data collected from the DFTA website and other media sources. The interview data fills-in the textual data in a way that has not been previously done for the DFTA.

A limitation of this study is that the data was collected over the telephone, rather than face-to-face with the participants. While face-to-face interviews would have been logistically difficult, they would have provided a rich and contextualized setting. Some of the physical cues, such as facial expressions and body language during the interview, were not able to be observed and recorded during my telephone interviews. Another limitation to this study is the fact that the DFTA is a very new organization that has not had the opportunity to put into action many of the initiatives it hopes to accomplish. Therefore, this study is based on the perceptions, rather than the concrete actions, of those deeply involved in the DFTA. A drawback of studying a new initiative is that it is bound to very recent history and to the present. At the same time, this study serves to provide baseline data about a new alternative agro-food initiative that aims to accomplish

concrete goals in the coming years, and a detailed foundation upon which future studies can be built.





**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC FAIR TRADE**  
**AS TRANSFORMING THE MARKET**

**Introduction**

The DFTA website (2009) indicates that those involved with the organization have a strong commitment to fair trade principles and organic production as essential to the transformation the current agricultural system using a market strategy. Since all of the participants in this study are deeply involved in one or both of these initiatives, it is important contextualize what they hope to bring to the discussion on food and agricultural issues within their backgrounds. Note that the definition of fair trade and the meaning of a fair trade label were often conflated in these interviews. I have attempted to indicate when a definition of fair trade was given in relation to an initiative, such as a label or a market claim, as opposed to fair trade as a concept about transformed economic relationships.

I will begin this chapter with describing how the participants in this study define domestic fair trade, in relation to both the international fair trade and the organic initiatives, including transparency, empowerment, and sustainability. I will then examine what DFTA members understand to be the obstacles to a successful domestic fair trade initiative, which include guarding their strong criteria and gaining and maintaining consumer participation. Finally, I will conclude with how the DFTA hopes to implement their understanding of the definition of fair trade, as well as how they hope to build a movement that will be a formidable challenge to the dominant paradigm of the globalized industrial agricultural model. The DFTA hopes to create a coalition and space for dialogue about the future of the initiative, to create alternative business models based on

social justice, to raise consumer awareness about agricultural issues, and to ultimately change policy to reflect a more just market place.

### **Defining a Movement: the Meaning of Domestic Fair Trade**

The DFTA website (2009:np) states that it is as a coalition of organizations that have:

come together to contribute to a movement for fairness, equity, and sustainability that supports family-scale farming, farmer-led initiatives such as farmer co-operatives, just conditions for farm workers, and the strengthening of the organic agricultural movement... Our organizations seek to bring these efforts together with mission-based traders, retailers, and consumers to contribute to the movement for a more equitable, diverse and sustainable agriculture in North America and around the world.

The DFTA website (2009:np) goes on to define fair trade as a system where:

Contributions of all workers and farmers are valued. Workers rights, human rights, and human dignity are affirmed and promoted. Fair Trade is synonymous with fair wages, fair prices, and fair practices. Risks and rewards are equitably shared. Information will be readily available on where, how, and by whom every product is grown, processed, and distributed. All practices from source to table are environmentally sustainable as well as economically just. Direct trade and long-term relationships dominate the food economy. Strong local communities are the foundation of society. Power is shared and development is grassroots driven and co-operative. Fairness is found in all relations from source to table. What a community eats is based squarely in the context of community building and social justice. Cultural rights are recognized and honored.

Likewise, they list fourteen principles that substantiate the meaning of fair trade in a domestic landscape, including: equality and opportunity; direct trade; fair and stable pricing; shared risk and affordable credit; long-term trade relationships; sustainable agriculture; appropriate technology; indigenous peoples' rights; transparency and accountability; and education and advocacy (DFTA website 2009:np; for a complete description of the DFTA's Principles, see Table 2 on page 24). With this definition of fair

trade in mind, I sought in the interviews to elucidate further how members of the DFTA understand what fair trade means in the context of the North American agricultural landscape.

A founding DFTA member relates his definition of fair trade to the principles given above:

I think that the statement of principles that we've put out there is our vision for what the core values for fair trade should be. And I think we've developed those principles in part to get a dialogue going about what those core values are. And what we essentially tried to do is take the principles adopted by the early [international fair trade] movement... and translate them into a domestic setting so that it would be clear that we are not trying to compete with the ideals of the international movement, but actually reinforce it by applying those values locally, regionally, domestically.

Another member places his definition of fair trade in the context of the organic initiatives, which he was involved with early on. He states, "It became clear that as the organic rules came out the USDA would not include what many of us thought was always a part of organic, which was justice." He goes on to state that any definition of domestic fair trade should include rights and responsibilities for all those along the supply chain, including:

transparency, health and safety, right of workers to collective bargaining, and those same rights are applied to farmers. And then the buyers have rights. If they say I need so much of this at a certain time, or we've agreed to this price, and the farmer needs to be able to deliver that, to meet the quality and meet the needs of the buyer. We try to create what we call a triple win concept.

The definitions for domestic fair trade given by the Board Members fall along a continuum of application to abstraction. For some members, fair trade is defined in the somewhat abstract concepts of social justice and equity, while for others, fair trade is a more concrete manifestation of how fairness is operationalized in the real experiences of

farm workers, farmers, processors, and consumers. Despite the diversity of positions from which DFTA Board Members approach domestic fair trade, common ideas about what fair trade means in theory and on the ground emerge in concert with the DFTA principles above. Below is a discussion of the most commonly voiced elements of what social justice means for domestic fair trade: transparency, empowerment, and sustainability. The emphasis of these three categories is not necessarily to the exclusion of the DFTA's exhaustive principles, but rather these are categories in which the entirety of the principles are understood. As one participant succinctly stated in reference to any initiative endorsed by the DFTA, "It should represent all the principles the DFTA stands for. Because if one element is missing, it becomes meaningless in some ways."

#### *Transparency and Authenticity along the Entire Food Chain*

Transparency along the entire commodity chain, from farm worker all the way to the consumer, was the most commonly and forcefully mentioned aspect of domestic fair trade by participants in this study. The participants in this study used the notion of transparency in two interrelated ways. The first type of transparency denotes an honesty and forthrightness in business practices, so that all those along the supply chain are treated with integrity and fairness. The second notion of transparency goes deeper into the relationships that govern the supply chain. It is concerned with creating a more relational market, where exchanges become transparent through trust, risk sharing, and long-term relationships, akin to Polanyi's (1944) embeddedness discussed above.

An authentic domestic fair trade initiative will guard its principles and the veracity of claims made by those who take part in it. Included in transparency is the ability for the consumer to know that at every stage of production, a fair price was paid

and fair working conditions were followed. Additionally, transparent business practices linking farm workers to farmers, farmers to processors, processors to retailers, and retailers to consumers are important to all of the participants in building trust relationships along the commodity chain. Without this transparency as a cornerstone to domestic fair trade, it is subject to watering-down and cooptation by interests that might distort the market claims of fairness for profit. As Jaffee and Howard (2009) point out, attention to the way these relationships are built may in fact be a potential way of overcoming the threat of cooptation by market-driven interests. One member states this dilemma in relation to the international fair trade labeling system:

My core concern about a seal is that you look at the market place. Unfortunately the fair trade seal has in most cases replaced the identity of the farmer. Which I think is really unfortunate and goes against the original principles of fair trade...the idea of transparency, of knowing your farmer, knowing the person who produced your product, and reinforcing their position in the market place has sort of been lost behind the marketing logic of the seal. Just look for the seal. In my opinion, we really should be looking for the farmer.

Re-embedding the food system in a network of relationships becomes a central part of transparency as understood by the DFTA members. Another participant in this study described fair trade as a way to “just tell the story of how the business is doing a good job. And how they are being a good actor in the community and doing right by their workers.” She goes onto say that complete transparency is a foundational part of fair trade:

The business has got to be willing to open up their books and show that this is what they’re doing. And be willing to have people come to the farm or the place of business and talk with the workers and have it be completely open and visible that they are doing a good job.

This was reinforced by another member, who reflected in a similar way:

I guess part of what our assessment of international fair trade was that it was too narrow of a definition ... We're attempting to broaden the scope and say that it's really this idea of the entire chain from the worker all the way to the retail worker and everyone in between. And trying to look at these relationships and create transparency about them. And create incentives for cooperation across that chain in a way that's fair.

The notion of transparency along the food chain in both business practices and in creating a more relational market can be found in the meaning of the word "fair." One member stated:

the word fair or the word just are inherently high-bar words, or inherently strict. You can't have something that's mildly just. You can't treat somebody somewhat better, but still be exploiting them, and say that it's fair. And so, the use of those terms and that kind of wording in and of itself to me says you are meeting a very high bar... and ... so I think that anything that doesn't really convey a true justice but uses those kind of terms is doing more harm than good in the market place because on the one hand its tricking consumers, deceiving consumers. And on the other hand it's also diluting the whole concept so that people will ultimately become disillusioned with the idea.

Transparency is not an end to itself for domestic fair traders; but it should lead to empowerment, as trust relationships based on fairness removes uncertainty from economic transactions. A new business model of empowerment for those marginalized at all stages of the supply chain is an ideal outcome of a fair trade initiative. The next section examines how empowerment is another keystone to the meaning of domestic fair trade.

