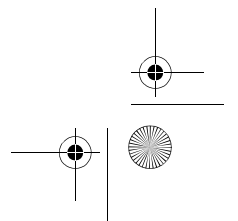
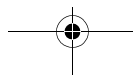
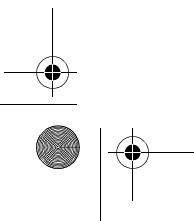
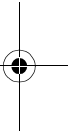
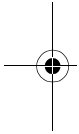
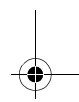
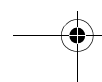
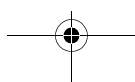
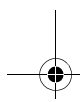
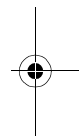
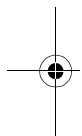


Part IV

Place, Space and Networks: Geographies of Sustainable Consumption





Chapter 6

Sustaining Foods: Organic Consumption and the Socio-Ecological Imaginary

David Goodman and Michael Goodman

1. Introduction

A central element in the social imaginaries of “sustainable consumption” and “green consumerism” is that the social values and everyday commitments that underpin consumer choice can be changed by the deployment of discursive resources. In this imaginary, changes in worldviews can transform consumption habits and cause significant shifts in market demand, creating profitable commercial opportunities for commodities produced more sustainably. As consumer values and habits of “getting and spending” are re-orientated toward “green” goods and services, producers of these commodities begin to enjoy competitive advantages over their less sustainable rivals. The process of capitalist competition, perhaps reinforced by state incentive policies and codes of ethical investment, will accelerate the transition of productive sectors, industries and, ultimately, capitalist economies to more sustainable development paths.

This standard, arguably reductionist, view conceives of sustainable consumption largely as a technological question, to be resolved within the parameters of capitalist instrumental rationality in a society where capitalist-exchange relations have penetrated all areas of economic and social life. In a second, less restrictive conception of sustainable consumption, premised on a different theorisation of capitalist society, alternative rationalities and social organisational forms could co-exist, and potentially restrict the scope of capitalist-exchange relations. This second conceptualisation clearly is implicit in arguments that consumer agency, even in the socially diffuse, incremental form of individual choice, can become a radical force for ecological and socially progressive change (Miller 1995). A wider analytical framework of co-existing social forms and different rationalities lends credibility to claims that “sustainable consumption” and “green consumerism” promise to achieve no less than the re-ordering of society’s metabolic relations with nature via the growth of new producer-consumer networks cemented by shared social values and commitments.

The transformative potential of green consumerism is not predicated on social mobilisation in the sense conventionally associated with social movements and political activism. Nevertheless, the articulation of producer-consumer networks to advance green commitments must contend with hegemonic discursive regimes and economic and regulatory

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power. In this context, the conceptual repertoire and metaphors of actor-network theory (ANT) are helpful to describe the challenge of changing the present “ordering” of nature-society relations. In the lexicon of ANT, networks are relational co-productions of humans and non-human entities formed to advance actor projects, although agency is conceptualised as a collective property or “effect” of the network (Law 1992; Latour 1993). Networks are forged in processes of translation, which have various “moments”, culminating in “mobilisation” when “a constraining network has been built” (Callon 1986:218–19).

Agro-food sectors and commodity systems fit easily into this conceptual framework of nature-society co-productions. In previous work, one of us has characterised food networks in terms of a dual combination of metabolic relations: between agricultural nature and social labour in production and the corporeal and symbolic act of human food consumption (D. Goodman, 1999). This approach places the relational materiality of agro-ecologies and human bodies at the centre of the analysis (FitzSimmons and Goodman, 1998). In this perspective, the discursive and material projects of organic agriculture and fair trade networks seek to re-configure this relational materiality by changing the underlying metabolic relations and the social practices in which these are embedded. Human and non-human entities are “translated” into alternative production-consumption networks.

In turn, these alternative “orderings” of nature-society relations face competing networks in the struggle to translate actors and entities and so enhance their power. Translation or alliance formation also is vital to the capacity of actor-networks to “act at a distance” across multiple scales of time and space (Latour 1993; Law 1986). As the case studies of food products reveal, standards, certification and other “immutable mobiles” (Latour 1987) are critical elements of this capacity to build networks of producers and consumers on multiple scales.

Our approach to organic agriculture, eco-labelling, and fair trade in food products is to map differences between their discursive claims and the material ecological and social practices that constitute their respective imaginaries of sustainability. These networks make differing claims, for example, about local food security, provision of a living wage for farm workers and biodiversity conservation. This analysis thus distinguishes the various practices of producer-consumer networks making general claims of “sustainable consumption” in order to problematise this concept and its normative application.

Before we proceed, however, the notion of green or sustainable consumption requires further discussion, and especially in relation to its transformative claims. More specifically, the radical content of these claims depends crucially on how capitalism is theorised. That is, the notion of sustainable consumption rests on hidden and largely unexamined assumptions about the nature of capitalism, its structural characteristics, and future development. One view of capitalism that underpins what may be termed the mainstream approach to sustainable consumption is the “universalization” thesis. This suggests that capitalism and its instrumental rationality now pervade all areas of human interaction, including social life, whose subsumption is characterised by Habermas (1987) as “the colonization of the lifeworld”. Virtually all aspects of economic and social life are “commodified” and capitalist social relations are ubiquitous.

From this “universalist” viewpoint, green or sustainable consumption activities can be characterised essentially as a subset of generalised capitalist production-consumption relations. A corollary of the universalist position is that the discourse of “sustainable

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consumption” is strongly, if not exclusively, focused on the technical relations or “forces” of production and their environmental consequences. Sustainable consumption does not propose any fundamental transformation of capitalist society and its distinctive rationality, but rather “running adjustments” to reorient the production-consumption nexus toward more environmentally friendly or “sustainable” production technologies.

By assumption, these alternative production technologies are efficient and consistent with the capitalist logic of exchange-value and the pursuit of profit. Here, sustainable consumption is mainly a form of technological competition, which adds a green gloss to capitalism, reifying its inherent dynamic and “tendencies”.

The role of discourse in the “universalist” version of green consumption is to provide a mirror in which actors can clearly discern the environmental consequences of their individual and collective activity. The consequences of our “old” ways of getting and spending, hitherto obscured, are now made transparent by green discourse, with the aim of stimulating a reflexive, self-cognitive process that will lead to individual and societal demands for less environmentally degrading processes of production and consumption. These tropes are deployed in varying ways by the sustainable-consumption networks examined below.

