

**SAMPLE CULMINATING EXPERIENCE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (IR 892)**

**Food Sovereignty Among Fair Trade Coffee Farmers in  
Nicaragua**

By

Susanna Beck  
IR MA Graduate (Class of 2010)

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## **Introduction**

This study will investigate the intersection between food sovereignty and fair trade. Led by the Via Campesina network, the food sovereignty movement in the global South is dedicated to ensuring that all people have the power and control to decide where their food comes from and how it is distributed. As a result, this movement puts a strong emphasis on local production for local needs. Although it does not disregard trade completely, the food sovereignty movement sharply rejects the export-oriented legacy of colonialism present in much of the global South today.

The fair trade movement, on the other hand, is focused on trade of primary commodities produced largely in the global South for export to the global North. This movement emphasizes that the externalities (environmental and social) traditionally ignored by standard free trade ideology should be internalized in the price of the good. In other words, the fair trade movement is dedicated to ensuring social and environmental justice in trade.

While there is a serious need to counter the control of the global food system by multinational corporations, there is an undeniable market for tropical commodities such as coffee, cacao and sugar. Traditionally, large corporations have dominated these industries-- using farming techniques that destroy soil fertility and overuse water and other resources. As a result, land is unable to support the basic needs of the local population and they must then rely on imported food for their survival. On the other hand, large amounts of money can be made from export agriculture and with the proper certifications in place, there is potential for it to benefit all those involved (instead of just elites).

I will approach this work from a 'world systems' view point with the following logic: colonialism followed by the green revolution have designed a system where the global South, or periphery and semi-periphery, is exploited in order for the global North, or core, to prosper. I will also investigate this North/South dichotomy in the leadership of the two movements since the food sovereignty movement is led by organizations in the global South while the fair trade tends to be dominated by those in the global North.

Through this research, I will work with Nicaraguan coffee farmers to determine whether their membership in a fair trade cooperative makes them more or less food sovereign. I will carry out this research by leading both a focus group and by conducting personal qualitative interviews. By determining if there is a link between food sovereignty and fair trade, I will contribute vital information to the success of these two movements.

In order to gauge the success of the research design of this study, I have conducted a feasibility study that consists of personal interviews with farmers in the San Francisco Bay Area. I utilized similar questions that I plan to use with the Nicaraguan coffee farmers in an effort to determine if changes need to be made to the research design.

## Literature Review

The concept of fair trade was developed in the 1980s, but only in the recent decade has it caught mainstream attention. As a movement dedicated to righting the historic imbalances associated with neoliberal free trade, fair trade internalizes the environmental and social externalities in the price of its commodities. Utting (2005) summarizes the most widely used definition of fair trade when she writes:

*Fair trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers, especially in the South. Fair trade organizations are engaged in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. ([www.ifat.org](http://www.ifat.org), accessed 27 July 2004, from Utting (2005))*

Fair trade aims to benefit the producer and eliminate the traditional exploitation of workers in the global South. The roots of this historic exploitation can be traced most vividly using dependency and world-systems theory. Tausch (2003) describes that dependency theorists see the international division of labor where raw material producers are exploited as the source of the wide economic and social imbalance around the world. He notes that world-systems theory continued to confirm this observation. Explaining world system analysis, Tausch (2003) writes,

*Capitalism in the periphery, like in the center, is characterized by strong cyclical fluctuations, and there are centers, semi-peripheries and peripheries. The rise of one group of semi-peripheries tends to be at the cost of another group, but the unequal structure of the world economy based on unequal exchange tends to remain stable. (p. 6)*

As the father of the theory, Wallerstein (Schouten, 2008) also describes the worldwide production of goods by using a periphery/core relationship model. Wallerstein explains that capitalistic production in the core is only made possible by the exploitation of the periphery. Building on this theory, Chase-Dunn (1981) explains that the political and economic systems of worldwide exchange are inextricably linked through capitalism. Chase-Dunn argues that the political interstate system is dependent on the capital-accumulation process for its survival and thus, the two concepts of economics and politics are permanently intertwined in an integrated system. Through Chase-Dunn's observation, one can see how an unequal playing field of political factors has led to economic exploitation around the world. International institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO have only reinforced systemic inequalities between states who benefit from neoliberal trade and those who are exploited by it for this purpose.

As McMichael (2006) points out, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has ushered in a new era where capital is no longer invested primarily in states, but is instead invested in these international institutions that have absorbed a more prominent role in the world arena. McMichael (2006) uses Polanyi's study of double movement to argue that land and labor continue to

be restructured throughout the world, but the difference today is that the process is happening through international institutions instead of states.

In Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform (2006), Rosset, Patel and Courville describe the evolution of this land redistribution throughout the world. They argue that two main models of agrarian reform continue to exist today: 1) rural social movements and 2) market-led reform. Similar to McMichael, they state that today, international institutions are playing an increasingly large role in the distribution of land and that this process has primarily followed the market-led model. Cousins (2005), Moyo & Yeros (2005) and Weis (2007) argue that market-led agrarian reform has resulted in growing inequalities within and between states and would agree that such market-based reform is reinforcing the dependency described by Wallerstein (Schouten, 2008) and Chase-Dunn (1981).

Furthering the definition of fair trade, Jaffee et al. (2004) suggest that the term be expanded to also include fair exchange of goods not just between states in the global South and global North, but to the exchange of goods also within states in both of those regions. Jaffee et al.'s analysis concludes that instead of diluting the movement, this expansion of the term actually helps consumers relate to the struggles of producers. Jaffee et al. (2004) argue that by 'bringing the moral charge home,' consumers will provide more demand for fair trade commodities and the movement will be strengthened.