#### *Empowerment of the Marginalized from Worker to Consumer*

A resounding theme in all of the interviewees' understandings of DFT is empowerment of farm workers, who are undoubtedly the most marginalized members of the agricultural community. When asked to define social justice, the participants in this study unanimously related it to the treatment of farm workers. While farm workers are

by far the most marginalized, the members of the DFTA are not dismissive of the difficulties which small-scale farmers and low-income consumers face in producing and securing healthy, appropriate, and just food. A definition of DFT, then, includes farm workers' rights as a primary component, but also farmers' and consumers' concerns. As the retail co-operative representative, who is well acquainted with all three groups in her work as a produce buyer for an inner-city community food co-operative, states: "[Fair trade] still makes sure that... the most vulnerable or least powerful groups affected have a voice and have some power in those relationships." Another member echoed this understanding of empowerment for all:

Everyone is taken care of. Or everyone is treated fairly. I guess not just fairly, but treated well. That we are not forgetting who is producing the food, but we are also not forgetting who needs to consume healthy food. Really encompassing all of us, in making sure that every one is treated well at every step along the way.

Empowerment of farm workers is understood very concretely. When asked what farm worker justice means, all participants responded with clearly articulated areas that need attention in order to move toward it. One member responded:

The specifics should include following the law for one thing... Giving them appropriate breaks, the right amount of pay, not paying them below minimum wage, but definitely paying them more than minimum wage. It would be paying them a living wage if the business is able to pay them a living wage. And if it's not able to at the time, it would show how it's working towards being able to pay a living wage.

Likewise, another member reinforced this idea:

The workers have to be paid fair wages, or livable wages, not just what [is] required by law. They also have to be given benefits... and the other important thing... is the right to organize... in most of the states, that right is not there.

Another member says similarly that the meaning of fair trade includes:

of course social justice. The workers not only get fair pay, but they have a voice in their work environment, whether it's... the amount of time they work or when they get breaks... they can say when it's not working for them basically... Going back to the exposure [to pesticides and chemicals] issue, that's very important too. We need to be aware of that even for the folks that are maybe the temporary workers that are here from other countries that they are not treated [like] a full time employee with the protection... So I think that's one thing domestic fair trade can help the consumer understand: that they are supporting the workers and the environment that they are working in.

A recognized obstacle that must be overcome in order for workers to receive living wages is the marginalization of the small-scale organic farmer. As one participant acknowledges, social justice:

means that the ... employees on the farm are paid fairly and ... they have the same labor rights as any of the rest of us. Which is not a guarantee if you're a farm worker because ... they don't have the guaranteed rights to organize into a union like other people do. But domestic fair trade recognizes their human right to do that ... [Farm workers are] paid fairly for their important work... they have safe working conditions, and they're treated with respect. What [domestic fair trade] could maybe one day achieve is that small family farmers can make a living ... You know, back in the day it was more possible, and now it's not.

A necessary link must be made between the farm worker and the farmer, so that the farmer is able to become empowered and earn a living him- or herself. One member acknowledges this obstacle to farm worker rights:

If we are looking at a small-scale family farmer who has eight employees, it's not realistic to think that from one day to the next [he or she] can suddenly start providing health care to their workers. But what we can do is really look at what profits are being taken in by the farm, and how equitably that is being shared among the workers. And what can be done through certification programs to bring more money to the farm itself. And then out of that money being brought to the farm, it would go not only to the farmer but also to the workers so that... everyone would be benefiting.

Likewise, another participant stated that domestic fair trade should strive:

to be able to always link the farmer and the workers together so that the claim is for both of them. And it creates rights for workers, rights for



farmers, and rights for buyers. But also responsibilities for all three as well.

Understanding empowerment as a primary ingredient to domestic fair trade requires that those most affected by the food system have a voice in how the system is reformed. The clear commitment to a diverse coalition of stakeholders and equal representation on the DFTA board reinforces this understanding of empowerment. As one member states, a fair trade initiative, such as a label,

should be something that's controlled by the people that it affects. Not necessarily that the fox should be guarding the hen house or whatever. But... if it's something that's supposed to support the farmers and the farm workers, then it should be something that they have ownership over as well.

Empowerment was also used in relation to the consumer, who is arguably marginalized in the market place by both false claims made by labels and by an obfuscated supply chain where the producer is disconnected from the consumer. Additionally, the healthfulness of food is a concern for DFTA members. One member stated that:

the best outcome would be to help foster a co-operative economy where we all have access to and can afford the food that we deserve. That it will make us healthy and make our country healthy. That we'll just kind of, that we'll raise everybody's standard of living. I hope.

Another member similarly emphasized that the consumer is an important link in the empowerment chain, which should include the farm worker, the farmer, and the retailer as well. She states:

So for me [the most important thing] is really... empowerment- is an overused word- but yeah, empowering for the farmers or the producers... and I think also for consumers because they... [should] have the power... to know more about where their food's coming from, and they have the power to choose something that's different from...the average product that's on the shelf.

The natural outcome of empowerment is a more sustainable food system, both for the environment and for society. The voice of the most vulnerable people on the supply chain is given heed, and their concerns are a central part of how DFT is defined. A domestic fair trade movement will empower those without power in order to bring equity to the market. In the next section, how DFTA Board Members link environmental sustainability and social justice is examined. Organic agriculture is understood, if not uniformly, as important to a socially just food system.

### *Sustainability for People and Environment*

Since domestic fair trade has emerged from not only international fair trade, but also organics, environmental sustainability is of concern to DFTA members. Environmental sustainability should not eclipse social sustainability; rather the two are understood as necessary in transforming the agricultural food system and as central to a definition of fair trade. As one participant stated of her organization, “We also try to strive for environmental sustainability... We have requirements where the farmers are taking care of the environment as well as the workers.” A sustainable social and environmental landscape through fair trade will likewise “make sense for the community. It’s not something that’s imposed from outside,” according to one member.

As a response to the lack of social justice criteria in the USDA organic standards, the Domestic Fair Trade Association does not seek to undermine organics, but rather reinforce its early vision of healthy farmland and communities. The DFTA website (2009:np) states, “It is our hope that we may create a more holistic model of commerce that is consistent with the basic values of international fair trade, and builds on the values

of the organic and sustainable agricultural movements.” The DFTA website (2009:np) goes on to read:

The organic and sustainable agricultural movements have grown in impact, focusing on the development and promotion of credible market-based claims for environmentally sound and humanely raised products produced by family farmers which meet consumer expectations for safe, healthy and nutritious products.

Domestic fair traders seek to go beyond environmental claims for sustainability to social claims for justice. As one member states of a potential domestic fair trade labeling initiative:

It’s gonna be a different certification to let the consumers know that our products are.. not only organic or free of chemicals, but also have all the concepts of sustainability... it’s a more sustainable product that is taking care of social justice for the participants in... the production and the delivery of the product. More sustainable than just organic, chemical free. [Who has] been taken care of is the environment, farm workers, family businesses and farms, co-ops, the right to organize under any type of organization.... It’s better than organics.

Another representative gives a similar understanding of how DFTA goes beyond environmental claims of sustainability:

I think it’s really important to have something that indicates that your purchase of an organic product goes beyond organic but also for social justice. I think you can reach social justice without going organic necessarily. And again that conversation comes up a lot. A lot of the folks are like you can’t have social justice without organic, but, some folks say you can.

Again, in concert with farm workers’ rights, another representative states that

there will be no just food, or more sustainable food without social justice for farm workers. It can be organic, but organic is just no chemicals. But workers in the field are making very little wages and they do not have the right to work collectively or organize themselves. They end up with very little.

Social sustainability is also understood as the ability for the small-scale farmer to stay afloat in an increasingly consolidated agricultural market. Therefore, a holistic view of sustainability requires new ways for farmers to participate in the market so that they are not exploited and are able to provide a living wage to their workers. The DFTA is intent on building alternative business models that demonstrate how social justice and fairness can successfully compete in the market place, similar to how international fair trade has done. Likewise, sustainability includes an agricultural landscape free of harmful chemicals, and characterized by diversified small-scale family farms that are rooted in the community. The DFTA website (2009:np) give a holistic definition of sustainable agriculture:

Fair Trade emphasizes a holistic approach to agriculture, supporting sustainable agricultural strategies such as Organic, Biodynamic, non-toxic Bio-intensive Integrated Pest Management, farm diversification and small-scale farming that protect the environment, sustain farming communities, and provide consumers with quality, healthy food. Fair Trade emphasizes the biodiversity of traditional agriculture, supports the rights of farmers to their own seed, and preserves cultural diversity.

The notions of transparency, empowerment, and sustainability that recur throughout the data are defined in concert and in some cases in reaction to IFT and organics. As one member said:

That takes us back to transparency. Because you can't really say we treat workers fairly without having the opportunity for consumers or other observers to speak with the workers. To know who they are. To know where they are. To know whether this is just top down scenario model of social justice, or an empowerment model in what they think is fair and socially just.

The DFTA hopes to build upon and reinforce the principles of both the international and organic strategies. At the same time, the participants in this study were keenly aware of challenges IFT and organics have faced; and that they are susceptible to many of the

same obstacles. This next section examines how the DFTA members who participated in this study understand the threats to their goal of transforming the agro-food system.