A second version of sustainable consumption can be distinguished, which is predicated upon a different implicit theorisation of capitalist society. Rather than “a totality of exchange relations”, the underlying premise is that the instrumental rationality of the capitalist economy is not universal and, as a result, commodification is uneven. A theorisation of capitalism with this premise has recently been advanced by Jessop (1997:563), who argues that alternative forms of social organisation may co-exist, and even co-evolve, with the capitalist economy, since this “is not wholly self-contained”. That is, “the capitalist economy is ‘structurally coupled’ to other systems with their own operational logics or instrumental rationalities and to the ‘lifeworld’ formed by various social relations, identities, interests and values not otherwise anchored in specific systems” (Jessop 1997:563).

A more open-ended, less totalising theorisation of capitalism, illustrated here by Jessop’s formulation, is implicit in the practices and values advocated by some of the green or sustainable-consumption networks discussed in this chapter. Their social projects and imaginaries are not constrained by the straitjacket of capitalist criteria of rational behaviour and profitability. Sustainable consumption then may be conceived as an alternative project on its own terms, which can co-exist with the capitalist economy, and possibly expand at its expense. Once different operational logics are given space, analytically and concretely, sustainable consumption can extend beyond its “universalist” version and reductionist focus on green technology to interrogate the rationality, values and goals that structure social relations and society’s relations with nature. In short, the concept of sustainable consumption can embrace social groups and organisational forms that do not all march to the same drummer.

From this standpoint, for example, sustainable-agriculture movements occupy “spaces of possibility” patterned by highly differentiated material eco-social relations and imaginaries. The analytical task is to provide a cartography of these spaces that reveals their diversity of form and diversity of practice. Organic food production-consumption networks in California are examined in Section 2 below, and international organic ecotourism, labelling and fair trade are the focus of Section 3.

2. Organic Agriculture: California Dreaming

Diversity certainly is evident in Californian organic agriculture, but the patterns of number, practice and form encountered in that region prompt close interrogation of sustainable consumption and its meanings. California is the primary focus of an extraordinary “translation” of human and non-human entities into new metabolic networks of agricultural nature-social labour-food consumption. Very briefly, in the United States these networks grew from 2,753 certified organic farms and 479,000 acres in 1991 to 4,856 farms and 915,000 acres in 1995 (Klonsky 2000).¹ Sales of organic produce, admittedly starting from a low absolute level, have grown at an average annual rate of 20 percent since 1990, reaching an estimated \$4.5 billion in 1998, including \$3.5 billion in domestic sales, \$5–600 million in exports, and \$2–300 million in herbs and non-food products. Although still significantly less than one percent of United States retail food sales, this rapid scaling up has brought serious tensions, which have called sustainable agriculture qua social movement into question and clouded the transparency of its claims to sustainability, as we explain below.

Organic production-consumption networks have a storied past, whose history has yet to be written. In the United States, the many filaments extend from early pioneers of biodynamic agriculture and 1960s counter-culture movements, including back-to-the-land advocates, farm communes and alternative food-marketing initiatives (Belasco 1989), to projects to revitalise family farming and conserve farmland and sustainable-agriculture movements (SAMs). The metabolic co-productions of land and labour variously mobilised under the organic are heavily invested with ethical and philosophical values to constitute what Vos (2000) has characterised as a “moral ecology”. This expresses certain “foundational values”, including notions of stewardship, following Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic”, and intersubjective relational values based on reverence for nature. These values are drawn from and shape both the material or agroecological practices of organic farming *and* its operational logic to create a distinctive praxis or “way of life”. In this discourse, organic praxis brings good husbandry to the land and healthy, nutritious food to consumers.

In actor-network terms, the organic discourse represents a specific “problematization” of eco-social relations in agro-food networks, an initial though recurrent step in the process of translation. This discourse constructs the organic agro-food collective, where human and non-human entities — agricultural nature, sociotechnical artifacts, farmers, workers, consumers — are aligned and their identities defined in particular ways. For organic consumers, the discursive “imagined community” of shared metabolic values is materialised as a specific ordering of eco-social relations. This nature-culture collective acts at a distance through the “certified organic” label, the medium of trust and stamp of authenticity used to enrol other actors and intermediaries, human and non-human, extending the production-consumption spaces of the organic. In this field of narrative forces, the “biocidal” wasteland of conventional agriculture is restored by benign,

¹Since these data are taken from private third-party certification groups, the number of organic growers, and particularly small operators, probably is significantly under-estimated. That is, growers who are registered as organic producers with state agencies, but not certified by third-party organisations, are excluded from these data.

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transparent ecological practices and repopulated by family farms, and all effortlessly inscribed on the cartography of organic consumption.

From its inchoate beginnings, the organic production-consumption network gradually acquired certain industrial characteristics as SAMs moved towards self-regulation. In the 1970s, such groups as California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and Oregon Tilth assumed state-level responsibility for certifying “organically grown” produce, initiating the legal construction of the organic. These efforts to further stabilise and coordinate the roles of human and non-human entities entered a decisive stage in 1990 with the passage of state and federal legislation, which is intended to establish legal minimum standards of organic production, including lists of allowable materials.

In this respect, such legislation represents a form of network coordination or “translation regime”, that seeks to impose behavioural stability and give the appearance of irreversibility (Callon 1991). However, the features of this regime have been vigorously contested since the public outcry provoked by the National Organic Program Proposed Rule, which was released in 1997 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to regulate the federal Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. The rejection by the organic production-consumption collective of the roles and identities that the USDA had assigned was at the heart of this dispute, epitomised by the proposed enrolment of new hybrid entities, notably irradiation, municipal sewage, and genetically-modified organisms. The proposed rule was thus perceived as a threat to dilute the distinctive practices, material and discursive, of this alternative “mode of ordering” metabolic relations (Goodman 2000a).

Nevertheless, as Guthman (1998:141, 145) emphasises, “organic food has come to be defined by its regulation” and this, in turn, “has come to rely on gross simplification — an amazing irony considering the agronomic goals of organic agriculture”. That is, organic is defined by the legally restricted materials and the exceptions, documented or illicit, that such codification implicitly encourages. This reductionism, and the associated levelling down of standards, arguably is the key source of the diversity of agronomic practice found in California organic agriculture.

Although the expository convenience of binary categories can be dangerously misleading, codification and economic expansion appear to have accentuated differences between “movement” farmers, who remain committed to the “moral ecology” and agroecological practices of organic farming, and “minimalist” farmers, whose practices and operational logic are more closely informed by legal-input restrictions and profit maximisation. However, as will soon become apparent, the lines between these categories are imprecisely drawn, with each representing a diverse constellation of eco-social relations.