In order to assess the success of fair trade in bringing better conditions to producers, a variety of factors can be analyzed. In his study of coffee farmers in Northern Nicaragua, Bacon (2005) measures the vulnerability of farmers through comparisons of 'farm gate' prices as well as the length of time a farmer must wait for payment. By comparing how these factors differ based on farmers selling their product to a fair trade cooperative as opposed to a local middleman or an agro-export company, Bacon assesses the impact fair trade has on the vulnerability of farmers.

Getz and Shreck (2006) also use 'farm gate' prices to evaluate the success of fair trade among banana growers in the Dominican Republic. In addition, their assessment of fair trade's impact on the well-being of producers and their communities is based on the number of items exported and the expressed feelings of farmers themselves through first-person interviews about their association with fair trade.

In contrast to analysis through 'farm gate' prices, Utting (2009) created a new integrative framework for determining the impact of fair trade on the livelihoods of farmers. Her framework includes five factors: 1) social capital, 2) human capital, 3) physical capital, 4) natural capital and 5) financial capital. Utting applies this framework to the Soppexcca coffee cooperative in Jinotega, Nicaragua, but intends for it to be used universally.

Raynolds et al. (2004) also take on a more holistic evaluation of the impact of fair trade on farmers. In their examination of seven coffee cooperatives in Latin America, they conclude that higher revenue is only one short-term benefit of fair trade. They posit that fair trade is also benefiting the producers in a more long-term and sustainable manner

through capacity building. They argue that fair trade has led to collective empowerment and has helped improve conditions for education, health and sanitation and also allows for investment in non-farm income generating activities.

In Bacon's 2010 article, "A Spot of Coffee in Crisis: Nicaraguan Smallholder Cooperatives, Fair Trade Networks, and Gender Empowerment," he examines how the 1999 coffee crisis has influenced the empowerment of collective smallholders. Through an analysis of three different groups (fair trade organic farmers, women's fair trade members and conventional farmers), he asks if fair trade and organic coffee producers feel more empowered than producers outside of these groups. Bacon concludes that members of women's fair trade cooperatives enjoy more gender empowerment than others. Bacon also discovers that members of the women's fair trade cooperative had more success in sending their children to school as compared to the other two groups.

Similarly, Bacon et al. (2008) address the UN Millennium Development Goals in their assessment of Nicaraguan fair trade cooperatives. Using data from a combination of surveys, focus groups and cooperative records, they argue that fair trade certification has helped farmers improve their livelihoods, but in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals, some significant changes in the process need to take place. Bacon et al. (2008) found that 65% of the households surveyed grow more than half of the food they consume; however, this lifestyle is threatened by the loss of land.

Pirotte et al. (2006), examine access to land in their analysis of fair trade. They report that the size of land a producer cultivates impacts their vulnerability during severe price drops such as the 1999 coffee crisis. They argue that while large-scale coffee producers in Tanzania and Nicaragua weathered the crisis because of their continued access to credit and equipment, medium-scale producers were decimated by the crisis. Surprisingly, small-scale producers in Nicaragua actually benefited most during this time. In their comparison of fair trade coffee production in the two countries, Pirotte et al. (2006) note that the close-knit nature of cooperatives in Nicaragua combined with the hands-off stance of the government, has led to an environment of trust and support that has greatly benefited small-scale coffee producers. The larger cooperative structure and government involvement in Tanzania, on the other hand, results in looser ties and a lack of financial and technical support for small-scale farmers.

Mendez et al. (2010) provide a comprehensive assessment of the effects of fair trade and organic certifications on Central American and Mexican coffee producers. Through a qualitative analysis of 469 households and 18 cooperatives in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, they conclude that households associated with certifications did not fare better than others in terms of food security especially during the 'hungry season' of April through August. However, they found that households who were successful in adding additional sources of income besides coffee production were better able to meet the family's food needs. By using a combination of surveys, formal and informal interviews as well as focus groups between November 2004 and December 2005, Mendez et al. (2010) discovered that most producers who grow fair trade certified coffee are not able to sell all of their harvest at the certified price due to lack of demand.

The international peasants network, La Via Campesina, provides the most widely used definition of food sovereignty in their 2003 Statement on Peoples' Food Sovereignty:

*The right of people to define their own food and agriculture, to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant.*

-Statement on Peoples' Food Sovereignty by La Via Campesina (Food First Backgrounder, 2003)

As a leader in the food sovereignty movement, Patel (2005) compares the neoliberal push of globalization to fascism. He uses the purposeful vagueness in La Via Campesina's declaration of food sovereignty to illustrate the importance of place in this fight against globalization. Patel argues that instead of examining the food sovereignty movement as a whole, one should focus on individual action based in local conditions. After all, he states, social movements are made up of individual actions and this is where the power lies.

As another prominent figure in the food sovereignty movement, Rosset (2008) discusses food sovereignty's relevance in the face of the recent dramatic shifts in prices of food commodities. Although circumstances have shifted for many producers, Rosset concludes that the food sovereignty movement continues to provide a framework that will help alleviate the pains felt by producers during the most recent food crisis.

In examining the intersection between food sovereignty and fair trade, it is helpful to turn to Murray et al. (2006). They ask how the fair trade movement can be broadened to increase the number and variety of participants, while at the same time, strengthened in its social and environmental core values. Murray et al. note the movement's lack of success in breaking down existing gender inequities.

Despite the volumes of literature focused on assessing the impact fair trade has on farmers' livelihoods through different forms of capital, there has yet to be an analysis measuring this impact in terms of food sovereignty for individual producers as well as their communities. My research will focus on this topic. I hope to determine how fair trade impacts the ability of its producers to provide subsistence food for themselves and their families.