### **Defining Tension: Growing the Market while Maintaining Integrity**

DFTA members are cognizant of the struggles facing a market-based initiative that has the ultimate goal of transforming the very market it is using to create change. Each interviewee used either international fair trade, organics, or both to illustrate both the potential successes as well as obstacles for domestic fair trade. The participants in this study agreed that overcoming this tension will be difficult and require a great deal of awareness, discussion, and care in abiding by the DFTA principles. As one member stated:

To do the good thing, sometimes it takes more intense work to get it done. ... and in some cases it is difficult. Taking care of the more immediate needs is a barrier... to make a better future. I mean, we might not be very successful right now, we don't have enough to offer the people. We've got... a dream or a vision of the future. It's hard, because people have to take care of the most immediate needs.

Another member states similarly, "I think with all of these kinds of grassroots movements that become ... through the market place or through federal or international legislation, there are always many many challenges with that adoption and being able to maintain the rigor and the discipline and integrity as it expands." He goes on to assert that maintaining strong principles in a market-based initiative is always difficult:

How do you grow the market while maintaining integrity? Those are crucial. And how do you not lose your grassroots support and zeal as you begin to make market penetration? So I think those dynamics exist across the board. And I think those are the lessons we are trying to draw from in moving forward.

The data indicates two main categories under which domestic fair traders understand the threats to an authentic and transparent movement. The first is the weakening of standards. Included in this is the threat of cooptation of DFT labels through a watering down of criteria; the pressure to certify partial or “split” operations (Jaffee and Howard 2009), and the pressure to trade high-bar criteria for quick and early success in the market place. The second category is the outcome of the first: consumers will inevitably lose confidence in a market-based initiative that is not transparent and trustworthy, and does not represent a valid difference from the dominant market paradigm.

### *Guarding Against Weakening of Standards*

The failure of international fair trade to guard against the logic of large corporations viewing fair trade as a way to participate in a lucrative market is the most noticeable threat arising from the data. One member stated:

I think there are big challenges because as you look at the example of Starbucks, and look at how [TransFair was] able to move from independent coffee roasters who were buying 100% fair trade and marketing themselves as fair trade, to a Starbucks who buys 1% fair trade and gets quite a bit of good publicity, but at the end of the day didn't conform or have any requirements to improve very much of their production. And I think that was a critical juncture in the road on the international side. And we certainly have tried to learn from that lesson.

Referred to as “split operations,” corporations in both IFT and organics that do not have a commitment to becoming 100% fair trade or organic are nonetheless able to “fairwash” or “greenwash” their image by converting only a portion of their products. Space is given for some practical considerations, especially in organic operations, where complete

conversion may not be possible due to logistics. One participant describes this danger of split operations:

On the social justice side, from our perspective, we couldn't figure out how you can do that. It didn't make any sense in our point of view as a claim, to have part of the farm socially just. So we just have chosen not to go there. We know that limits who will participate early on. But I guess our perspective is still that you set a high bar and you bring in the early adopters and let them develop that market. And you bring in the rest of the percent of the market you can based on that integrity. And let the others challenge that...we're taking a deeper, not as wide, strategy.

He goes on to discuss how a less stringent criteria may invite more companies to participate early on, but have a much more shallow effect on actual change. Another member states that split operations are highly problematic because, "You could have a company that with one hand is abusing and exploiting workers in a horrific way and with the other hand able to just show one little tiny piece of their business that is somewhat better. And benefit from that in the market place. And use that to promote their business." He goes onto say that, "Where we see a lot of the larger scale corporations getting certified, we see a lot weak standards that are out there... that are not really holding them to a high enough bar."

The participants' understanding of the threat by larger corporations pressuring for a weakening of standards is in part from the international fair trade's experience. One member, who has a background in international fair trade organizations, stated that:

Part of our goal in starting the group was really to reinforce those core values. The international certification movement moving more and more toward what we... felt like were the priorities of large manufacturers and marketers rather than the producers... drifting toward large retail production and away from small farmers. Drifting toward commodity production, and still calling that fair trade. It was really drifting away from the core values that had started the movement and what we believed consumers were really interested in.

The DFTA is intentionally developing strong criteria, and is taking its time in doing so in order to ensure they represent the interests of their stakeholders. At the 2009 DFTA Annual Meeting, developing criteria for evaluation of a domestic fair trade market claim for authenticity, veracity, and stringency was a central topic. Transparency emerges as a way to uphold DFTA's strong ideals and goals. As one member states of the current DFTA:

any large corporation that walks into that group and realizes what is being asked of them, which is basically opening up their economic relationships to other people's scrutiny, would walk away right away. As long as we maintained that commitment to transparency, to being honest about our shortcomings, and being committed to developing better systems with each other, we just wouldn't run into that.

Another member confirms this when she says, "The folks who are in the DFTA right now, you know those are going to be good. You wouldn't work that hard if you're trying to be dinky. It's more what might come after. And folks who may use the term and may actually not be members and things like that. So those are things we will have to watch out for." Likewise, another member stated that:

probably the only way that... a more mainstream corporation would get involved at this... earlier stage, would be if the principles and criteria were diluted enough to make it easy for them. They are not going to stick their neck out. And I think looking at the principles that DFTA has agreed to, they're not going to appeal to a mainstream business right now.

One member speaks of the personal commitment that DFTA members have to what they do, not just as business people, but also as activists seeking to radically re-define the way agriculture is practiced in North America. She speaks of the personal commitment of DFTA members to maintaining a high bar. "This stuff isn't just something they do when they go to work. And maybe that's it. It's not something you do when you go work. It is part of who you are. You know. It is part of... how you're



trying to be in the world.” Likewise, another member asserts, “We can honestly say that we care about standards, and we care about continual improvement based on domestic fair trade principles.”

A central reason for maintaining the integrity of what domestic fair trade represents lies in the value consumers give to it in the market place. As a market-based initiative, domestic fair trade will only be successful if it is able to engage consumers with authentic and transparent alternatives to the current system, and ensure them that by purchasing domestically fair traded items, they are making some sort of difference on the ground for farm workers and farmers. The next section will examine how DFTA members understand the important role of the consumer, and the value of his or her confidence in a domestic fair trade initiative.

### *Maintaining Consumer Confidence*

The consumer plays a central role in the success of any market-based initiative. The DFTA members understand this, and are intent on guarding the veracity of DFT so that it may make a difference to farmers and farm workers on the ground. A participant who has extensive experience with international fair trade recognizes the importance of consumer trust in a label. He states,

In my experience in the market place talking to consumers and what they think they’re buying when they buy fair trade, it’s all about small farmers, it’s about sustainability, it’s about biodiversity, it’s about supporting local communities. And the best way to sort of reinforce those values and ensure that those are actually what underlies a movement or a seal or a product is transparency. And making sure that the claims that are being made are not only certified by a seal but can actually be seen by the consumer so the consumer can make those judgments now for themselves.

He goes on to describe how the certification of plantations in international fair trade has corroded the trust consumers place in the movement. How the DFTA wants to approach maintaining consumer confidence is through complete transparency. One member states:

Instead of just saying trust us, what we're saying is we actually investigated the claims here and information is here that says how much the worker was paid, how much the farmer was paid, how it was grown, etc., we certified to be correct. And that is not currently how the international system works at all. It basically says, trust us. And you know, after more than ten years of working within that fair trade system, I as a consumer don't have a lot of trust for that system, to be honest. I don't think it is transparent enough to deserve the trust that it assumes.

Another consumer issue to overcome is the apathy toward market claims made by organic and social justice labels. The label does not educate the consumer to ask the right questions; instead, 100% fair trade certified and organic products are mixed in with partially fair trade and organic products. The consumer has no way of telling them apart in the market place. One member who works for a company that produces multi-component 100% fair trade products, describes this issue:

I think that a lot of consumers when they see these things they just think that the product is fair trade, just like they think it's organic. Or if they see you know so and so's organic shampoo they don't care, they don't do the research to go oh, is that the one 1% essential oil? They think oh, this shampoo is fair trade or organic or whatever it says on that label... I think that's going to become an issue for folks like us with multi-component products because... you can have just one small token ingredient that may not even effect the formulation that much be fair trade and get that word on them.

She goes onto describe the responsibility that certification organizations, as the DFTA is hoping to become, have in creating a system where a label can be trusted to represent the full meaning of fair trade. She says, "A certification program needs to be clear about who they are and what they are so that when folks...look and see they're a member of the DFTA, that has substance, you know that it means something."

This section has identified the major threats to domestic fair trade as understood by the participants in this study. The next section will examine how the DFTA hopes to create social change in the agricultural system so that it comes to reflect a transparent and relational market place wherein all stakeholders are empowered to engage in the creation of a socially and environmentally sustainable food system.

