

Facing the Challenge: The Temptations and Perils of Placing Volume over Values in the Fair Trade Market

Chair and

Convenor: Monika Maria Firl, Cooperative Coffees

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Status: Practitioners (Fair Trade Coffee Importers, Roasters and Promoters)

Volume verses Values:

This workshop is intended to demystify certain assumptions around the debate on “How to grow the market?” a lively topic now commonplace in many Fair Trade circles. Along with the entrance of increasing numbers of Trans National Corporations (TNCs) without evident social agendas, many critics and practitioners are suddenly thrown into an “either or” discussion around the future directions of Fair Trade. Depending on whom you talk to and which way you look at it, Fair Trade is either “selling out” or “finally hitting the mainstream.”

We will examine the strength of economic justice messaging based upon solid values and demonstrative commitment with both producer partners and local consumer networks, and how that has proved to be a more powerful tool for developing a sustainable Fair Trade network than slick marketing and/or large publicity budgets.

We will bring together North American Fair Trade pioneers and innovators to share their respective life experiences introducing and developing Fair Trade markets in their respective fields of influence. We will provide a brief presentation by each one of the critical actors along the Fair Trade system: Fair Trade producer representative, Fair Trade financier, Fair Trade certifier, Fair Trade importer and Fair Trade roaster. The final critical actor in this debate is the consumer – a role that each one of us in the workshop and audience might play at any given moment (or during many moments of any given day). We will invite and incite audience participation to round out the discussion.

We intend to stimulate a healthy and constructive debate and to demonstrate that growing market volumes upon integrated social values is not only possible, but in the short and long term, a much more sustainable approach to building a Fair Trade Movement.

Presenters:

Rob Clarke: Executive Director - TransFair Canada

TransFair Canada, as one of 20 National Initiatives for FLO (Fairtrade Labelling Organization) is an independent third party Fair Trade certification organization. TransFair Canada is responsible for over 160 licensed distributors and importers of FTC products into Canada. Products include cocoa, sugar, cereals (rice and quinoa), fruit, sports balls and of course coffee. New products include roses from Kenya, with wines from South African and cotton by the end of the summer. Rob's goal is to use his experience to ensure the certification and audit process of FLO and TransFair guarantees the consumer a fair price was paid to the producers to improve their way of life.

After 20 years representing the Canadian subsidiary of a US multinational, Rob brings a new perspective on role of TransFair in Canada and within the FLO system. Rob has paid particular attention to understanding the current needs of the Canadian market and how TransFair Canada can best represent those needs.

José Luis Rojas: Senior Investment Officer, EcoLogic Finance Inc.

EcoLogic Finance is a non-profit offering affordable financial services to community-based businesses operating in environmentally sensitive areas of Latin America and select countries of Africa and Asia.

Jose Luis, a Mexican national, has worked in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Prior to joining EcoLogic Finance, he held positions with UBS Warburg in Mexico (Equity Research Associate), the Soros Foundation in Mongolia (Pro-bono Consultant), the United Nations in Ethiopia (Consultant), and CRU International in the UK and the US (Aluminum Industry Analyst/Consultant). Mr. Rojas holds an M.I.A. in international finance and economic development from Columbia University, and a B.A. in international relations and economics from the University of Pennsylvania.

Bill Harris – Founder and President of Cooperative Coffees

Cooperative Coffees is a green bean buying collective comprised of fair trade roaster/members. We are committed to working in partnership with our associated coffee producer cooperatives in order to create more equitable trade mechanisms. We strive to promote fair trade and sustainable development alternatives in both the North and the South, while continuing to sell the highest quality coffee on the market. Bill is an innovator and offers a fresh look at sustainable approaches to this Fair Trade debate.

Before “fair-trade enlightenment,” Bill was the president of a food distribution company, a trust portfolio manager, and a business consultant. He currently serves on the Board and as treasurer of the Fair Trade Federation, the Board of the Americus/Sumter County Habitat for Humanity Affiliate, and the Board of Directors of Glover Foodservice.

Larry Larson –Owner Larry’s Beans and President of the Board of Cooperative Coffees

As one of seven founding member/roasters of Cooperative Coffees, Larry brings a historical perspective to the growth and development of both his own business and of Cooperative Coffees as an active participant in the Fair Trade community. Larry’s Beans is one of Cooperative Coffees fastest growing members, and in the span of 3 years has converted his entire business to integrated Fair Trade practices. “Once our eyes were opened to Fair Trade, we saw that it was more than an equitable way to buy fantastic coffee from farmers who put their hearts and souls into growing it - it was an alternative economic model,” says owner Larry Larson. “It is a way to connect people from all corners of the world!” Larry is living proof that operating under integrated Fair Trade practices is not only good for the farmers, but also good for his local business and community.

Esperanza Dionisio: General Manager of CAC Pangoa Coffee Cooperative

Esperanza grew up near Satipo, in the region of influence of the cooperative Pangoa. She left to Lima to study agronomy, but upon completion of her studies returned to the area. She was quickly elected as General Manager and has worked diligently to transform the coffee producer cooperative, originally founded in 1977 with 50 members, into a dynamic and growing cooperative of some 500 small-scale coffee producers. Pangoa is now well-placed within the Fair Trade commercial network, and has earned its reputation as a responsible and visionary cooperative in Peru.

Workshop Chair and Convenor:

Monika Firl, Cooperative Coffees – Producer Relations

Monika has worked with a variety of locally based development projects, while living in Central America and Mexico from 1991 to 2000. Her experiences range from: founding and directing a center in San Salvador for the exchange of information on alternative technology; to direct participation in technical training and marketing development with coffee producers’ cooperatives in Chiapas; to active promotion of Fair Trade, including her role as TransFair USA, Interim Director in 1997 during its pre-launch period. Monika will present an overview of the major issues to be presented by the speakers.