Both groups enjoy the refugial niche of organic production, protected by the costs of the conversion process from direct competition with conventional agriculture. Yet, in the context of rapidly growing organic markets, legal minimum standards have facilitated the scaling-up of production and drawn larger producers into the sector, including so-called “mixed”-farm operators, who cultivate both conventional and organic crops. This configuration has two significant implications for the meaning of sustainable-food consumption. First, the extension of organic production-consumption networks has provoked structural convergence with conventional agriculture, threatening the shared metabolic values that connect the “imagined community” of organic producers and consumers. Second, the

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bifurcation between “movement” and “minimalist” farmers problematises the notion of sustainable agriculture, even when this is understood purely in ecological terms.

Restructuring and Convergence

Recent research in California reveals that organic agriculture in important respects is not so much imitating natural systems — “farming in nature’s image” as the textbooks have it — as industrial agriculture. Agroecological management involves the design of integrated farming systems, where organic matter, soil nutrients and biological pest-control mechanisms, for example, are produced on-farm as use-values and recycled through the system. However, evidence from California indicates that farm-production processes have been significantly eroded by industrial appropriationism (Goodman *et al.*, 1987). That is, there is considerable dependence on external inputs produced by specialist suppliers, allowing organic farmers to dispense with the recommended on-farm alternatives. Such input substitution, in turn, supports mono-cropping, sometimes at several production sites, and year-round multiple cropping (Guthman 2000; Buck *et al.*, 1997). As Altieri and Rosset (1997) observe, this recalls the “limiting factor mentality” that has dominated conventional agricultural research and practice for decades.

Critics of conventional agriculture have long drawn attention to the unsustainable, energy-intensive logistical patterns associated with agribusiness product sourcing. Thus Kloppenburg *et al.* (1996:34) cite an estimate that food products in the United States are transported 1,300 miles on average and are handled by six intermediaries before being consumed. “What is eaten by the great majority of North Americans comes from a global everywhere, yet from nowhere they know in particular”. Yet California organic growers are approximating these conventional patterns via contract production for interregional markets, supermarkets and organic chain stores, such as Whole Foods Market, with 100 outlets in twenty states, as well as exports to international markets. These marketing structures are a far cry from the development of local agro-food networks of farmers’ markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes or integration in place-based “foodsheds” in support of community food councils and food security initiatives.

Finally, structural convergence is evident in the organisation of the labour process. The agronomic demands of intensive, specialist fresh vegetable crops and the recent scaling-up and concentration of production challenge the frequent conflation of organic production and family farms. Certainly these are generally not family-labour farms *strictu sensu*. Rather, the production process depends on casual non-unionised immigrant labour, which reproduces the exploitative wage relations of their counterparts in industrial agriculture.

The bimodal structure between “movement” and “minimalist” farmers, or what Melanie DuPuis (2000) characterises as “process” vs. “standards” approaches to organic production, was an implicit assumption of earlier research on California organic agriculture. Thus larger producers, including all-organic and “mixed” operators, were presumed to adhere to the codified criteria and be closely integrated with concentrated distribution and retail sectors, with smaller “process” farmers relying more on direct-marketing channels, notably farmers’ markets, CSAs or subscription farming, and sales to sophisticated restaurants (Buck *et al.*, 1997). However, following a comprehensive questionnaire survey,

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interviews and farm visits, Guthman (2000:18) has proposed some important qualifications to the bimodal hypothesis, suggesting “key variations in practices are related to variables quite separate from scale and grower commitment”. Her research emphasises the significant influence of climatic and biophysical differences on agronomic practice, but the principal source of variation “is related to crop specificities and the availability of efficacious technologies and inputs to deal with crop-specific problems”.

Differences emerge in the agronomic practices used by all-organic farmers and “mixed” operators, and “at least in some areas, there are clear gradations in practices between large-scale and small-scale growers” (Guthman 2000:18). However, the most singular finding is that “in almost all cases, organic-farming practices fall notably short of agroecological ideals, although they remain within the letter of organic rules and regulations” (18). Guthman attributes these limitations in part to the contradictory effects of legal norms, which operate both as entry barriers and as a ceiling, giving “growers less incentive to incorporate an ideal practice when an allowable one will suffice” (19).

This research describes the wide diversity of agronomic practice and the malleable content of the organic in California. As Guthman (2000) emphasises, since her sample is not representative in terms of number of growers, there is uncertainty about how many certified small farmers remain committed to the philosophy and agronomic processes of organic agriculture. It is revealing, nevertheless, that of Guthman’s sample of 77 all-organic growers, only four gained the highest agroecological ranking, as defined by basic principles of organic management drawn from the well-known text by Altieri (1995). While the median farm size of organic production of ten acres (Klonsky and Tourte 1998) leaves room for small “process” farmers, Guthman’s survey “captures most of the acreage and sales in the sector” (Guthman 2000:2). In short, organic practices in California still may fall on a gradient but, for large and small producers alike, it is heavily tilted towards the minimalist or standards approach in terms of food sales and relations with agricultural nature.

This codified agricultural sustainability and the cost-oriented calculus of input substitution fit easily with capitalist logic, facilitating structural convergence and exposing organic agriculture to “translation” by other powerful actor-networks. This scenario describes the recent struggle of movement farmers and grassroots organisations with the USDA and its strong corporate agribusiness constituency. Sadly, the boundaries of this dispute have been defined largely by the USDA’s framing of regulation in terms of production norms and market enhancement (Goodman 2000b). This discursive disciplining and capture of the regulatory process endangers other imaginaries that build on the nexus of philosophical values and agronomic practice as the foundation of alternative socio-ecological futures.

Codification, Organic Managerialism and Reflexive Green Consumerism

The codification of organic, and the structural change this promotes, problematises sustainable food consumption in various ways, principally by locating its political economy on the highly constrained terrain of technical criteria. The politics of sustainable food consumption can then be formulated as a choice between two forms of environmental managerialism. Both dovetail nicely with the “universalist” version of green consumerism

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discussed above. In this framing, the sustainability of organic food consumption is ascribed negatively by comparison with the unsustainable practices attributed to conventional agriculture. The organic is represented as a competing system of efficient resource management, and enframed by modernist epistemology and scientific-knowledge claims (Allen 1993; Buttel 1993, 1997). This managerialist representation also privileges food safety and health claims. The organic is equated with the limited and controlled use of synthetic materials and substances, a reliable source of “chemical-lite” products. Sustainability as resource management is the hallmark of this techno-scientific discourse, which marginalises “moral ecology” and reifies the social division of labour.