### **Implementing Meaning: Creating a New Type of Market**

The DFTA's mission is to "promote and protect the integrity of domestic fair trade Principles through education, marketing, advocacy, and endorsements" (DFTA website 2009). The statement goes on to outline twelve objectives, which include improving the livelihood of family farmers; supporting and promoting fundamental human and labor rights; creating, promoting and participating in social justice label market initiatives; taking policy positions; and engaging all stakeholders in the process of defining sustainable agriculture. Broadly speaking, the DFTA seeks to endorse and use market-initiatives to bring social justice into the market place, ultimately leading to a re-definition of consumer culture and public policy. Data indicate that the members of the DFTA board hope to create a collaborative Association wherein debate about the shape of social justice labeling in North America can take place, guided by those most vulnerable to the outcomes, namely farm workers and small-scale farmers. Creation of alternative businesses and economic models based on social justice and community or worker participation was a consistent theme among those interviewed in this study. Additionally, education and empowerment of the consumer to act in the market place according to his or her values both individually and collectively emerged as goals of the DFTA's market-based approach. Lastly, endorsement of public policy initiatives, which

support sustainable farming and social justice in the agricultural system is understood to be linked both to the creation of viable economic models and consumer demand for socially just products.

The emphasis on these four goals by interviewees above the other objectives listed in their mission objectives may be due to the place at which the DFTA is currently. The outcome, and in some instances, even the role of the Association is unclear as they seek to create a space for discussion and collaboration around social justice in the agricultural landscape and within the market place. At present, the DFTA is not interested in introducing a labeling initiative, but rather seeks to endorse or discredit market claims about social justice. Participants in this study indicate that the DFTA may evolve to fill needs in the market place as they arise. As one interviewee stated, “It’s... just a really new organization... and because it is such a broad coalition, I think that it’s sort of difficult to get off the ground in that way.”

It is my position that careful attention to how DFTA members understand using the market to bring about social justice the agro-food system can illuminate the potential of domestic fair trade to create social change. I argue that the DFTA’s goals, emphasized by the participants in this study, are not separate and distinct, but connected as outcomes of the same philosophy of collaboration above competition, co-operative economies over profit-driven ventures, and collective action tied to personal responsibility for shaping the food system. These goals are the outcomes of the DFTA’s understanding about what fair trade means. Likewise, they are responses to the threats domestic fair trade faces as it seeks to transform the market.

*Creating a New Space for Dialogue: Social Justice Coalition Building*

The DFTA website (2009:np) states, “A goal of the DFTA is to work with stakeholders to define what the meaning of sustainable agriculture is.” Every interviewee in this study indicated an aim of the DFTA is to be an inclusive Association wherein the voices all stakeholders were taken seriously and weighed equally. Forming coalitions of organizations that take different approaches to the common goal of transforming the food system is central to Hassanein’s (2003) argument around food democracy. While she cites other scholars who view the divergent methods and interests in confronting the centralized and industrialized agro-food system as potentially fragmenting, she finds value in the formation of coalitions who are able to meld their many approaches into one voice, thus mobilizing diverse resources. Creating space for discussion about the meaning of domestic fair trade in this context sheds light on how the DFTA is able to work pragmatically and incrementally toward their more general and long-range vision of a just and democratized food system. One of the goals of the DFTA, as discussed above, is to collaboratively and democratically define what domestic fair trade will mean as it gains momentum in the market place. One board member connected coalition building back to the market initiative the DFTA espouses, saying:

One of the reasons we wanted to have a DFTA that really was made up of the... major stakeholders in the food system and put them in an Association as equals was so that we would be able to develop a voice to both raise questions about labels that may emerge in the market that don’t have integrity... to be able to have a base from which to have this conversation that we expect and intend will grow over time.

A central aim DFTA board members cited for building a coalition of the five stakeholder groups is to create a unified voice among stakeholders. While the member

organizations may articulate and approach issues from different angles, at the core of their struggle is the transformation of the food industry. One participant stated:

It's a holistic way of looking at... these issues. We've got some organizations more focused on farm workers, you've got co-ops... you've got the buy local people, the organic movement... But really all these different movements have a lot in common. They share many of the same values, and maybe don't use the same words to talk about them. But it is true in the DFTA that there is dialogue and we are recognizing the commonalities.

Likewise, another member described the discursive space the DFTA creates:

We're looking at the entire food system. So it's everybody from the farm worker to the retailer. Every bit of the chain in between... What traditionally happens is that everybody is in their own silo... you know, 'I'm a marketer, I'm a retailer, I'm a farmer, I'm a farm worker.' And you get all organized and interested and knowledgeable about your own sector or silo, but you have no idea what's going on in the others. And when you don't have an understanding of that, then you become in quote marks, 'selfish'... So it's when you start to look up and out and begin to understand... what's going on in the other places, you begin to get that holistic picture. And then you care.

Another member resonated with the same goal of creating a collaboration, which would form allies rather than opponents of those who are working to change the industrial food system. Speaking of the DFTA, he stated:

I think that structurally it is very unique. We did this on purpose to try to unite the voice of farm workers, of farmers, of processors and retailers and supply groups into an Association that they equally share responsibility and ownership of. So that it creates hopefully an organized voice that doesn't exist now... Because we tend to have this kind of... everybody against each other... And you can't find a unified voice. And so we're trying to create a process and a structure that can bring... the different sectors to the table so that their voices can be heard and they can find common ground.

Through this diversity, DFTA board members understand conflicts that arise as constructive discourse, leading to changes in the ways stakeholders understand their sectors in relation to the others. Not only does this model of collaboration exemplify the

structure of the DFTA, it is also mirrored in their goal of creating a new model of viable alternatives to the current dominant profit-driven market by extending this model of diverse collaboration to the creation of sustainable production and business practices in the market place.

*Creating a New Way of Business: Co-operative Economy and Sustainability*

The DFTA website (2009) states, “By creating businesses committed to principles of fairness and equity and leading by example, we hope to create positive change in the mainstream market place by influencing the conduct of conventional corporations.” In the words of one member, domestic fair trade is “a different model about bringing things to the market. It doesn’t have to be about trying to buy from the farmer at the lowest possible price. It doesn’t all have to be about profit for corporations.” The data in this study suggest that a central goal of DFTA is to go beyond creating business models that conform to the dominant system, although members are definitely interested in using existing markets and traditional business models to expand consumer consciousness. The DFTA members interviewed in this study all referred to creating opportunities for new ways of business to thrive in and ultimately transform the market place. A central criticism by many scholars of alternative food initiatives is that they do not challenge the underlying capitalist system, which is profit-driven and anchored in social inequality (Getz 2006 and Schreck 2006; Guthman 2007; Winter 2003). In order for domestic fair trade to overcome this challenge, it will have to demonstrate that a business model based on social justice can be viable in the market place, but also extend beyond the market to influence policy and consciousness.

DFTA board members use various examples, some hypothetical and some already in operation within their member organizations, to illustrate their goal of creating a counter-example of the current business model. The most commonly mentioned viable alternative is the co-operative model, wherein the workers, farmers, or community members are the owners of the business, and ultimately the profits of the business are distributed back to the community or workers equitably. One member who represents a retail co-operative stated:

I think the fact that there are several co-operatives involved in the organization speaks to that sort of alternative and viable market...because the co-operative model... is really about serving the neighborhood in a way... The money goes back into the community and nobody's making a gigantic profit because... the profits are disseminated back into the community... to that web of economic relationships...

Similarly, another member speaks in the context of agricultural co-operatives:

When things got tough people got together and formed co-ops so that they... weren't reliant on big corporations... It's a self-reliance thing, a co-operative. Working co-operatively, fairly, democratically, to achieve a goal for a community. That's what a... co-op is. So in the current economic climate, I would suggest that co-ops are part of the solution.

Of the nine interviewees in this study, four were members, workers, and/or co-owners of co-operatives. The others were well aware of the co-operative model, and spoke of collaborative economies that are about more than the bottom-line. One member discussed business models in the context of how a small-scale farming operation might set an example of fair treatment for workers:

We can look at what profits are being taken by the farm and how equitably that is being shared among the workers. And what can be done through certification programs what would bring more money to the farm itself, and then that money being brought to the farm would go not only to the farmer but also to the workers so that... everyone would be benefiting .



Another representative from a for-profit private business, spoke of her company's tremendously successful business model:

[The company's founder's] vision in 1948 was the United States of Earth, in his words. "Constructive capitalism" is where you share your profits with the earth and the workers from which the profits are made.

Not only does DFT hope to create a different model of doing business, the movement actors also have a strong commitment to ensuring those new models uphold the vision of a just and equitable economy through transparent business interaction. In reference to a social justice label likely to be endorsed by the DFTA in the coming year, one member stated:

We're trying to create a market place deal that... basically shows this is the highest bar. That when you see this on a food product, you know that... the highest standards of the highest standards are encapsulated in that deal.

The success of these collaborative models, whether they are true co-operatives or private companies whose owners are attempting to, as one member said, "change his bit of the world with his food," the goal is for domestic fair trade models to be created and to work in the market place to show that another way is possible. As member explained:

If you put a model out there in the market place and you demonstrate that it's feasible. And... the customers can find it and have confidence in it, then that is a very powerful visual tool in the market that does begin to do many things.

The success of these viable alternatives, then, will be measured not simply in their creation and endorsement by the DFTA, but in their ability to influence and "change the consumer's idea of product value," as one member said. She continues:

When I look at the companies like [two successful DFTA member organizations] who are the leaders in these industries, we can show the conventional folks that you don't have to give up the way you treat

people, the environment, animals, to have a solid spot in the market... We've been driving the prices down down down when the consumer needs to know, Wow! Look how much it takes to grow a green bean!