## **Research Design**

### **Data Source**

In order to dive more deeply into the impact that Fair Trade has on coffee producers in Nicaragua, I will use a participatory action research paradigm to conduct a qualitative study. Through this approach, I will ask the Fair Trade cooperatives and coffee farmers themselves to participate in the design of the study. I am interested in learning how participation in a Fair Trade cooperative has impacted farmers' food sovereignty;

however, food sovereignty is notoriously difficult to measure. As a result, I will ask the participants to help brainstorm ways that this study could be effective and listen to their ideas for design that would benefit them most. In this way, the farmers themselves will have control over the study's purpose and procedures. This pre-study brainstorming session will most likely take the form of a focus group. Some open-ended questions may include:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- How is food sovereignty different from food security? Is this difference important to you? Why?
- Is food sovereignty a goal for you and your community?
- How do you know if you are food sovereign? What are ways to measure this?
- How should we gather this data?
- How could this study benefit you?

Throughout the group interviewing process, it will be important to ensure that all members have an opportunity to express themselves. It will be essential to invite both men and women farmers and encourage each to participate equally.

Once the focus group is finished, I will have a better understanding of how the rest of the study will be conducted. However, following in the footsteps of Wright and Wolford's work with the MST in Brazil, I suspect that the next step will be to conduct personal interviews (Wright and Wolford, 2003). Potential open-ended questions for the personal interviews include:

- How did you get involved in farming? Do you hope that your children will do the same?
- What are some of the major obstacles that you face?
- What is the source of these obstacles?
- Are there times when you don't know where your next meal will come from? What do you do during those times?
- Do you purchase food grown by neighbors? What type? How often?
- Are you able to produce as much food as you want to produce?
- Are you concerned with food being imported from other countries? Or other regions of Nicaragua? How does this impact you and people you know?
- How much choice do you feel you have in the type of food you purchase and where it comes from?
- Would you like more choices or more control over this?
- How much choice do you feel you have in whom you sell your harvest to?
- Would you like more control over this?
- How important is it to you to grow your own food?
- Do you think that people who own their own land are more able to grow their own food than people who don't own land? Why?

Throughout both the focus group session and personal interviews, it will be essential to record observations during and directly after in an effort to avoid relying on memory. I will most likely use a hand-held audio recording device and take still photographs. After



consulting with another researcher, I have determined that video recording would be too intrusive and may alter the answers of the interviewee. If possible, I would like to spend some time with the interviewee before the interview. This may include a walk around their farm or property. In this way, we can establish a comfortable connection that will enable the interview to flow more smoothly, questions to come up naturally and feel less like an interrogation.

In addition to focus group and personal interview work in Nicaragua, I plan to work with other researchers who have already conducted similar studies. Dr. Christopher Bacon, for instance, has published his findings from a number of studies looking at the impact of Fair Trade on farmer vulnerability in Nicaragua. I plan to use his survey data on food security among farmers. Similarly, Daniel Jaffee conducted food security studies with Fair Trade coffee farmers in Oaxaca, Mexico and I will utilize some of this research in my study. In addition, I will consult with Professor Kathy McAfee about her work in Oaxaca. Finally, I have been in contact with Andrianna Natsoulas, who is currently working on a book entitled, "Food Voices: Stories of the Food Sovereignty Movement." She is interviewing farmers and fishermen throughout the Americas about what food sovereignty means to them. I plan to collaborate with some of her work.

### **Analytical Options**

Since this will be a participatory action research study, analysis of this qualitative data will depend on the conclusions of the focus group. The process of analysis may not be shaped until after the personal interviews take place. In this way, I will use inductive reasoning to develop a theory and hypothesis based on the observations.

### **Anticipated Challenges**

Since my Spanish is not fluent, I will most likely need to work with an interpreter to conduct the qualitative interviews. This poses a number of challenges since the nature of these interviews is fluid and further questions are based on the response to the last question. For the qualitative interviews to be successful, the interviewer must be able to listen, think and talk at the same time and speaking through a translator will certainly slow down and inhibit this process (Babbie, 2010). A potential solution to this is to work with community members who can take on the interviewer role without my help. Essentially, they would conduct the qualitative interview themselves and then simply report back to me what they found. This option fits nicely with the participatory action research model, but it also results in me having much less control over the study.

Using the participatory action research model poses some issues of conflict of interest. Since community members will assist in shaping the study and possibly also act as interpreters, they may influence the response from interviewees in order to acquire the outcome that is desired.

### **Feasibility Study Results**

The feasibility study I conducted consisted of personal interviews of three local Bay Area farmers. Unfortunately, a fourth interview that I had scheduled was unable to be

conducted. On the set date and time of the interview, the individual was unresponsive to both phone calls and emails and has been since that time. From this experience I learned that it can be very difficult to ensure that interviewees follow through with the scheduled appointment.

Due to a busy schedule, another one of the interviewees preferred to correspond via email to the interview questions rather than speaking on the phone or in person. This posed an interesting challenge in that it was very difficult to ask follow-up questions. Both of these logistical issues illustrate the challenges of using human subjects as contributors to the data of a study. I found myself at the mercy of their schedules and without wanting to pester or inconvenience them too much, I found myself patiently/impatiently waiting for their responses (whether it be about the date and time of an interview or simply waiting for a response to my emailed questions). In addition, I realized through this experience that it may not be feasible to conduct the interviews at each person's farm. The logistics of this may be too difficult.

The interviews that were conducted in person were both challenging and insightful. I found that it was very difficult to listen to the response of the interviewee while at the same time thinking of the next question I would like to ask them. I imagine this will become even more challenging with the proposed interviews conducted in Spanish; I foresee taking longer to understand the response when it is in Spanish. Although the use of a translator would slow down this interview process, it may be helpful in that it will allow for more time to respond and think about the next questions.