With sustainable food consumption reduced to production standards and related food-safety claims, it is easily consigned to the neo-liberal terrain of individual-market choice and consumer sovereignty. This terrain is populated by self-regulated bodies or reflexive consumers who, it is presumed, have the knowledge to evaluate food risks and the purchasing power to buy accordingly. In short, neo-liberal green consumerism pre-empts alternative conceptualisations of sustainable food consumption, which articulate social-justice concerns and provide space for forms of food provisioning not disciplined by capitalist markets.

There seems little doubt that codification of organic, and the rapid scaling-up to “industry” status with the entry of larger growers, vertically integrated agribusiness, and retail chains, will reinforce technocentrism. Indeed, mainstream SAMs in the United States, by and large, have accepted this arena of legitimation and failed to elaborate a progressive socio-ecological politics that gives prominence to issues of social justice, food security, class, gender, and race (Allen 1999). The social agenda of sustainable agriculture has been subordinated to “the project of making agriculture sustainable” (Allen and Sachs 1991:571). By default, construction of food production-consumption networks to address this social agenda has fallen to community food-security movements and anti-hunger activists.

Bridges to Progressive Green Consumerism

To expose these social “invisibilities”, a more symmetrical understanding of sustainable food consumption is needed. The key requirement is the integration of sustainable agro-ecological processes — the conditions and forces of production — with social justice in the production and distribution of wholesome organic food. Discursive claims to transparency would then be systemic in scope, extending from farming practices to socially just relations in the labour process and equitable food access. Although embryonic and localised, more systemic, progressive agendas have recently emerged that challenge the erasures and silences of technocratic discourse. These initiatives to create sustainable agro-food networks are seeking to forge links between small-scale organic farmers and the working poor and other excluded groups in urban areas.

In California, the past decade has seen a remarkable groundswell of social movements and programs seeking to restructure regional and local food networks. Although often with strong historical roots, this organisational effervescence has created a rich array of new social forms at the food production-consumption interface. Mere labels do not convey the

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empirical diversity of form that embraces organic-farmer movements, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, food-policy councils, urban gardens, micro-food processing enterprises, therapeutic and rehabilitation projects, farmland-conservation trusts, food cooperatives, and myriad organic garden and meals projects in schools. Yet for all its creative energy, this wave of social innovation has made negligible inroads into agro-food networks at large. Organic food, as already noted, still represents less than one percent of retail food sales in the United States (Klonsky 2000).

As a general argument, the success of these progressive initiatives depends on the construction of "rural-urban bridges"² that promote expansion into spaces and production niches where non-capitalist operational logics can prevail. Sustainable food consumption otherwise will be defined in the technocentric lexicon of production norms and food safety, losing its credibility as a force for progressive structural change. However, these bridges are extraordinarily difficult to build in practice, as efforts to connect farmers' markets and CSAs with affordable food provision to low-income consumers have demonstrated.

These new institutional forms have grown spectacularly in recent years, with the number of farmers' markets in California rising from seven in 1977 and 250 in 1997 to over 300 currently (Perry, 2000). The livelihoods and social reproduction of organic "movement" or "process" farmers are closely linked to these regional and local markets. Thus the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), a nonprofit membership organisation in California, "supports direct marketing as a key to economic viability for family farmers and as a way for city folks to get back in touch with the land and the people who grow their food" (CAFF 1998:3). "Economic viability" for operators in these marketing channels arguably is the simple reproduction of petty capitalists rather than the expanded reproduction of archetypal capitalist enterprise. Nevertheless, apart from extremely smallholdings, fresh vegetable and fruit growers in California usually depend upon wage labour, as well as family members, and therefore have a structural requirement to earn an adequate economic return or "surplus product". Under these conditions, production for the market inevitably raises issues of exploitative class and gender relations within the labour process, as well as pricing practices.

This structural requirement has bedevilled efforts to reconcile market-based sustainable production with the community food-security goal of providing equitable access for all consumers to organic food.³ The short-lived Market Basket Project in Los Angeles, for example, supplied organic produce to low-income residents by purchasing from growers in local farmers' markets, who agreed to sell part of their output at a 15 percent discount below market prices. After two years, this project was phased out because of the economic difficulties of providing food to low-income families and logistical-supply problems (Gottlieb and Mascarenhas 1997). In Santa Cruz, the grant and subscriber-supported Homeless Garden Project, which gives vocational training to homeless people in its CSA programme, contributes to local food security by allocating some CSA shares

²This phrase is used by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers to define its activities (CAFF 1998:3).

³For a general discussion critical of community food-security movements and attentive to the limitations of localism, refer to Allen (1999).

to low-income households. However, this arrangement depends on a “cross-subsidy” from grant funds and donations from wealthier CSA subscribers.

The social exclusion that these CSA projects seek to offset is accentuated by reports of the higher unit prices found in farmers’ markets compared to supermarkets. These “new spaces” and their imaginaries are not accessible to all, inviting charges that organic consumption is a form of “class diet”, highly differentiated by income, race, and other attributes. Allen (1999), for example, cites a 1995 survey of California CSA members that found that 71 percent had annual incomes of \$40,000 or more, while a 1992 study reported that people of colour represented only 5 percent of the total CSA membership.

The creative, but highly fragmented and partial, nature of efforts to resolve the commercial production — affordable consumption dilemma emphasises the obstacles facing progressive agendas for sustainable agro-food networks. Not surprisingly, these difficulties have stimulated a variety of urban-based agriculture and community-gardening projects to enhance food security, generate income in kind, and strengthen community organisation. The Northern California Food Systems Alliance formed by the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners and other Bay Area organisations exemplifies this focus on gaining greater control over local food supply as a source of community empowerment. In other programs, public resources, notably school district-meals funds, are being used to provide markets for organic family farms and enhance their integration with local communities. The “Farmers’ Market Salad Bar” program in which nine Santa Monica schools are participating and the Berkeley Food Systems Project are two of many such initiatives in California (Mascarenhas 2000). In their different ways, such projects simply side step the dilemma presented by market-based approaches to sustainable food consumption and food security. Instead, they create allocative schemes less strongly disciplined by market values and the conflation of consumption and citizenship.