The DFTA understands successful alternative businesses not just as models for changing the economy, but for educating and empowering consumers to use their purchasing power in the market place for social justice. Although a goal of the DFTA is to transform consumer society, board members are pragmatic in their approach, recognizing, as one member said, "Whether we like it or not, we live in a capitalistic, consumer-driven economy. So if we start to use that consciously, then we can... begin to transform it and then we can come up with different way of relating and being and selling food."

*Creating a New Consumer Conscience: Harnessing Purchasing Power for Justice*

If the outcome of forming a coalition of diverse groups intent on changing the agro-food industry is the creation of new business models that are cognizant of the entire supply chain, then the ideal result of those new types of market place alternatives is awareness among consumers that a different way of purchasing is possible. Each interviewee in this study recognized the consumer as playing a powerful and necessary role in transforming the food system to be more just. In this way, domestic fair trade seeks to move beyond a passive consumer movement to an active engagement wherein the act of purchasing becomes an individual responsibility as well as a collective political statement (Dubuisson-Quillier and Lamine 2008; Micheletti and Follesdal 2007). As one member stated, the diverse range of organizations belonging to the DFTA are able to permeate many different levels and interests in society so that:

Each of us take it back to our avenues of marketing... and that elevates the consciousness and helps people to make that connection between globalization... and everyday consumption... What is behind all of this? To think about the chain that brought whatever it is you've got into your world.

The importance of education in the market place through DFT labels, logos, and branding emerged as an important component of how DFT will work. Each interviewee referred to the need for raising awareness, consciousness and knowledge among consumers about where and how their food and other agricultural products, were produced. A strong education theme ran through the interviews, many of which indicated the success of DFT will depend on its ability to raise consumer awareness through the use of reliable social justice label initiatives. The need for strong criteria that represents a company transparently to the consumer and increases his or her awareness of the origin of the product emerged in every interview. A goal behind endorsing labels for the DFTA is to empower the consumer to make choices in the market place that ultimately “change the situation on the ground” for farmers and farm workers. One member describes the role of a trustworthy social justice label:

People understand that by buying this product you are having an impact. You are making a change... The solution is with the individual. It's one person at a time and one choice at a time... It's about becoming conscious about... how you're eating and how and what you're purchasing... You have to buy food anyway. So here's a way that your food purchase can actually change lives.

A central question concerning international fair trade has been the level of impact market premiums have on the conditions actual producers work under (Jaffee 2007). The DFTA sees itself as an accrediting organization to assure consumers that a label carrying its endorsement will represent only the strongest criteria and have an actual impact for the producers it affects. As one member stated, labels are like “little tools that can help us

live by our personal integrity. And know with confidence what we are doing is really what it is, not what we just think it is.”

Not only does the label provide a mechanism for the consumer to live out his or her personal moral consciousness, but it should also work to create an awareness of social justice along the entire supply chain. Reconnecting people to the source of their food was brought up by multiple interviewees. As two members stated:

It’s about reconnecting people to their food... because once you reconnect to your food and the human element to it, you care. Right? And all the sudden, there’s a face, and you can go, Wow! By me buying this product, I am supporting this person, his or her family, and their community... So that is really how we’re trying to reconnect people to how their food is produced in a global market.

[Fair trade] sort of completes the chain... from farm worker to farmer, farmer to retailer, retailer to consumer. But you know, it... brings the consumer back to the farm worker, back to the beginning of the chain by identifying those issues.

DFTA members understand the goals of an ethical purchasing initiative not just in terms of reconnecting and educating consumers about the source of their food, but also to empower them to use their purchasing power to change the food system. Two members describe consumers:

I think the largest, most powerful group of people in this country, and also the least organized, is consumers. ‘Cause we’re all consumers. And there’s a huge number of people who are interested in these issues and want to buy fair food... And unless you can suddenly, instantaneously organize and lobby the government to change the entire agricultural policy and immigration policy and economic policy... I just don’t see that as being possible. So... the market is the way to start working on this stuff now.

Consumerism is all about being conscious. You know, ask questions, know that your dollar is powerful in the market place. And that the more people that we can get buying food that’s consciously created, the more we’ll change the consciousness. The more we’ll change the market.

It is unclear how—or if—members understand a label as an organizing tool to mobilize consumers toward the creation of social justice policy, although all study participants recognize the need to enlist consumers in broader, more engaged aspects of changing the food system. The role of the consumer in shaping the food system through ethical consumer campaigns is necessary and can be tremendously effective, as Allen and Kovach (2000) note; but the outcome of market-based initiatives should not and cannot be confined to the market place if significant social change is to take place. The DFTA understands raising consumer awareness and building viable social justice business models not as goals in themselves, but as means for changing consumer culture and economic policy in a deep and lasting way. In this light, the DFTA sees the catalyst for change coming from its own role as an activist organization, as well as through a consumer movement for social justice in the market place.

*Creating New Policy: From Coalition to Collective Action*

While a market initiative is central to the DFTA's goals, Board Members also understand the outcome of such an initiative as a way to influence policy around agricultural sustainability and social justice. As one member stated,

To weigh in on relevant policy... is a key factor in how well market-based initiatives can work... Market-based initiatives... cannot be a complete solution. What they are best used as is a tool on how to re-shape policy... I think the best use of fair trade... is not as an end of itself, but as a way to influence policy.

The DFTA itself has within its vision the goal of endorsing policy initiatives on immigration, the Farm Bill, organic standards, as well labor, safety, and other pertinent issues as they arise. Public support of policy, through consumer action, is understood as

necessary for complete transformation of the system. The market and policy are not seen as completely separate spheres. One member, who has a long history of lobbying for organic policy, describes the complementary roles:

The magic is when you have the market signals and the policy signals the same. And it's rare that you're able to do that... Either one is ahead or the other. But when you actually have those signals to match, you really have some dynamic change.

Several interviewees referred to USDA organic legislation as both an example of success and failure to create policy from a market initiative. While acknowledging the failure of the organic standards to incorporate social justice criteria, DFTA members recognize that organic has been a success in the market place, leading to policy around a more sustainable form of agriculture. One members stated, "I think the only reason organic is still successful is because it does represent a very fundamental difference from conventional products. The same is true of social issues."

Presently, the role of consumers as shapers of policy is unclear, although the DFTA understands them to be important in the long run, similar to influence consumers had during the creation of the USDA organic standards (Allen and Kovach 2000). DFTA members understand that policy is slow, while the market may be a more expedient way to "change the situation on the ground" in a more immediate way, as well as work toward a transformed economy in the long-term. The formation of farmer and consumer co-operatives does not require policy change, nor does the introduction of a social justice labeling program into the market place. Speaking of the immediate need for change, one member stated, "Policy is important, but it's slow... So I would say you need to be doing both [policy work and market initiatives]. If you want to have immediate energy... go buy some ethically traded organic food." Right now the DFTA's central goal is to create

momentum for social justice market initiatives, but all of the interviewees indicated that engaging and mobilizing socially conscious consumers to lobby for policy is a way in which they understand the success of domestic fair trade in the market place.

This chapter outlined how my data addresses my research objectives: (1) how DFTA Board Members articulate the meaning of domestic fair trade at the outset of this nascent movement; (2) how they perceive and intend to overcome the threat of corporate cooptation of social justice labeling seen in IFT and organics; and (3) what they hope the transformative potential of DFT will look like in the market place. I have outlined how the DFTA defines fair trade in a North American context, what they see as their biggest challenges at the onset of the domestic fair trade initiative, how they hope to create concrete manifestations of DFT as well as combat some of the threats they face.

The DFTA offers a constructive response to the criticisms of market initiatives raised in the literature on the alternative agro-food movement, even as it faces some of the very same threats and challenges as other initiatives have faced. Through a market-based approach, the DFTA hopes to create a transparent system of food production and trade, that links those involved on food production and consumption in a more relational and embedded manner. By doing so, it hopes to use the market to bring about a reinterpretation of how food is produced and consumed, with those most marginalized along the food chain in mind. The potentials and weaknesses of a market approach are not hidden from those involved with domestic fair trade, as they attempt to grapple seriously with the same issues with which international fair trade and organics have had to grapple.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**RENEWING AND EXPANDING**  
**THE ORGANIC AND FAIR TRADE VISIONS**

**Introduction**

Some very basic questions still remain: Will the rule help the early farmer-innovators of organic agriculture or hurt them? Will the costs, red tape, and paperwork drive the small farmer out of organic? Will the rule allow the entry of industrial-style confinement livestock operations? Will its regulations enhance or hurt consumer confidence? We must fight for answers to these questions that will ensure fairness and integrity, that will ensure the marriage of values and standards. This is an ongoing struggle for food with a place, a face, and a taste.

Michael Sligh (2002:278)

Sligh articulates what the DFTA is working for: a food system where the marginalized are taken care of and given the opportunity to participate in the very important vocations of growing and eating healthy and sustainable food. In this study, I have sought to gain insight into how DFT actors understand this struggle for fair food in North America. Learning from and building upon the international fair trade and the organic experiences, domestic fair traders begin their struggle for a socially just agricultural system with their eyes open to what a fair food system should look like, and what challenges they face in helping to bring it about. As a coalition of stakeholders bringing different perspectives to a common goal, the DFTA is poised at a moment in the history of fair trade and organics to deepen and broaden the meaning of alternative agriculture. This chapter summarizes my research findings, examines potential difficulties these findings present as the DFTA continues to shape domestic fair trade, and gives suggestions for future research.