In addition, during the verbal interviews conducted in person, I did not want to intimidate or give the impression that I was not really listening to their response, so I did not look at my pre-determined interview questions during the interview. This made it difficult to remember all of the questions and also difficult to determine whether I had asked all the questions or not. Also, I kept my note writing to a minimum during this process in an effort to not distract from the conversation. I wanted the conversation to be as free flowing and natural as possible, so I rarely stopped to record any responses. As a result, I had to remember what was said and then record my notes immediately after the conversation. This experience illustrated my need for a digital audio recorder and I plan to purchase one for the actual study.

I also found that it was a mistake to tell the interviewee too much information about the study in my initial outreach to them. It was difficult to find a 'happy medium' for this since it was necessary to inform them of why I wanted to interview them, but it was overwhelming for them to hear all about the study I plan to conduct in Nicaragua. I found that telling them too much about the study made the potential interviewee intimidated and therefore less likely to agree to participate. In a way, it would be easier (and perhaps produce better data) to simply have a conversation about these topics without declaring it an 'interview.'

Finally, I found that one of my questions was a bit biased. When I asked interviewees if they were concerned with the food that is imported from other countries, I set them up for

a specific response. Instead, I need to find a way to solicit this information without leading them to the answer I have in mind.

There were several themes among the responses. The interviewees cultivated a variety of different areas, ranging from 5 acres of farm to eight 20 feet by 6 feet raised beds to four wine barrels, 27 inches in diameter. Most wanted to grow their own food in order to reduce the carbon footprint that results from purchasing food that is grown in other countries and shipped into the United States. They also generally agreed that they produced their own food in order to have control over how it is grown (organic, use of pesticides, types of fertilizer used etc. . .). One interviewee noted, “We’ve just always grown our own food, we’ve known no different.” He added, “When you grow it yourself, you *know* it’s organic!”

Another interviewee responded, however, that he was concerned about the ethical and moral issues associated with purchasing food abroad from countries with oppressive political regimes. This same respondent also pointed to the high price of organic produce as another reason he chooses to produce his own food.

When asked what percentage of their food consumption they produce themselves, the interviewees varied in their response from 98% to 25% throughout the summer growing season. Most respondents did not produce food during the winter months; however, the interviewee with the 5 acres cultivated does produce all year round. In fact, this respondent takes orders from San Francisco restaurants and grows to order the fruits and vegetables each would like. This provides additional income for the farmer and his family during the peak season (spring and summer). Another interviewee expressed interest in growing year-round sometime in the near future and currently grows a cover crop during the winter months to restore nutrients to the soil.

All respondents expressed a desire to grow more food, but cited time and money as limiting factors. In order to grow throughout the winter, additional work would have to be done. In addition, one interviewee stated that he would like to set up a compost system, but so far, has not had the time to do so. The only exception to this is the farmer who cultivates 5 acres. His land consists of 60 acres, but he and his wife are the only workers on the farm and they have no desire to increase their cultivation area.

Most interviewees mentioned that trade of locally produced food was very common among neighbors; however, one joked, “Willing trade is only with items that not everyone produces. There are times when everyone wants to give away their squash, but if you grow something unusual, like celery, neighbors will be more willing to trade.” In addition, one respondent noted that his community conducts a farmers market that is run by locals who produce excess food in their own backyards. This is a very small-scale market with no ‘farms,’ but only for people who can produce more in their gardens than they can eat. Finally, one interviewee utilized fish bi-products as a fertilizer and has coordinated an exchange with the nearby seafood processing company which enables him free access to the fish bi-products in exchange for delivering them fruits and vegetables.

Sample transcript from one interview:

-On average, what percentage of your consumption do you produce?

*About 5%*

-How much land do you cultivate?

*I have a community plot in the Mission that's about 9' by 6'*

*My home garden is about 30' by 15'*

-Why do you produce your own food?

*Mostly for the pleasure of it.*

-What are some of the major obstacles that you face in producing your own food?

*For my home plot it's the lack of direct sunlight. There are quite a few pests that take a lot of work to repel and get rid of.*

-What is the source of these obstacles?

*The shade is caused by houses and trees. The pests are creeping over from the neighbor yards...*

-Do you purchase or trade food grown by neighbors? What type? How often?

*I get a lot of fruit given to me by people I work for. Many people have fruit trees on their property that they don't harvest from.*

-Are you able to produce as much food as you want to produce?

*No. I'd like to have more land that gets full sun.*

-Are you concerned with food being imported from other countries? If so, why?

*Not terribly so. I do try to keep my food purchases to locally grown/raised. I want to support people in the area that are trying to make a living producing food. There are some good things that come from outside the US though and I'll definitely partake in them from time to time.*

In addition to the personal interviews in my feasibility study, I have contacted researchers doing similar work to discuss the feasibility of this research. On November 3, 2010 I met with Andrianna Natsoulas. Andrianna is currently working on a book entitled, "Food Voices: Stories of the Food Sovereignty Movement." She is interviewing farmers and fishermen throughout the Americas about what food sovereignty means to them. When I met with Andrianna, we discussed her techniques for interviewing people and I hope to incorporate some of the advice she had to share. Andrianna noted that she rarely, if ever, asks people how they feel about 'food sovereignty' directly. She explained that it is still too much of a new term that it leads to an awkward interview. Instead, she suggested asking questions about the topic, but leaving out the term.

Andrianna also strongly suggested that I find a translator who I really trust. She mentioned that this might cost a lot of money, but I agree with her that it is a very

important aspect. She recommended the translators who work at Via Campesina events and those who will attend the Cancun summit on climate change.

My feasibility study results conclude that it will be possible to conduct personal interviews with Nicaraguan coffee producers. However, due to the logistical difficulties I experienced in scheduling and getting interviewees to follow through with the scheduled interviews, I think it would be wise to add a quantitative portion to the study that does not rely on human subjects. As a result, I suggest adding data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization as well as the World Bank to illustrate the changes in the import and export rates of Nicaraguan staple crops such as corn, beans and squash. I propose an analysis of these imports and or exports in relation to the structural adjustment programs imposed on Nicaragua as well as the development of the 2006 Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

## Human Subjects Protocol

### **San Francisco State University** ***Food Sovereignty Among Fair Trade Coffee Farmers in Nicaragua***

**Researcher's Name:** Susanna Beck

**Department:** International Relations

#### 1. STUDY AIM, BACKGROUND AND DESIGN

- a. State the research question(s) concisely.