These experiences reveal the contradiction between the social reproduction of commercial organic farmers and equitable access to affordable organic food. Under present rules of the game, in other words, the rural-urban bridges of progressive imaginaries are too fragile. This recommends, in turn, that sustainable agriculture and urban-food movements build coalitions that can engage with the politics of the State to secure public resources for locally based sustainable agro-food networks. The need for non-market support is the crucial lesson of projects to connect farmers’ markets and CSAs with low-income groups.

The imaginative use of cost and price subsidies would not place producers and consumers outside the market economy, but it would give viability to agro-food networks where access to safe, healthy food does not depend on the ability to pay. Hegemonic conventional networks have enjoyed such institutional arrangements for decades! The re-direction of public agro-food subsidies to advance the symmetrical construction of sustainability as both agroecological praxis and social justice would represent a powerful societal project. It may not transform capitalist instrumental rationality *tout court*, but it holds far greater promise of changing the world for present and future generations than inequitable technocentric readings of sustainable food consumption.

The issue of symmetry, of a truly “socio-ecological” ordering of sustainable consumption, also arises in the extended networks of international organic foodstuffs. In the case studies presented below, however, the parallel perhaps is better drawn between the organic as ecocentric, as represented by the ecolabelling narrative of biodiversity conservation,

and the organic as social justice through fair trade. Both networks are built upon codified agro-ecological practices, but fair trade stands in more ambivalent relation to the objectified logic of capitalist markets.

3. Consuming ‘Green’ in an International Context: The Cases of Organic Ecolabelling and Fair Trade

The international networks of organic food production and consumption have experienced remarkable expansion (ITC 1999), but not all organic commodities are created equal. Indeed, the marketplace is seemingly awash with a diversity of products, each anchored in its own organic “nature”, yet often purveying very different socio-ecological imaginaries. In this section, we explore the imaginaries deployed in the provisioning of two important categories of organic products emerging within the international organic marketplace: those sold through ecolabelling schemes and those that are associated with the “fair trade” pathway.

The purpose of these case studies is to begin to evaluate and offer critical reflections on the transformative potentials of these particular ways of consuming “green”. How are these commodities and their networks produced and discursively constructed as “different” from those of conventional products, other organic commodities, and each other? This task requires a broad investigation of the co-produced social and material relations imprinted on ecolabelled and fair trade products and the processes by which these relations become embedded. Equally important, we wish to evaluate the “agency” of these commodities; as we will show, these foods are about “doing” more than just producing and consuming organic products. This agential dimension is considered on two related levels. First, on a practical/normative level, what is it, through the specificity of their co-production relations, which these products are purported to do and how do they go about doing it? And, second, on a theoretical level, how is capitalism theorised in the functioning of ecolabelled and fair trade organic foods? We begin with a discussion of the general processes of the construction of ecolabelled and fair trade products.

“Eating Green” for Tropical Conservation: The Ecolabelling of International Organic Foods

The organising principles of the ecolabelling of international organic foods very often require the specific creation of networks devoted to the conservation of tropical nature. In generalising across a diversity of products, labelling practices, and tropical “natures,” organic ecolabelling displays a dual “constructive” strategy. First and foremost, this strategy requires that the material-production relations be recognised as organic, in accordance with a set of internationally codified production techniques, which are legitimated by the system of organic certification. Yet, it is here that ecolabelled products seek to go beyond this codified organic “nature” to actively distinguish themselves from other more “generically” marketed organic foods. This differentiation is performed by making explicit

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and additional claims about the synergistic links between the production of organic commodities and tropical-biodiversity conservation. These claims, found predominantly in the networks that provision organic chocolate and coffee, are made through textual and visual cues imprinted on the label. For example, one manufacturer states:

Your purchase of this product helps support sustainable organic farming of cacao beans in the tropics. Ten percent of our profits on our chocolate bar go to conserving tropical rainforest lands. (Wild Oats, n.d.)

Another puts it this way:

Hot, humid, and chemical-free. Tropical Source, searching worldwide for local growers committed to leaving nature on its own ... nothing but heat, earth, and cocoa beans ... roasting all day under the intense equatorial sun ... at the Tropical Source ... We donate ten percent of our profits to conserve tropical rainforests where cocoa beans are grown. Please join us in this conservation effort. Your purchase makes a difference. Thank you. (Cloud Nine Chocolate Company, n.d.)

One of the fastest growing segments of this market includes a host of “bird-friendly” products, whose production and consumption, it is claimed, promote tropical biodiversity and shade trees as migratory bird habitat.

The second strand of the organic-ecolabelling strategy, as demonstrated in the above examples, involves the participation of manufacturers and importers in donation schemes. Here a portion of the profits from the sale of a commodity, often upwards of ten percent, is given to organisations involved in tropical-conservation programs. Very often, these two strategies are combined in one product, as in the case of marketing the “Tropical Source” bars from the Cloud Nine Chocolate Company (www.cloudnynecandy.com) that sells organic products and donates money to the Rainforest Alliance, an NGO involved in tropical-forest conservation.

There are two striking characteristics of ecolabelled-organic products. First, organic foods generally attempt to make the ecological relations of their production transparent within the commodity form (Goodman 1999; Reynolds 2000). Yet as demonstrated in the case of ecolabelled international organics, the transparency between organic farming and tropical nature is given a greater specificity and “connectedness” in the entangled network of organic agroecology, consumers, tropical conservation, and conservation schemes. Arguably, the discursive, economic, and geo-material specificity of these links through ecolabelling is carving out another niche within that of the organic marketplace. The second distinguishing characteristic of this form of green consumerism is the role it affords consumers. Couched in the moral discourse of “helping”, consumers are implored to “join in conservation efforts” to “make a difference” through their purchases that go to support organic farming and fund conservation. Thus consumption and tropical conservation are joined in this imaginary and green “agency” is made real through the neo-liberal mechanisms of consumer sovereignty and choice “for change”.

Opening the Boundaries of Organic Consumption: Fair Trade Networks and the Re-emergence of Productive Labour

A fascinating development in the international organic food trade has been the production of organic commodities under the auspices of the fair trade movement.⁴ Much of this expansion is the result of the continuing dialogue between the organic agriculture and fair trade movements in recent years and the actions of individual companies (refer to IFOAM 1997). These “fair trade” products, typically cacao, coffee and teas,⁵ are “bearers” of consumers’ commitments not only to more environmentally-friendly production methods, but also to socially-responsible trade, which creates more equitable and favourable conditions for increasingly marginalised small-scale producers in the global South. These involve, but are not limited to, trading relationships defined by a bundle of characteristics: long-term contracts, direct-trading routes, democratically-run producer groups and co-ops, advanced credit, and a guaranteed-minimum price. The regulation of fair trade labelling is still somewhat in flux. The Fair Trade Labelling Organisation (FLO) is offering a more codified set of criteria for burgeoning European markets and fledgling North American and Japanese markets (Raynolds 2000; Robins *et al.*, 1999:54) while some companies have established their own criteria or voluntarily comply with those of the fair trade movement. As the movement and its institutionalisation continue to grow, compliance with FLO guidelines presumably will become mandatory. In actor-network terms, the fair trade movement at this point would begin to take on the characteristics of a “translation regime”; that is, a durable, strongly coordinated network, “heavy with norms” that gradually “tends to shed its history” and become taken for granted (Callon 1991).