**Summarization of Data:  
Defining DFT, Confronting Challenges, and Transforming the Market**

DFTA members in this study define domestic fair trade as a transparent way of doing business, wherein every group along the entire supply chain—from worker to consumer—are treated fairly, and business relationships are based on trust, honesty, and fairness. Fair trade is defined as a system that empowers those who are marginalized by the current system, most notably farm workers, but also family farmer and consumers. Finally, DFTA members define fair trade as a system of socially and environmentally sustainable food production, where the visions of international fair trade and organics are expanded to include farm worker justice and family-scale diversified farming practices. The land is taken care of, and those who work the land earn a living wage and a fair return for their labor. Farming communities are strengthened, family farms thrive, and consumers have access to healthy food that has been justly produced. The maze of food production is mapped out, so that consumers can navigate how their food is produced, farmers and farm workers have transparent business relationships, and the food system is not longer about extracting profit at the expense of human rights and environmental sustainability, but rather about taking care of all along the supply chain.

The challenges DFTA members recognize are similar to international fair trade's and organics' challenges. They see the threat of weakened criteria—which may increase initial participation by large businesses seeking to benefit from a lucrative market, but will ultimately thwart a deeper and broader social change—as a major threat to be confronted. Likewise, maintaining consumer confidence in a domestic fair trade initiative is seen as a potential obstacle that could affect DFT's transformational potential as a consumer movement. The DFTA members in this study are committed to a slow and

articulated strategy, allowing the movement-driven vision of members to shape the future of the initiative. Their aim is that doing so will both reinforce the DFTA's strong principles as well as strengthen consumer confidence, thus changing the reality on the ground for those who produce our food.

Lastly, the DFTA members in this study have a vision for a collaborative organization that seeks to bring a diverse group of stakeholders to the table as directors of the initiative. The stakeholders are committed to creating a more just food system, although they come from different perspectives with sometimes disparate ideas about how to go about transforming the food system. The DFTA hopes that they can create and endorse business models which demonstrate farm worker and farmer justice, environmental sustainability, and consumer engagement. Ultimately, the DFTA's vision is for a transformation of consumer culture to reflect economic and social justice for all in the market place; and a reformed agricultural policy that protects small farmers, farm workers, and consumers.

These themes speak to the existing academic literature on alternative agro-food initiatives, where the obstacles and potentials of market-based approaches to social change have been discussed. I contend that examining the DFTA's philosophical framework at this stage offers a constructive conceptual response to the criticisms about a market initiative's ability to transform the very market it attempts to use to create change. The way the Association is structured, as well as in the ways it understands its predecessor initiatives, offer a new approach to fair trade that mirrors the domestic fair trade initiatives within the Global South (Wilkinson 2007). As the DFTA moves ahead in

enacting its vision, some of the theoretical and practical issues discussed below will deserve attention and concrete responses by the DFTA and within the academic literature.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the DFTA's Approach**

The DFTA Board members who participated in this study have put a great deal of thought into what fair trade could accomplish within the North American food system. They have articulated domestic fair trade principles, and defined the changes in the agro-food system these principles may engender. They understand many of the threats that could potentially undermine what they are hoping to accomplish, especially in the context of international fair trade and organics. This section examines some of the strengths of the DFTA's vision and strategy in light of the academic literature, as well as some potential weaknesses and ideas for overcoming them.

#### *Building and Reflecting: DFTA's Productive Potential*

Two strengths come to the fore during this study. The first is potential for the collaborative nature of the DFTA to act as a "builder" initiative (Friedmann and McNair 2008:427) that bridges together multiple interests for constructive social change in the interstices of the market system. Another potential strength is the reflexivity the DFTA has gained through its members' experiences with international fair trade and organics. They have articulated a vision for domestic fair trade based on what they know transformation does not look like, as well as what it may come. The structure of the Board of Directors and membership of the DFTA lends itself to a new and potentially successful way of confronting and overcoming the threats IFT and organics have faced, and have often failed to surmount. Through its inherent reflexivity and broad coalition of

stakeholders, the DFTA has the ability to respond to obstacles as they arise and to maintain philosophical and structural integrity. The DFTA is positioned in a place where it can see its predecessors' challenges and failures as well as successes, and move forward based on this knowledge.

### Building Markets and Bridging Diffuse Interests

Friedmann and McNair (2008:427) discuss the potential for “builder” approaches to social change. They write that a builder strategy is a:

non-confrontational approach to social transformation, which nonetheless creates myriad nodes in a network. Just as plants growing through cracks in asphalt can eventually replace a roadway with a forest, tiny projects in the interstices of agrifood capitals might potentially—and eventually—become a new way of organizing food and agriculture, at once locally embedded and globally connected.

Friedmann and McNair are speaking of alternative agro-food initiatives that use the current market structures to create small and incremental changes, such as domestic fair traders hope to do. They cite Erik Olsen Wright, who calls for a “shift in our efforts from building a theory of dynamic *trajectory* [as in Marxist theory] to a theory of *structural possibility*” (2008:427). Similar to Hassanein’s (2003) argument for a food democracy built upon knowledgeable and empowered participants and diverse coalitions of stakeholders that create incremental and pragmatic change, Friedmann and McNair give a theory of the possible based on changes in the interstices of the dominant system. They write that builder movements work with and through markets to create change. These initiatives are on the verge of corporate cooptation. Some are compromised by profit-driven interests; but others are able to maintain their integrity, and can therefore push back against the weakening of the agro-food movement with clarified vision. Therein

lies the hope that domestic fair trade can challenge the system through interstitial change in the market place using a consumer movement and a diverse coalition.

Domestic fair trade represents an initiative based on the theory of the possible—that another way of producing and consuming food can be established through pragmatic and incremental change to the present system. While they admit their ultimate goal—nothing short of transformation of the entire way we practice agriculture and consume food—is optimistic and seemingly impossible, they call on a diverse group of stakeholders and actors who are involved in concrete daily struggles to recast North American food production and consumption. As a builder coalition, the DFTA has the potential to bridge the divides between members whose perspectives and strategies may contradict, raise a unified voice for social change, and reach a broad population of consumers. DFTA members recognize contradictions and tensions, and are committed to creating not just an understanding, but a synthesis among groups, so that their shared values and visions are articulated and they might work together for a more just food system, both locally and globally.

#### Reflexivity and Response to Threats

For Friedmann and McNair, builder strategies include the ability for initiative actors to respond to threats thoughtfully and vigilantly to threats and challenges. They write (2008:430):

Can something so apparently congenial to the dominant system, so apparently subject to appropriation by governments and corporations, as participation in markets—the pursuit of ‘educated pleasure’—actually transform the agrifood system? These projects are on an edge of absorption, cooptation and the like, and many fall over. Yet others arise and recover. They thus require constant vigilance and self-correction, experimentation and mutual learning. Interstitial social transformation is an idea that invites us to depart from a polar divide between autonomous

oppositional movements on one side, and cooptation by powerful corporations and states on the other. It is a muddy terrain into which one can sink at any time, yet perhaps one from which one can renew and redirect the journey as the swamps are mapped.

DFTA is presently at an early stage. They have yet to endorse a label, and have only recently drafted criteria for domestic fair trade operations. They have released a resolution on immigration policy, with progressive statements about the status of both documented and undocumented workers in the United States (DFTA website 2009:np). Part of empowerment for the DFTA is the ability for those affected by criteria, policy, and initiatives to have power to shape them. The DFTA emphasizes the farm worker as an important and equal stakeholder.

Jaffee and Howard (2009:np) offer this advice to new alternative agro-food initiatives that use the market and may need to be vigilant against corporate cooptation:

Because the pressures for accommodation and capture by large corporate participants can become so intense, the initial design and structure of the bodies that regulate/govern access and certification is crucial, even determinative. To the extent that the principles and visions of the movements' founders can be incorporated into the "DNA" of these bodies—their bylaws, board and committee structures, lines of authority, and funding mechanisms, to name just a few—there exists at least the possibility for safeguarding against cooptation.

Data indicates that the DFTA has within its structure the ability to reflect upon domestic fair trade claims in the market place in order to forego immediate gain for transformational potential. The by-laws of the organization are built upon its fourteen principles, the Board of Directors is structured around equal representation of all sectors, and the membership is organized on a consensus model, so that any voiced concern or dissent is taken seriously.

As Wilkinson (2007) discusses, international fair trade is not simply a monolithic initiative, but rather one with many facets and faces and motivations, so will domestic fair trade be, in perhaps a stronger and more intentional manner. The DFTA has the experiences of IFT and organics as examples of cooptation tempered by movement-driven actors who push back against the weakening of the initiative. Likewise, Jaffee (2007) argues for fair trade actors to constantly examine the legitimacy of claims being made by fair trade initiatives. This reflexivity is made possible by the structure of the DFTA, where each stakeholder sector is given equal representation on the board, and whose concerns are given equal credence. Within international fair trade organizations, such as with FLO and TransFair USA, producers were not represented within the early initiatives, and are still given nominal attention (Jaffee 2007). The DFTA is in a position to continually and consistently ask if domestic fair trade initiatives are fulfilling their claims, as those whom DFT is aimed at benefiting are involved in the verification of those claims.