How does participation in a fair trade cooperative impact the food sovereignty of individual farmers?

- b. Include a brief (1 – 2 paragraphs), current, scholarly review of relevant literature that supports the purpose of the research study.

In order to assess the success of fair trade in bringing better conditions to producers, a variety of factors can be analyzed. In his study of coffee farmers in Northern Nicaragua, Bacon (2005) measures the vulnerability of farmers through comparisons of 'farm gate' prices as well as the length of time a farmer must wait for payment. By comparing how these factors differ based on farmers selling their product to a fair trade cooperative as opposed to a local middleman or an agro-export company, Bacon assesses the impact fair trade has on the vulnerability of farmers.

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## STUDY DESIGN

c. Provide a **brief** overview of the research, including

- research design
- number and description of participants
- data collection methods
- data analysis methods
- describe how the data you collect will answer your research question.

This research will consist of a qualitative study that will be used to complement the existing quantitative research on this topic by Mendez et al. (2010), Jaffee (2007), Bacon (2008) and others. A participatory action research paradigm will be used to conduct this qualitative study with fair trade coffee producers in Nicaragua. Through this approach, fair trade cooperative leaders and coffee farmers will be asked to participate in the design of the study. The researcher is interested in learning how participation in a fair trade cooperative has impacted farmers' food sovereignty; however, food sovereignty is notoriously difficult to measure. As a result, the researcher will ask the participants to help brainstorm ways that this study could be effective and listen to their ideas for design that would benefit them most. In this way, the farmers themselves will have control over the study's purpose and procedures. This pre-study brainstorming session will most likely take the form of a focus group.

Some open-ended questions may include:

- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- How is food sovereignty different from food security? Is this difference important to you? Why?
- Is food sovereignty a goal for you and your community?
- How do you know if you are food sovereign? What are ways to measure this?
- How should we gather this data?
- How could this study benefit you?

Throughout the focus group process, it will be important to ensure that all members have an opportunity to express themselves. It will be essential to invite both men and women farmers and encourage each to participate equally.

Once the focus group is finished, the researcher will have a better understanding of how the rest of the study will be conducted. However, following in the footsteps of Wright and Wolford's work with the MST in Brazil, the next step will be to conduct personal interviews (Wright and Wolford, 2003). The personal interviews will result from a snowball sampling method of both members of fair trade cooperatives and conventional coffee producers. This method has been proven effective by a number of scholars including Mendez et al. (2010), Pirotte et al. (2006), Bacon (2005), Getz and Shreck (2006) and Utting-Chamorro (2005) who used personal interviews to determine how participation in fair trade cooperatives impacts the vulnerability of farmers.



In order to provide some consistency and means for comparison, the researcher would like to conduct the study in the Jinotega region of Nicaragua where previous research by Karla Utting was conducted with the Soppexcca coffee cooperative. Alternatively, the researcher would like to conduct this research near Leon, Nicaragua where she has existing contacts who are well connected to the farming community. As a precaution against unforeseen events and to ensure an adequate sample size of approximately 100 households, the researcher will identify more than one coffee cooperative to work with. The sampling size of 100 households will include fair trade producers as well as producers who sell their coffee through conventional means. The researcher has already made contact and obtained permission from the La Via Campesina organization in Nicaragua: Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC). The researcher will submit a protocol modification in order to add more coffee cooperatives from which to recruit participants.

The open-ended questions for the personal interviews are included below. These are foundation questions that will form the base of the interview. All types of households (including those with fair trade producers, conventional producers and those associated with La Via Campesina) will receive these questions.

- How did you get involved in farming? Do you hope that your children will do the same?
- What are some of the major obstacles that you face?
- What is the source of these obstacles?
- Are there times when you don't know where your next meal will come from? What do you do during those times?
- Do you purchase food grown by neighbors? What type? How often?
- Are you able to produce as much food as you want to produce?
- Are you concerned with food being imported from other countries? Or other regions of Nicaragua? How does this impact you and people you know?
- How much choice do you feel you have in the type of food you purchase and where it comes from?
- Would you like more choices or more control over this?
- How much choice do you feel you have in whom you sell your harvest to?
- Would you like more control over this?
- How important is it to you to grow your own food?
- Do you think that people who own their own land are more able to grow their own food than people who don't own land? Why?

Throughout both the focus group session and personal interviews, it will be essential to record observations during and directly after in an effort to avoid relying on memory. The researcher will most likely use a hand-held audio recording device and take still photographs. After consulting with another researcher, it was determined that video recording would be too intrusive and may alter the answers of the interviewee. If possible, the researcher would like to spend some time with the interviewee before the interview. This may include a walk around their farm or property (however, it will be important to be sensitive to the amount of daylight hours the interview takes and not take too much time away from farm work for the day). By starting out with a more personal

introduction, the researcher will attempt to establish a comfortable connection that will enable the interview to flow more smoothly, questions to come up naturally and feel less like an interrogation.

- d. What is the anticipated significance of this research to the field?

Despite the volumes of literature focused on assessing the impact fair trade has on farmers' livelihoods through different forms of capital, there has yet to be an analysis measuring this impact in terms of food sovereignty for individual producers as well as their communities. Although Mendez et al. (2010) provide an excellent source of quantitative data on the food security of fair trade farmers, their research can be expanded upon. The proposed research will build on these data by asking how fair trade has impacted the food sovereignty of coffee producers in Nicaragua. Food sovereignty takes the concept of food security one step further by ensuring that both producers and consumers have choice over where their food comes from and how it is distributed. The researcher will use the data of Mendez et al. (2010) and others to determine when and how often fair trade coffee producers are able to feed their families; however, she will ask these families if they feel they have a choice in type of food they eat and where it comes from. Through the addition of food sovereignty, the researcher will add significant data to this field.