The discursive armoury marshalled by fair trade foods not only lends transparency to their material relations in the ecological organic, but also attempts to re-embed the social relations of production in the fair trade “portion” of the commodity form. In other words, growers and their labour are made visible and tangible to consumers. This visibility is “performed” through the discursive tactics of label text and images and the concerted marketing efforts of those non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have spearheaded fair trade.⁶ This “laying out and viewing” of who is producing these commodities and the social and material conditions under which they are produced is altogether absent from other conventional, organic and ecolabelled-organic products as they sit on store shelves. For example, on one fair trade coffee, known as Café Mam®,⁷ consumers learn that:

⁴Links between organic and fair trade have not been without considerable discussion (see IFOAM 1995 and 1997) and constraints and barriers, many of which still exist. See Browne *et al.* (2000), Sams (1997) and Robins *et al.* (1999) for a discussion of these and related issues.

⁵The markets for fair-trade bananas and orange juice are expanding rapidly (see ITC 1999; Raynolds 2000; Murray and Raynolds 2000).

⁶While this is clearly changing with the Internet, many manufacturers offer brochures full of rich textual and visual material in conjunction with their products to explain the principles of fair trade and/or organic production and give more detail of producer communities.

⁷For interesting work focusing directly on the community of ISMAM, see Hernández Castillo and Nigh (1998) and Nigh (1997). See also www.cafemam.com.

Café Mam is grown by ISMAM (Indigenous peoples of the Sierra Madre of Motozintla), a social solidarity cooperative of native Mayan farmers living in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. The growers are primarily from the Mam, Tzetzal, and Mochó peoples. ISMAM is organised on egalitarian and democratic ideals that stress responsibility to the co-op, hard work, and high standards of quality. Their programs help the communities in many positive ways ... ISMAM's mission is equally one of conserving and rebuilding the natural environment and one of working towards a higher quality of life for the indigenous campesinos and their families. Each purchase of ISMAM coffee helps support goals of:

- Direct Marketing (no intermediaries or coyotes);
- Self-sufficiency and political independence;
- Democratic decision making among communities;
- Sustainable Development of rural infrastructure;
- Child Welfare, including education and nutrition;
- Defense of indigenous cultural identity;
- Protection of forests, rivers, and tropical fauna;
- Justice for indigenous peoples;
- Promotion of women and women's rights ... (Royal Blue Organics, n.d.).

Often fair trade products thus enact the life histories of producers. In this sense, many of these foods carry the imprint of their workers' place-based, economic and social livelihoods.

Thus, at a discursive level, both organic ecolabelling and fair trade seek to establish what Whatmore and Thorne (1997) call a novel "mode of ordering of connectivity" among the actors and intermediaries enrolled in these networks: producers, organic nature, consumers, product labels, organic, conservation and fair trade NGOs, regulatory texts, certifiers, traders and importers. Such "modes of ordering" (Law 1992) operate in ecological, geographic, and economic spaces relatively marginal to the larger conventional agro-food system, but also in ideological and discursive spaces at the boundaries of the neo-liberal logic of commodity production and world trade. On this ideological terrain, a "relational ethic" (Whatmore and Thorne 1997) forges links of eco-social "right" action across ecolabel and fair trade networks.

Yet, there are important differences in this regard between the two networks. For ecolabelled commodities, the mode of ordering creates a relational ethic between consumers and tropical nature. In the fair-trade network, a more expansive ethic is constructed to connect consumers, nature, and, now, producer groups. For producers, this ethic finds material expression in the fair trade price premium that is available for investments in local social and economic development, and in the textual discourses of "helping", "support", and "difference making". Thus, in fair trade commodities and their "nourishing networks" (Whatmore and Thorne 1997), consumption and the relational ethic it creates is tied not only to the support of organic farming and tropical conservation, but explicitly to the very livelihoods of the producers themselves, no longer occluded by the commodity form's objectification of work, nature and place.

Two 'Moments' of Construction: Networks, Text and Acting at a Distance

Since ecolabelled and fair trade organic products are abstracted from conventional food-stuffs and then re-embedded with sets of alternative and more ethical eco-social relations, we need to look at the processes through which this occurs. The embedding processes are located at two co-production "moments" of network construction: at the moment of their socio-ecological production and the moment of discursive or narrative production through label text.

At the point of production, it is the specific co-production of agroecological nature and social labour, which is encoded as "organic" and endowed with ethical content. Implicit in this organic moment, however, is a rather tightly disciplined sense of how organic "nature" is to be produced. Organic nature is policed through an international system of organic regulation, the core of which is based around the production standards of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). Thus, the organic moment is not only defined by specific production practices grounded in agroecology, but also by the history and struggles of actors and their intermediaries to determine what the organic is and should be. For fair trade commodities, not surprisingly, this first moment comprehends both organic production processes and the bundle of ethical labour and commercial practices that encode alternative eco-social production relations into the constitution of these products.

The second co-production moment in the construction of these alternative networks occurs through the narrative strategies of label texts. These readings of eco-social relations construct the meaning and identity of ecolabelled and fair trade foods. This discursive moment clearly is necessary and complementary to the organic production moment as it is through these narratives that consumers come to understand and perceive the relations imprinted on these foods: ecolabelled organics are about conservation and fair trade organic is about conservation of nature, equitable exchange and producer livelihoods. These textual inscriptions also endow the networks with the capacity to "act at a distance" and thereby translate affluent green-consumer constituencies and the socio-ecological environments of poor rural communities. The textual moment of production, and the practical and theoretical implications of these discursive tactics and their transformative potential, have received little attention in the literature on organic and fair trade (Barrett-Brown 1993; Browne *et al.*, 2000; Buck *et al.*, 1997; Guthman 1998; Murray and Reynolds 2000; Nigh 1997; Renard 1999; Reynolds 2000; Whatmore and Thorne 1997; but see James 1993).