Jaffee and Howard (2009:np) urge new market-based initiative actors, such as those involved with DFTA, to examine their organization's structure for inconsistencies that would lead to tensions between the market and their principles. Doing so may push the initiative away from "a more decentralized, semi-autonomous system that could foster competition among producers for the highest possible standard," and toward a "more centralized standard that pushes practices toward the least common denominator," as seen with USDA organic and the large fair trade labeling organizations in Europe and the United States. The DFTA's role as an organization that seeks to endorse or discredit DFT market claims based on unwavering criteria reflects this ability to maintain the

initiative's stringency, rather than allowing consolidation of claims that represent a lowest acceptable standard. As a sort of "social justice consumer reporting agency," as one Board Member described it, the DFTA hopes to validate market claims based on the rigor and veracity of their criteria, rather than homogenize DFT into a single label that does not distinguish for the consumer among the degrees of social justice and environmental sustainability, as is the case in both IFT and organics. In this way, domestic fair trade itself becomes a market, where the strongest and most legitimate claims for social and environmental sustainability are the most successful, and producers are competing in a "race to the top," verified by the DFTA's approval. The DFTA may avoid the threats that have befallen the TransFair USA label, where the consumer cannot be certain if market claims actually benefits producers, and where large corporations have lowered the criteria a company must meet market a fair trade certified product. The DFTA may endorse a market claim or discredit it. It can evaluate the market claim through the multiple perspectives of its stakeholders, while maintaining its autonomy as a verification body, not a label licensor. If the DFTA continues to be an independent membership organization not linked to a specific label, it may be able to safeguard the meaning of domestic fair trade in the face of threats to its integrity.

### *Overcoming Obstacles: Creating a Consumer Movement*

This data raises two potentially problematic issues. The first is the emphasis on consumers as essential for the success of DFT, and the problems that may arise bringing consumers to this new awareness. Overcoming the elitism associated with both international fair trade and organics will prove to be a part of creating a consumer movement that is broad and meaningful, not just for those who can afford to participate in



a niche market, but also for the average consumer and eater who desires to have justly produced food. Motivating consumers to go beyond conscious consumption to become food system shapers requires that domestic fair trade is visible and influential in the marketplace to the degree that it motivates political action.

The second obstacle involves the scale at which most farm worker rights abuses take place. While the DFTA emphasizes the family-scale organic farm, it is also strongly committed to the welfare of farm workers, many of whom are employed on large-scale industrial farms that are outside of the scope of the DFTA's membership. How effective the DFTA will be in changing the situation for farm workers while also focusing on small-scale organic operations becomes a central question. The role of changing policy and influencing the actions of conventional corporations seems to be pivotal and unavoidable, though not easily attainable.

#### Contending for Consumer Buy-In

Since domestic fair traders seek to use conscious consumption to fuel change in market practices and in policy that will eventually transform the food system, DFT must first become visible in the market place. How the DFTA hopes to do this is unclear, although marketing and education are integral to its principles. An attempt has been made by local food advocates in the Midwest to create a DFT label through the Local Fair Trade Network and the Agricultural Justice Project in 2008. Another DFT label is in the process of being created, called Fair Deal, which will be broader in geographic distribution and include Canadian and U.S. producers and processors. A challenge for the DFTA will be in creating ways for consumers to distinguish between a DFTA-endorsed label, and one that does not meet the DFTA standards. It is likely that in the

coming year TransFair USA will begin a DFT labeling program that will probably not meet DFTA standards, as TransFair has historically espoused less stringent criteria in order to secure early buy-in by major corporations within the mainstream market (Jaffee 2007; Jaffee and Howard 2009). Helping the consumer navigate market claims may prove difficult as the idea of DFT gains momentum in the market place.

An obstacle to any new label is how it will gain recognition in the market place for consumers who have never heard of the DFTA. With an estimated 20% of the U.S. population knowing what international fair trade is after fifty years of history (Murray and Reynolds 2007), it will be difficult to reach consumers who are not aware of another business model, or who simply do not care about social justice market initiatives. While some members of the DFTA represent very successful companies who have considerable mainstream market shares, those whom DFT is aimed at benefiting—namely small farmers and farm workers—are not equipped to compete at a large scale. These successful member organizations are recognizable as brands that consumers seek out for primarily for quality, rather than social justice.

Distribution demands, supply chain consistency, and marketing are all obstacles small-scale operations will have to overcome in order to find their way into the mainstream market place where the average consumer purchases his or her food. Members of the DFTA understand that the initial market for DFT will be the conscious consumers who already seek out fair trade and organic, but they hope DFT will eventually reach beyond this niche to occupy a visible place in the market. Domestic fair traders are clear that they want DFT to be more than a niche market, but a transformative force in the market place. The DFTA hopes the visibility of domestic fair trade in the

market with create a more politicized consumer. It is unclear in past initiatives, however, to what extent consumption may lead to a political movement (Jaffee and Howard 2009; Murray and Reynolds 2007).

A pragmatic and immediate way for the DFTA to approach raising consumer awareness may be through using the local food movement, so that it reflects values not only of environmental sustainability and farmer-consumer proximity, but also social justice. Some scholars have pointed to the danger of conflating locally produced with socially just, pointing to the multiple motives of local food advocates (Brown and Getz 2008; Hinrichs 2000; Jaffee et al. 2004; Winter 2003). There may be window of opportunity to create productive dialogue around the locally sustainable—globally just connection. Local food initiatives may have the potential to become the conduit of domestic fair trade practice, as producer—consumer proximity makes transparency an achievable goal. Additionally, local food systems allow consumers to become involved with agricultural issues at a manageable scale, where they may experience the satisfaction of shaping local policy, and therefore may be motivated to become involved with larger-scale agricultural and immigration policy as a result. Emphasizing the importance of sustainable food system that includes more than the environment and local economy, but also farmers, farm workers, and low-income consumers can greatly enrich and substantiate the local food movement.

Transparency, as discussed in Chapter Four, is central to DFTA members' understanding of fair trade. Yet how transparency will be achieved in the market place beyond local relationships and social justice branding is unclear. The DFTA depends upon the reputation of its members have proven to be trustworthy representatives of

international fair trade and organics. This reliance on branding, however, does not speak to the transparency of domestic fair trade, but rather to the particular company making the claim associated with its name. Creating a transparent system over distance will prove a challenge if DFT is to operate at a variety of scales. A way of verifying market claims about social justice that is accessible to the consumer is needed. Data indicates that those involved in the DFTA do not want consumers to be dependent upon a label, but to have a way of knowing authentically that claims are true. It is unclear at this point exactly how both of these goals will be achieved.

While the DFTA is a structure of multiple stakeholder collaboration which that works by consensus, a challenge to gaining consumer buy-in lies in implementing pragmatic initiatives that are accessible to the consumer while representing all the interests of the DFTA. The fourteen principles put forth by five stakeholder groups represent a broad scope for creating a clear message in the market place (see Table 2). Like international fair trade, DFT will need to figure out how to form consensus that will concisely convey their message in the market place. As discussed above, the DFTA members in this study understand that a consumer does not necessarily inquire about what is behind a label before he or she purchases a product, and that a misrepresentation of fair trade in the market can go undetected.

In a sense, the DFTA is racing against time and other interests that may adopt and co-opt the domestic fair trade concept, as the idea has slowly made its way into the academic literature as well as more popular food literature. The DFTA is intent on maintaining the meaningfulness of domestic fair trade—a more just food system from farm worker to consumer. Developing a comprehensive and holistic definition of justice,

and then getting it out in the market place for the consumer to embrace is the task at hand. As one interviewee described her organization, a very successful pioneer in international fair trade, there are so many messages they are trying to get across that she fears it becomes a complicated and unwieldy initiative at times.

The concepts of social justice and equity are somewhat abstract in the market place. A consumer may not necessarily understand what an “ethically produced product” means, or may have a set of priorities that do not include farm worker justice (Howard and Allen 2006). Organic and local both have a concrete appeal that a consumer can understand. The message is clear and concise: this product was produced according to the criteria the USDA has set for organic production; or this product was produced by a local farmer. International fair trade has a less clear, but more defined message the consumer can grapple with without being personally implicated in the struggle for justice: the purchase of this product gives a fair return to the peasant who produced it in the developing world. Whether any of these claims are completely transparent is left open. The DFTA intends to go beyond all of these claims to provide that transparency when it is lacking. In the meantime, a clear and concise message that encapsulates what domestic fair trade means to the consumer without being cumbersome is a challenge the DFTA needs to take up. Raising farm worker justice to the fore for consumers to seek out and purchase in the market will prove a challenge. This could prove doubly problematic, given that the public’s attitudes toward immigrants—many of whom are farm laborers—in the United States are not always the most compassionate, and are at times simply discriminatory and unjust, as reflected in current national policy.