## 2. PARTICIPANT POPULATION

- a. Participants: Describe the participant pool

- State the number of participants.

The initial focus group will consist of approximately 20 individuals and the personal interviews will take place with approximately 100 households. The personal interviews will consist of fair trade producing households, conventional households and members of La Via Campesina.

- State the age of participants:  
General (18 and over)

Participants will be Nicaraguan coffee producers who are 18 years old or older.

- Are the participants considered a vulnerable population (e.g., prisoners, children, pregnant women, cognitively impaired)?

No, the participants are not considered to be a vulnerable population.

- Are the participants already known to the researcher?

No, the participants are not known to the researcher.

b. State any inclusion/exclusion criteria used to select participants.

The researcher will use the snowball sampling method to select participants.

c. Describe the recruiting process clearly.

The researcher will initially contact the leaders of the fair trade cooperatives targeted for the study. This will be done by first working with existing contacts in Leon, Nicaragua to determine the most appropriate cooperatives to work with. This communication will happen via email and possibly Skype. Once the cooperatives are determined, the researcher will send an email introduction and ask the cooperative leaders to select members for a focus group. The personal interviews will be conducted using a snowball sampling method and since the study will utilize the participatory action research paradigm, the personal interviews will be dependent on the result of the focus group.

Below is the email introduction to the coffee cooperative:

*Dear friends,*

*My name is Susanna Beck and I am a graduate student researcher in the International Relations Department at San Francisco State University in the United States. I am conducting research for the completion of my Master's degree and I am interested in learning more about your cooperative and the farmers who belong to it.*

*As you know, the falling price of coffee combined with the widespread neoliberal economic policies of the last decades have pushed the small-scale farmer out of business in many parts of the world. I am interested in learning how your fair trade cooperative has helped counter these trends. Specifically, I want to find out if membership in the cooperative has enabled your farmers to produce more of their own food than they would if they were selling through conventional markets.*

*In order to conduct this study, I would like to first meet with you and a number of farmers to determine how this research can best benefit your community. I would also like to enlist your feedback to create methods to carry out the study.*

*This meeting will take 3-4 hours and participating farmers will be compensated with \$10USD for this time. After the conclusion of this focus group meeting, I will conduct personal interviews with farmers associated with your cooperative. The interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and participants will be compensated \$5USD for their participation. Both the initial meeting and the individual interviews will be audio-taped and I will take still photographs of the farmers.*

*Are you interested in participating?*

*Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at*

---

Below is the email that the fair trade cooperatives will send to the farmers:

*Dear friends,*

*Susanna Beck, a graduate student in the International Relations Department at San Francisco State University, is conducting research on fair trade coffee cooperatives.*

*She would like to meet with a group of you to discuss how this research can benefit your work and get your ideas on how it can best be conducted. This initial focus group meeting will take 3-4 hours and if you choose to participate, you will be compensated \$10USD.*

*She would also like to conduct personal interviews so that you can share your experiences. If you would like to be interviewed, Ms. Beck will come to your farm and the interview will take approximately 30 minutes. If you choose to participate in the personal interviews, Ms. Beck will pay you \$5USD to compensate for your time. During both the initial focus group meeting and the personal interviews, Ms. Beck will be audio recording the sessions.*

*You are in no way obligated to participate in Ms. Beck's research. If you are interested in participating, please contact her at*

---

Below is the Spanish translation of the email that the fair trade cooperatives will send to the farmers:

*Queridos amigos,*

*Susanna Beck, un estudiante graduado en el Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Estatal de San Francisco, está llevando a cabo investigaciones sobre las cooperativas de comercio justo de café.*

*A ella le gustaría reunirse con un grupo de ustedes para discutir cómo la investigación puede beneficiar a su trabajo y obtener sus ideas sobre el mejor modo de llevar a cabo. Esta reunión de los grupos de enfoque inicial puede tomar de 3-4 horas y si decide participar, usted será compensado \$ 10USD.*

*También le gustaría llevar a cabo entrevistas personales para que pueda compartir sus experiencias. Si usted desea ser entrevistado, la Sra. Beck llegará a su granja y la entrevista tendrá una duración aproximada de 30 minutos. Si usted decide participar en las entrevistas personales, la Sra. Beck le pagará \$ 5USD para compensar por su tiempo. Tanto en la primera reunión de grupos focales y*

*las entrevistas personales, la Sra. Beck será de grabación de audio de las sesiones.*

*Usted está de ninguna manera obligados a participar en la investigación de la Sra. Beck. Si usted está interesado en participar, póngase en contacto con ella en*

---

d. Attach all recruiting materials—telephone or speech script, email or letter text, or copy of ad or flyer.

The recruiting email can be found on page 6.

e. State how researcher will gain access to the participants.

The researcher will gain access to the participants through the fair trade cooperative leaders and each interviewee will be aware that this information will be used in a study. Their demographic information may be included in the final study; however, no additional identifiers such as names will be used. If requested, a pseudonym will be used.

### **3. STUDY PROCEDURES**

a. Describe the details of the procedures and methodology.

As mentioned above, the study will consist of a focus group as well as personal interviews.

b. List procedures in which the participants will take part in a step-by-step, chronological manner.

- Fair Trade cooperatives will contact potential participants
- Contact focus group participants to schedule focus group
- Conduct focus group using open-ended questions
- Conduct initial personal interviews
- Ask interviewees to suggest other appropriate households to interview (snowball method)

c. Research details

- State *where* the research will take place.