The function of label text is not only to enable consumers to learn about and interact with the imprinted material and symbolic qualities of these products, but also, not surprisingly, to entice consumers into making a purchase. Labels and their discourses, thus act as "immutable mobiles" to enrol human actors as consumers into the respective networks. Through intermediaries, ecolabelled organic and fair trade networks seek to "lengthen" across the spaces of consumption, to work against and translate actors from more conventional agrofood networks. Two observations are appropriate here. First, in green consumption networks, the struggles for a sustainable agriculture and society are as much about the competition for the "hearts and minds" (and purchases) of consumers through the discursive tactics of language and symbols as they are about agroecological production

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methods. Second, enrolment involves not only the literal corporeal consumption of the food, but also the consumption of the label discourse. Consuming is thus both the metabolisation of productive “nature” and the figurative symbolic ingesting of the tropics and producer livelihoods.

Furthermore, the “connecting” and re-embedding discourses of the texts and the messages they contain have a series of implications. Most importantly, because consumers are enrolled as agents of positive eco-social change and thereby given the ability to “make a difference,” the act of consumption is infused with novel meanings: consuming becomes a tool of long-distance eco-social development, with consumers as the agents of that development. The encoding of consumption with developmental attributes is the symbolic and material means by which the networks “act at a distance” and affect the conditions of tropical nature and producers’ lives. The drawing of overt links between consumption, environmentally sensitive production, and livelihood strategies, which frequently feature as goals of Third World “sustainable” and “green” development (Adams 1990; Redclift 1987), is becoming a common strategy in the provisioning of a multitude of First World consumables, such as shampoos and clothes, in addition to organic food items (e.g., Dove 1993). One of the authors has characterised the growing market-based links between consumption, environment and social development as “developmental consumption” (M. Goodman 1999).

In the ecolabelling and fair trade networks, the notion of developmental consumption conveys not only a geography of Third World production and First World consumption, but also maps out a cartography of network power. Clearly, in the ecolabelling network with its relatively invisible producers, the powers of conservation lie in the hands of the “green” First World. The fair trade network, on the other hand, while still mirroring this geography of production and consumption, cleaves to a less hierarchical set of power relations: it is the actions of both farmers and consumers that go into the making of the fair trade network (Whatmore and Thorne 1997). As the movement likes to highlight, “fair trade isn’t charity, it’s simply good business” (San Francisco Chronicle 1999), with producers portrayed as “partners” and consumers as “activists”.

4. Transformative Foods?

The eco-social relations encoded in ecolabelled and fair trade organic networks assign to these products agential roles distinct from those of their more conventionally produced counterparts. In part, both challenge the objectified relations of conventional international commodities in material terms: ecolabelled in their “organic” status and fair trade products as organic, “fairly produced”, and equitably exchanged. Similarly, both seek to reduce the social distance between production and consumption by infusing material and discursive connections between consumption and tropical conservation into ecolabelled items and, for fair trade, between consumption and livelihood protection (in the widest possible material and social sense). Thus material- and symbolic-use values in ecolabelled and fair trade commodities are reconfigured: these products are tools of natural and human development, in addition to offering the (rather dubious) nutritional/metabolic food values of coffee and chocolate.

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The growth of the international organic and fair trade markets has been remarkable. International trade in organic foods, including ecolabelled and more “conventional” organic products, has reached an estimated \$10 billion (ITC 1999). The market for fair trade products is estimated to be \$400 million per year and expanding rapidly (Raynolds 2000). These figures are minuscule when compared to the international trade of conventional goods and, since ecolabelled and fair-trade organic are a subset of their respective markets, their market presence is even smaller. Rather, as Raynolds (2000) observes, it is the political and institutional challenge that ecolabelled and fair trade products posit to the conventional agro-food system that is most compelling about these commodities. With this challenge comes the creation of “spaces of transformative potential” in the imaginaries of eco-social sustainability encoded into these commodities. We turn now to assess the transformative content of ecolabelling and fair trade in their claims to make consumption more sustainable.

The form and processes of ecolabelling contain a relatively simplistic reformist imaginary of sustainability anchored in conventional trading relations and the social relations of an exploitative agrofood system. Indeed, the imaginary transmitted through the “minimalist” ecolabelled pathway relies solely on the organic, with the implication that sustainability and conservation are technological matters resolvable through the promotion and spread of organic farming practices. Ecolabelled products are constructed within the relational and ideological spaces of the current capitalist system and seek little fundamental change in the social and economic pathways of food production and trade, which would be a part of a wider, more progressive agenda of sustainable consumption. The novel relational ethic created by the connection of consumption to tropical nature only becomes operational through the realisation of profits and changing consumer choices mediated through market sales. Ecolabelling is more about bringing organic production, tropical conservation, and thus sustainable consumption, within the purview of capitalism than an operationalisation of substantive eco-social change in the provisioning of international commodities. It is perfectly consistent with the “universalist” perspective of green consumption discussed in the introduction to this paper.

Several further limitations to the transformative potential of organic ecolabelling require brief mention. First, while organic production methods are presumably better for worker health and safety, ecolabelling standards neglect the social conditions of production and trade, particularly for labourers on large organic farms and plantations, nor is there any commitment to ensuring that the premium price for organic reaches those producing the commodities or labouring in the fields. Furthermore, ecolabelling is bounded by a very lax regulatory structure, with little or no effort to evaluate and monitor the validity of claims made on ecolabelled commodities. Transparency, in short, stops with agroecology. Yet, even here problems are evident, particularly in the acceptable definitions of “shade-grown” peppering the multitude of bird-friendly products on the market. As one researcher has found, shade-grown can, in reality, mean anything from being grown under a full-complex tropical understory to production under a veritable monocrop of trees spaced widely apart (Perfecto, 2000).⁸ As such, bird-friendly might quickly become a race to the agroecological bottom, similar to the prospect facing organic agriculture in California, as competition and the market for these products expands. A second concern is that ecolabelling schemes and developmental consumption represent a form of what Sachs (1993) refers to as ‘eco-colonialism’. This places the control of the state of nature, albeit in a

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green organic guise, in the hands of First World NGOs, standards-creating institutions, consumers, and organic companies to the exclusion of local producers. Finally, for small-scale producers, many of whom are “organic” by default, the costs of organic certification are prohibitive and they receive little or no economic or agronomic help in making the transition to organic methods (Hamm 1997; Porritt 1997; Reynolds 2000).

