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# **Sustainable Food and the Promise of Improved Farmworker Conditions (or: Market-Based Approaches to Improved Farmworker Conditions)**

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# The Problem:

## Poor Farmworker Conditions

- ◆ Occupational hazards: pesticides, musculo-skeletal injury, accidents, heat stress, etc.
- ◆ Low pay
- ◆ Lack of benefits
- ◆ Un- and underemployment
- ◆ Limited job security
- ◆ Substandard housing
- ◆ Immigration status, raids, deportation, etc.
- ◆ FLCs, limited legal protection, etc....



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# Efforts to Improve Farmworker Conditions

- ◆ Incentives and disincentives (“carrots and sticks”)
- ◆ “Sticks” – traditional approaches
  - Legislation, sanctions for non-compliance
  - Organizing: unionization, strikes, boycotts
- ◆ “Carrots”
  - Market-based approaches
  - Incentive: market rewards farms with good labor conditions → increased prices and/or market-share



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# What is Sustainable Agriculture/Sustainable Food?

- ◆ 3 “E’s” of sustainability
  - **Environmentally** balanced
  - **Economically** viable
  - **Socially** equitable
- ◆ Sustainability is often compared to a 3-legged stool
  - will tip over if any of the legs is missing



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# What is Social Sustainability?

- ◆ Fair conditions for agricultural and other food system workers
- ◆ Fair prices for small and medium farmers
- ◆ Equitable access to healthy food for all consumers, regardless of income or geographic location



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# Sustainable Food–Definitions

- ◆ Kellogg Fdn, Food and Society:
  - **“Good Food” is food that is:**
  - Healthy: it won’t make you chronically ill.
  - Green: it was produced in a manner that is environmentally sustainable.
  - **Fair: no one along the production line was exploited for its creation.**
  - Affordable: people of all socioeconomic backgrounds are able to purchase it and have access to it.



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# Sustainable Food—Definitions

- ◆ Slow Food USA - “Good, Clean and Fair”
  - “Food that is fair should be...produced by people who are treated with dignity and justly compensated for their labor.”



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## What's Happening - Social Sustainability in the Supply Chain?

- ◆ Efforts to promote sustainability have largely focused on environmental and economic aspects, with little attention to social issues.
- ◆ Recent years have witnessed greater greater consumer interest in – and demand for socially responsible food



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# Consumer Interest in Social Sustainability

- ◆ Hartman Group: 2007 Sustainability Survey
  - Representative of 92% of all consumers
- ◆ “How important are the following business practices in your decision to buy a company’s products?”
  - Safe working conditions for employees
    - 85% core
    - 65% mid-level
    - 55% periphery
  - Good wages and benefits
    - 57% core
    - 53% mid-level
    - 53% periphery



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# Consumer Interest

- ◆ Produce Marketing Association (2007)
  - 55% of consumers ranked social responsibility of produce suppliers as their #1 concern
- ◆ Howard (2006), study of eco-labels
  - 17% of respondents chose “living wage” as their #1 label
  - Willing to pay 71% more (median) for products with a “Fair Labor” label
    - Need to take “willingness to pay” with a grain of salt



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# How Does this Affect Agricultural Workers?

- ◆ Labor conditions are now considered a core component of sustainability.
- ◆ Farms – and other businesses along the food supply chain – (“farm to fork”) must provide fair conditions for agricultural workers to be sustainable.
- ◆ Washington Post (4/28/09)
  - Social justice is the “new front of the sustainable-food wars”
  - “Promoting workers’ rights is...crucial in establishing and defending green credentials.”



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# Types of Market-Based Approaches to Promoting Improved Agricultural Worker Conditions



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# International Fair Trade

- ◆ Promoting fair trade conditions for small farmers and agricultural workers - focus on global south
- ◆ Main products
  - Coffee
  - Cocoa
  - Bananas
- ◆ Very successful – 25% growth in 2008



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# Domestic Fair Trade

- ◆ New model - promote fair trade in North America
- ◆ Domestic Fair Trade Association (2007)
- ◆ Members:
  - Producers
  - Processors
  - Distributors
  - Retailers
  - Civil society/NGOs



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# Fair Labor Labels and Certification Schemes

- Prevalent internationally – fair trade model
- Main standards
  - Human rights (compliance with ILO conventions – child labor, forced labor, discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining)
  - Wages
  - Benefits
  - Occupational health and safety
  - Human resource policies and procedures
- Currently few “fair labor” labels for food in U.S.
  - Food Alliance
  - Agricultural Justice Project
  - National Sustainable Agriculture Standard (Draft ANSI standards – under development)



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# Market-Based Efforts

- ◆ Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)-  
Campaign for Fair Food
  - Strategy: demand higher prices from buyers,  
rather than higher wages from growers
  - 1 penny more per pound of tomatoes – increase  
goes directly to farmworkers
- ◆ Agreements with:
  - Taco Bell
  - Burger King
  - McDonald's
  - Whole Foods
  - Bon Appetit



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# Other Market-Based Efforts

- ◆ Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops
  - Performance based metrics for sustainability along the specialty crop supply chain
    - Includes labor practices
  - “No-bar” approach – not a standard
  - Participants self-report along a spectrum
  - Market rewards firms based on personal criteria
- ◆ Pros:
  - Palatable to industry
    - Members: Western Growers Assn, Farm Bureau, Produce Marketing Assn., Wal-Mart, Sodexo, etc.
  - Could result in improved conditions for large numbers of agricultural and other workers
  - Potential for making progress beyond standards
- ◆ Cons:
  - Will probably be less stringent than standard-based approaches



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# Supply Chain Codes of Conduct

- ◆ Numerous corporations – include fair treatment of workers
  - McDonald's
  - Wal-Mart
  - Sodexo
- ◆ Generally consist of compliance with labor laws and ILO conventions – don't go beyond that



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# Campus-Based Efforts

- ◆ Increase in campus based efforts to promote sustainable food – including farm labor – and food service worker – conditions:
  - Real Food Challenge (300 universities)
  - United Students for Fair Trade
  - Student Farmworker Alliance
  - SEIU – Stir it Up! (food service workers)



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# Conclusions

- ◆ How effective will market-based approaches be in promoting improved farmworker conditions?
- ◆ Potential pitfalls
  - Scope – potential for “greenwashing”
  - Verification issues – already problem in fair trade
  - Impacts on family farmers: scale and ability to implement, price premiums or market share?, paperwork burden
- ◆ Which strategies will rise to the top – standards? voluntary reporting?
  - Pros and cons
- ◆ Impacts on unions?
- ◆ Single approach or multi-pronged strategy?



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# Resources

- ◆ Domestic Fair Trade Association
  - <http://www.dftassociation.com>
- ◆ Food Alliance
  - [www.foodalliance.org](http://www.foodalliance.org)
- ◆ Agricultural Justice Project
  - <http://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org>
- ◆ Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops
  - <http://www.stewardshipindex.org>
- ◆ Real Food Challenge
  - <http://realfoodchallenge.org/>
- ◆ Students for Sustainable Agriculture (UC Davis)
  - [http://daviswiki.org/Students\\_for\\_Sustainable\\_Agriculture](http://daviswiki.org/Students_for_Sustainable_Agriculture)



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