One avenue to confront these attitudes could be collaborations with progressive religious organizations who emphasize human rights and social justice as a moral tenant, as the Immolokee Farm Workers initiative did. Faith-based organizations, such as Bread for the World—an ecumenical Christian organization focusing primarily on engaging religious citizens to lobby for policy reform around food and poverty issues, and Hazon—a Jewish organization spearheading the New Jewish Food Movement for sustainability and social justice—could be avenues to reach already engaged citizens with the DFT message about farm worker justice. Additionally, these organizations have educational resources and communication networks that can mobilize citizens to be politically engaged. They are non-partisan, broad-based, and appeal to moral mandates for social justice within institutionalized religions. Additionally, international fair trade first took root among religious consumers who felt a moral obligation to ethical trade as a form of development (Wilkinson 2007). Domestic fair trade has already become known within some progressive religious circles, as one interviewee indicated that one of her organization’s most receptive markets for DFT is progressive religious groups that are also involved in IFT campaigns.

A common issue raised by the participants in this study is that food is too cheap. Farmers are not being paid enough, farm workers are exploited, and the large corporations are driving the cost of food down to an unsustainable level from a small producer’s point of view. Organic and fair trade products receive a higher return in the market place, with an assurance that both the content and the process of production are qualitatively different than conventional products (Friedmann and McNair 2008). These markets are seen as an elitist domain, something that only the wealthy can participate in.

The participants in this study recognize that if DFT becomes and remains elitist, it will have failed to create the change they hope to see in the market place. Yet how they are hoping to motivate the average consumer that he or she needs to be spending more money on food in order to create a better reality for farm workers and farmers is unclear, especially in a consumer culture that demands cheap food of dubious origins and sometimes content.

The DFTA advocates for direct marketing, wherein the supply chain is shortened, and the producer and consumer are in much closer social proximity. Again, local food initiatives seem to be an arena for this engagement to take place. In many cases the small-scale farmer who serves a local and wealthy market cannot reduce his or her prices without self-exploiting. Therefore, a way of protecting the farmer as well as the consumer is needed. One way of providing this protection would be a shift in national farm policy so that small-scale farmers are given appropriate support. Policy is one area where the conditions for small farmers to thrive can be created. Policy change would require a huge consumer lobby and movement, such as the DFTA hopes will happen. This becomes a dilemma, however, as consumer awareness is required to create a more politicized consumer; yet the average consumer is likely to remain unaware of domestic fair trade if it remains an elitist market.

A potential way of overcoming barriers keeping DFT from reaching the average consumer, as noted by one participant in this study, is emphasis on community co-operatives, with strong commitments to both local farmers as well as to consumers, in low-income areas. Another, less pragmatic, way of overcoming elitism would involve bringing the commonalities among marginalized farmers, farm workers, and low-income

consumers to the fore. The tragedy that the marginalized are participating in the marginalization of other groups could potentially create an awareness that may lead to the political action necessary for social change.

### Jumping Scale for Farm Workers' Issues

The DFTA is intent on supporting family-scale farmers, the definition of which is still being developed. At the same time, DFTA members recognize that farm workers are the most marginalized people in the food system. In most states, farm workers are not protected under minimum wage and labor laws, do not have the right to organize, and are the victims of egregious abuses. The DFTA understands current U.S. immigration policy to be unjust, to marginalize and criminalize migrant workers, and to make even more difficult the circumstances for already mistreated populations. Yet, farm workers are employed predominately by large-scale agricultural operations that are not likely to seek out membership in an organization such as the DFTA, whose central aim is betterment of those agribusiness exploits in order to increase corporate profit margins. The question then is how effective domestic fair trade will be in actually providing farm workers with a just work environment without engaging agribusiness.

The strong voice of farm workers within the DFTA indicates that the membership is intent on hearing and acting upon farm worker issues. Additionally, the DFTA's membership includes multiple groups who are deeply involved in the struggle for farm worker justice, at local levels around the United States, as well as at the national policy level. It is not clear how the DFTA reconciles its emphasis on farm worker issues with family-scale organic farming. It is clear, however, that the DFTA is intent upon empowering farm workers at whatever scale they work. The DFTA also understands that



policy is an important avenue when working on farm workers issues, as the central topic of discussion around policy positions is labor.

The DFTA might do well to emphasize farm workers' right within the organic industry as a way to raise awareness among consumers about farm worker issues in general. Schreck et al. (2006) found that industrial organic production replicates the social injustices that are found in conventional agricultural production by and large; yet some cases offer hope that organics can be a more socially sustainable mode of production from a farm worker's perspective. Additionally, Howard and Allen (2006) found that consumers who often purchase organic food are more likely to be interested in social justice issues than conventional food purchasers, and may therefore be more easily motivated to shop for farm workers' rights as well as environmental sustainability.

Another area the DFTA might focus on is what is referred to as the "agriculture of the middle," that is, medium-sized family-run agricultural operations that employ outside labor, but are not considered to be industrial (Kirschenmann 2005:1). The farm-to-cafeteria initiatives have utilized the "agriculture of the middle" as a source for locally produced food at an appropriate scale for institutional needs, thus inviting these family farmers to participate in the alternative agro-food movement in a way that benefits them and raises awareness of agricultural issues. By inviting participation by such operations in domestic fair trade, the DFTA could improve farm worker conditions in a significant way while opening up market avenues for medium sized farmers who are able to engage in socially just practices. It is unlikely that broad changes in farm worker conditions will occur without enforceable legislation to protect farm labor, as well as a dramatic shift in consumer culture to demand equity and human rights, but the DFTA's work is planting

small changes in the interstices of the agricultural market for human rights, that will hopefully lead to a more just food production system.

### **Future Research for Domestic Fair Trade**

The Domestic Fair Trade Association is young, and it is yet to be seen what they will accomplish as they seek to build onto the alternative agro-food movement. As this study has shown, the ways those shaping domestic fair trade understand its relation to international fair trade and organics are important for how the DFTA will move forward, and how it will respond to threats and challenges. Little research has been done on domestic fair trade, and much will be needed to analyze and critique future DFT initiatives. Of particular interest in the present is how the members of the DFTA understand the tension that sometimes exists between local food initiatives and global fairness campaigns. I feel that the DFTA can shed light on how these counter-intuitive tensions are resolved, as both local food advocates and fair traders are involved in the organization and identify the same motivating values of social justice and sustainability. Future research on specific DFT initiatives, as well as the tensions and contradictions that may arise as it gains momentum and the attention of larger businesses and organizations that may not be movement-driven, can build upon this initial study. Because domestic fair traders hope to create a consumer movement and a market initiative, they will need to be reflexive and resilient, willing to reform, and open to the possibilities to transform the market.

As Sligh (2002:272) writes, “The alternative to the industrial model is a food system in which food trade raises incomes, and increases food security and food safety at both ends; one in which the environment is preserved; one in which farmers have fair

access to the means of food production and consumers have fair access to food at fair prices.” It is likely that domestic fair trade will fall into the “muddy terrain” (Friedmann and McNair 2008) that international fair trade and organics have fallen into; but, to paraphrase one DFTA member in this study, organics and fair trade are still meaningful in the market because they represent something fundamentally different to the dominant system. Domestic fair trade has a future because it too represents a legitimate challenge to the current agricultural system. It will most likely be a contested and difficult future, characterized by struggle and small successes; but this will be no surprise to those at the heart of the early initiative.

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **Introduction:**

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I appreciate your time.

This interview is part of a study I am doing on the domestic fair trade Movement for a project at the University of Montana. I am trying to understand what being a part of the Domestic Fair Trade Association means to its members.

So you know, your identity here is completely confidential. I will not use your name or position title, or the name of your organization in any write up or presentation of this research. I also want to make the outcome of this research available to you once it is completed.

Is it okay if I record our talk today so that I can accurately record and recall everything you say here?

#### **Questions:**

##### A. History of and involvement in the DFTA:

1. Can you tell me about your involvement with food and agricultural issues?
2. Can you tell me a little about your history with the DFTA?

Probes: When did you become involved?

How did you become involved?

##### B. The Role of Markets and the DFTA:

3. What type of market do you think domestic fair trade will appeal to the most?

Probes: Who do you think will purchase or be interested in DFT products?

4. On the DFTA website, it is very clear that you are interested in creating (and I quote) “positive change in the mainstream marketplace, influencing the conduct of conventional corporations by creating viable alternatives.”

Can I ask you to tell me what this mean in your own words?

5. Considering the above statement (read again if necessary), how do you see the DFTA or the principles of Fair Trade, to be working to create positive change and viable alternative in the mainstream market?



6. What are your thoughts on the idea of social justice labeling?

Probe: What is the role of DFTA in social justice labeling?

### C. Values in the Marketplace

7. What would you say is the most important thing domestic fair trade brings to the discussion on agricultural issues?

8. What are the central values around which DFTA is organized?

9. Ideally, what would you like to see DFT do in the market?

### D. Obstacles facing DFTA

10. Do you see any inherent tensions between the marketplace and the movement DFTA represents?

Probe: How are those tensions played out?

How do you try to reconcile them, or do you?

### E. Wrap up

11. Is there anything we haven't covered that you want me to know for my research?

12. As this study progresses, I would like it to reflect the areas of concern to the DFTA. Are there questions would you as a member of the Steering Committee like to have asked and researched that would benefit the DFTA?

Thank you for your time. As this project progresses, I may need to follow up with you. Would that be okay if I contacted you again for a follow-up in the next couple of months?