The fair trade network’s eco-social imaginaries offer a deeper, richer and more radical promise of transformation. Based on the stories and relations of sustainable environments, livelihoods, and exchange, this moral ecology and, now, economy, reconfigures the neo-liberal logics of price and efficiency into ethical-relational structures defined by Third World social and environmental development. Fair trade links recontextualise everyday practice in both the worlds of consumers and producers in the local contexts of “place” and, at the same time, seek to transcend the social, economic and spatial distances between growing food and eating it. The project of organic fair trade presents a dual challenge to the conventional agro-food system by seeking to reposition larger North-South relations both through notions of eco-social transparency and equity in production, consumption and trade.

However, two compelling sets of questions remain for the fair trade movement and purveyors of these products. The first set revolves around the ability of the fair trade-organic market to shed its alternative status and make substantial economic and ideological inroads into the conventional global food system. In this respect, the alternative trade movement must find ways of incorporating low-income consumers into its networks, while maintaining its commitment to price premiums and long-term contracts for producers. Moreover, fair trade organic must extend its reach beyond the nutritionally rather insignificant commodities of coffee and chocolate, and enrol large-scale retailers and socially excluded consumers into a more broadly based coalition that prioritises its political commitments.

A second set of questions surrounds the ambivalent nature of the fair trade organic network that in some ways operates in spaces marginal to capitalist rationality, but simultaneously is situated in the larger agrofood market and subject to its characteristics and discipline (see Whatmore and Thorne 1997). Three brief points deserve more attention here. First, it is arguable that fair trade labels, their texts, and the processes of developmental consumption actually may deepen rather than subvert the processes of commodification by objectifying and commoditising the very things they are trying to save. Indeed, in some way, small-scale producers, their livelihoods, farming knowledge, and natural surroundings become commodified, reduced to the price of fair trade products.⁹ Second, it is worth considering the meaning of “fair” in fair trade and the

⁸Indeed the reputation of Rainforest Alliance and the ECO-OK label it has developed in conjunction with Dole has been tarnished by their minimalist attempts at tropical conservation (Reynolds 2000). Partially as a result, ECO-OK labeled products are not available in the European market.

⁹From a contradictory view, small-scale and indigenous producers and the other actors in the fair trade organic network have been able to heed Michael Taussig’s suggestion to engage with and “seize” the commoditising fetish of capitalist markets and turn it more explicitly towards economic and social development (Taussig 1992, cited in Cook and Crang 1996; see also Cook and Crang 1996:147–148). Possibly, the commodification of environmental conservation, indigeneity, livelihoods and difference can make a difference (e.g., Nigh 1997; Hernández Castillo and Nigh 1998).

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asymmetries of power at work in deciding what is “fair”. The fair trade networks offer selected Third World producers a set of market-based incentives — premium prices, guaranteed-minimum prices and long-term contracts — but are these inducements an adequate representation of “equal exchange” or “fairness” in relation to the rich consuming North? Finally, while fair trade organic has opened up “spaces of inclusion” for small-scale producers, the dictates of “quality” act as an exclusionary force at odds with the relational ethic of the movement. Many producers, typically the poorest in both resources and natural endowments, even if they can meet the costs of organic certification, may be excluded from the network because of the strict quality standards imposed by importers and suppliers. One author experienced this first hand in the exclusion of cacao growers looking to enrol in a fair trade organic cooperative in Costa Rica.¹⁰

These spaces of exclusion also are located in Northern sites of consumption as the premium attached to fair trade organic makes them high-priced luxury items, out of reach of the everyday purchases of lower-income consumers. Nor is there much consumption of these products in either the local or regional Southern contexts of their production (M. Goodman 1998). Fairness in the network does not extend to the sites of consumption, which suggests that explicit discussion is needed about the place of these food items in the universe of sustainable *and* just consumption. If the fair trade project is to make progress towards its declared aim of displacing the conventional agrofood trading system, new institutional mechanisms will be needed to promote more socially inclusive patterns of sustainable consumption.

5. Conclusion

This paper has argued in favour of symmetrical socio-ecological conceptualisations of sustainable consumption and against technocentric and ecocentric approaches, exemplified here by minimalist “standards” oriented organic food production and international ecolabelled organic products. In our view, these approaches reinforce, rather than attempt to bridge, the fault lines of social exclusion in both local and international communities. This truncated green imaginary fosters niche production for those consumers who can afford to pay premium organic prices and are knowledgeable about the health risks of conventionally produced foods. In Andrew Szasz’s insightful phrase, technocentric green consumerism represents an “inverted quarantine”, permitting privileged bodies to avoid harmful substances that potentially contaminate the metabolic relations of the less fortunate (Szasz, forthcoming). In these risk politics, green consumerism becomes a dimension of technological competition based on market segmentation rather than a societal project open to all.

The technocentric imaginary is curiously “place-less” since actual production conditions, other than being codified organic, are secondary to the nutritional and symbolic properties of the product at the point of sale and in consumption. This abstraction of social

¹⁰In this respect, recent recommendations to expand the participatory assessment of fair trade networks are especially pertinent (see Robins *et al.*, 1999).

production relations in particular localities fits easily with the instrumental rationality of multinational agrofood sourcing from “a global everywhere”. Sustainable consumption in this form would create an international patchwork of production zones, differentiated by cost-price criteria, supplying high-income consumers in distant markets.¹¹

In discussing more socially inclusive imaginaries of sustainable consumption, we drew attention to the difficulties presented by the commercial production-affordable consumption dilemma. Efforts to link market-based yet socially progressive forms of organic production with equitable food access for consumers are compromised by dependence on charitable sources of cross-subsidy to offset premium prices. This experience indicates that robust state institutional initiatives are needed to rupture and reconfigure the present market-embedded identity between agroecologically sustainable production and the ability to pay to consume sustainably. In market economies, publicly funded programs could create the necessary room for manoeuvre to develop socio-ecological projects that comprehensively address issues of sustainability, social justice and food poverty at the sites of both production and consumption. This vision is no more “political” than technocentric elitist green consumerism; it simply advocates a more progressive integration of the ecology and politics of organic food consumption.

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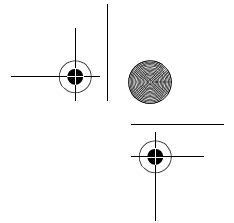
¹¹International out-sourcing of organic cotton by multinational clothing corporations in Africa and other Third World areas, where organic methods often are used by default, apparently is undermining the market for organic cotton produced in California’s Central Valley (Bunin 2000).

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