The focus group will take place at a community meeting area or at the fair trade cooperative office, if appropriate. Personal interviews will take place on individual coffee farms.

- State *how long* the research will take for the participant.

The focus group will take approximately 3-4 hours. This will be divided into 2 sessions with a 30-minute break for lunch. The personal interviews will consist of a walk around the farm and an interview. This will take approximately thirty-minutes depending on the farm and the interviewee.

The researcher will be sensitive to the amount of time each farmer has available and plan the interview accordingly (during lunch or in the evening).

- State what *time of day* the research will take place (after school, evening, weekend)

This will be determined during the focus group. Research will take place whenever is most convenient for the farmers.

- State the *time* for each procedure and the *total time* commitment. The focus group will take approximately 3-4 hours. The personal interviews will consist of walk around the farm and an interview. This will take approximately 30 minutes depending on the farm and the interviewee.

- If participants will miss class, how will they make up the work?  
Not applicable

- What will non-participants do while the others are participating?  
Not applicable

d. State how data collection and analysis will answer the research question.

As mentioned above, this study will collect qualitative research that will complement the existing quantitative research available on the subject. The participatory action nature of the research will entail a great deal of flexibility in the study; however, some proposed personal interview questions include:

- How did you get involved in farming? Do you hope that your children will do the same?
- What are some of the major obstacles that you face?
- What is the source of these obstacles?
- Are there times when you don't know where your next meal will come from? What do you do during those times?
- Do you purchase food grown by neighbors? What type? How often?
- Are you able to produce as much food as you want to produce?
- Are you concerned with food being imported from other countries? Or other regions of Nicaragua? How does this impact you and people you know?
- How much choice do you feel you have in the type of food you purchase and where it comes from?
- Would you like more choices or more control over this?
- How much choice do you feel you have in whom you sell your harvest to?
- Would you like more control over this?
- How important is it to you to grow your own food?
- Do you think that people who own their own land are more able to grow their own food than people who don't own land? Why?

These questions will help open up a conversation about the farmers' attitudes and feelings about the food they are able to provide to their families. Through this conversation, the researcher will be able to determine the extent to which control over their own food is an issue for them.

#### 4. RESEARCH RISKS

a. State the risk(s), and then state how the researcher will lessen each particular risk.

A potential risk during this study will be the possible lack of privacy. This risk will be minimized by keeping all hard copy research in a locked desk in a secure location and by keeping all electronic research data in an encrypted document on a password-protected computer program.

b. Physical risks may include physical injury, aggravation of an existing condition, allergies to materials used in the research, etc.

Not applicable

c. Risks also include the potential loss of privacy, as well as possible psychological risk (anxiety, stress, depression), and uncomfortable emotions (anger, fear, sadness, discomfort).

A potential risk during this study will be the possible lack of privacy. This risk will be minimized by keeping all hard copy research in a locked desk in a secure location and by keeping all electronic research data in a password-protected computer program.

d. Focus groups, use of real names, videotapes and photographs require extra measures to protect against loss of privacy.

Also, because the focus groups include discussion of personal opinions, extra measures will be taken to protect each participant's privacy. The researcher will begin the focus group by asking the participants to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group confidential. She will then ask each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential, and will remind them at the end of the group not to discuss the material outside.

Only the researcher will have access to the data collected. Any tapes and transcripts of the focus group will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study.

e. For sensitive research where loss of confidentiality may expose participants to excessive risk, such as prison, etc., a federal [Certificate of Confidentiality](http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/certconf.htm) <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/certconf.htm> may be required.

Not applicable

f. Teachers conducting research on their own classes should consider the power imbalance between themselves and their students to avoid coercion in recruiting students for their study. To do this:

-- make sure the recruiting script or letter to parents and children is an invitation to participate. Parents and the child must both have the opportunity to refuse.

--Also, tell parents and children that the child's grade will not be affected whether they participate or not. If the researcher is assessing the results of a curricular model that would be taught anyway, he/she should ask permission of parents and children to use the data collected from the pre and post test scores. Then all students would participate in the assessments, but the researcher would use data only from those students who agree and who have permission to participate.

Not applicable

g. Research in the workplace also offers risk if management has access to the raw data, or data, if identified, could result in loss of employment, rank or salary. Data should be presented to supervisors only in the aggregate, as a finished report.

All data in a finished report will be presented in aggregate.

h. If researcher is using deception, add a line to the risks section:

“Research designs often require that the full intent of the study not be explained prior to participation. When the study is completed, you will receive a full debriefing on the purpose and the procedures of the research.” Justify the deception and include a short debriefing script, per 1.e, above.

Not applicable

## 5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality refers to the security of the data.

a. Describe any coding systems that will be used to protect the privacy of the participants and the security of the data.

A number instead of a name will identify interviewees during the personal interview. This number will correspond with all information that is recorded by hand, electronically or via tape recording.

b) For some sensitive research where loss of confidentiality may expose participants to excessive risk, a federal [Certificate of Confidentiality](#) may be required.



Not applicable

c) Describe how the confidentiality of the data will be protected. Describe the storage location, storage methods and final disposition of the data. Describe methods of maintaining security.

Research data will be kept in an encrypted document on a password-protected computer.

The data will include codes instead of names to ensure confidentiality. Participants will be assured in the informed consent that the data will be used only for studies that are consistent with the original research purpose and that any other researcher attempting to use the data will need to obtain IRB approval to re-use the data.

After transcripts are made, audio tapes will be destroyed, approximately 1 year after they were originally recorded. Still photographs will only be used with the expressed consent of those photographed and will be destroyed after 5 years.

## **6. BENEFITS**

a. If there are no direct/guaranteed benefits, state this:

There are no direct benefits to participants.

b. In discussing anticipated benefits (optional), use the conditional tense:

Subjects may learn more about the research subject. Participants may benefit from exchanging experiences and sharing stories.

## **7. PAYMENT**

If there will be no compensation, state this.

Participants in the focus group as well as the personal interviews will receive monetary compensation that is considered a moderate wage for the number of hours they put into the study. This compensation will be received in cash at the conclusion of their participation. Participants will receive \$10USD for their participation in the focus group and \$5USD for a personal interview. Participants will be able to receive a total of \$15USD.

## **8. COSTS**

If there will be no costs, state this.

Participants in the focus group will receive compensation for transportation and child care. In addition, lunch will be provided.

There will be no costs associated with the personal interviews.

## **10. ALTERNATIVES**

a. Usually, the alternative in social/behavioral/educational research is not to participate in the research.

The alternative is not to participate in the research.

b. However, if the researcher is proposing a biomedical treatment or therapy, a disclosure of appropriate alternative courses or treatments that might be advantageous to the participant, if any, is required here.

Not applicable

## **11. CONSENT/ASSENT PROCESS AND DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT/ASSENT**

a. The consent/assent process begins with the recruitment of participants, which was described in Section 2.

After members have been selected for the focus group, the researcher will visit each member in person to inform them of the study procedures, give them an opportunity to ask questions and ask them to sign a Spanish-translated informed consent form.

During the personal interview portion of the study, interviewees will be asked to sign a Spanish-translated informed consent form in person before the beginning of the interview. The informed consent documents will be collected by the researcher and kept in a locked desk in a secure location.

b. State that the participants will receive a signed copy of the consent/assent form.

Participants will receive a signed copy of the consent/assent form.

c. Because of HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) regulations protecting private health information, researchers must receive permission from participants to review their medical charts or histories. Please include a HIPAA release form if necessary. (We will accept other institutions' standard HIPAA authorization or release forms.)

Not applicable

## **12. INVESTIGATOR'S QUALIFICATIONS**

a. State the researcher's qualifications to conduct this specific research project.

The researcher has taken a research methods class at San Francisco State University entitled, *IR 751 Alternative Research Methods*. During this class, the

researcher conducted interviews, participated in surveys and practiced collecting and analyzing data.

b. *For students:* Briefly add (one paragraph) advisor's areas of research expertise or relevant courses taught.

The advisor is an assistant professor at San Francisco State University who teaches Latin American Studies, Research Methods, and Analysis. She writes about Latin America, exploring how social movements seek support and build consensus, especially through the use of media. She received a Ph.D. in Mass Communication with a certificate in Latin American Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

### **13. FUNDING SOURCES**

If receiving funding for this research, please identify the funding agency. If this is contract work, please clarify what part of the contract project is research. If not funded, state "No funding."

Not yet funded.

If the project is funded, do any of the researchers have a financial conflict of interest? Please inform the committee and the prospective participants in the informed consent documents.

Not applicable

### **14. REFERENCES**

Provide the full citation (including title) for any references cited in this protocol.

## **Works Cited**

Citations removed to save space

## **Informed Consent Form**

### **San Francisco State University Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study *Food Sovereignty Among Fair Trade Coffee Farmers in Nicaragua***

#### **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this research study is to learn how fair trade cooperatives benefit coffee farmers. Are fair trade coffee farmers able to produce more of their own food than conventional coffee farmers?

The researcher, Susanna Beck, is a graduate student conducting research for a master's degree from the International Relations Department at San Francisco State University.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a coffee farmer.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- you will be interviewed for approximately thirty minutes about your experience growing coffee and growing food for your community.
- the interview will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
- the researcher will ask your permission to take still photographs of you
- the interview will take place at a time and location (ideally at your farm) that is convenient for you.
- the researcher may contact you within two weeks to clarify your interview answers for approximately fifteen to forty-five minutes.
- total time commitment will be approximately an hour.

#### **RISKS**

There is a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or identities will be used in any published reports of the research. Only the researcher will have access to the research data.

Also, if you participate in the focus group, extra measures will be taken to protect each participant's privacy. The researcher will begin the focus group by asking the participants to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group confidential. She will then ask each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential, and will remind them at the end of the group not to discuss the material outside.

Only the researcher will have access to the data collected. Any tapes and transcripts of the focus group will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study. In addition, still photographs that are taken with the expressed consent of those photographed will be destroyed after 5 years.

**D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

The research data will be kept in a secure location and the electronic research data will be stored in an encrypted document on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in a locked cabinet or office.

In addition, a number instead of a name will identify interviewees. This number will correspond with all information that is recorded by hand, electronically or via tape recording.

The data will be used only for studies that are consistent with the original research purpose and any other researcher attempting to use the data will need to obtain IRB approval to re-use the data.

After transcripts are made, after approximately 1 year, audiotapes will be destroyed. Still photographs will only be used with the expressed consent of those photographed.

**E. DIRECT BENEFITS**

There will be no direct benefits to the participant.

**F. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you for participating in this research.

**G. COMPENSATION**

You will receive \$10USD for your participation in the focus group and \$5USD for a personal interview. You will be able to receive a total of \$15USD if you choose to participate in both the focus group and personal interview.

**H. ALTERNATIVES**

The alternative is not to participate in the research.

**I. QUESTIONS**

You have spoken with the researcher, Susanna Beck, about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at \_\_\_\_\_ or phone at \_\_\_\_\_. You may also contact the researcher's advisor, Professor Darling at [juanitad@sfsu.edu](mailto:juanitad@sfsu.edu).

Questions about your rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study, may also be addressed to Human and Animal Protections at 415: 338-1093 or [protocol@sfsu.edu](mailto:protocol@sfsu.edu).

**J. CONSENT**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at San Francisco State University or Asociacion de Trabajadores del Campo.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Research Participant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you allow the researcher to take still photographs of you for the purpose of this research study? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_