

FREE PUBLICATION

# FOR A BETTER WORLD

IDEAS AND ACTION FOR A JUST ECONOMY



SEEDS OF

## CHANGE

Protecting the Sacred:

Indigenous-Led Peyote Conservation

Community-Controlled Seeds in Puerto Rico

Esperanza's Story:

Leading Change in Fair Trade Coffee

FALL - WINTER 2020



Fair World Project (FWP) is a non-profit that advocates for fair trade policies that support small-scale farmers, artisans, and workers. We publish the perspectives of farmers, farmworkers, mission-driven business people, and activists working to build a better world.

#### WHY WE EXIST:

- Conscious consumers, armed with informed purchasing power, can create positive change and promote economic justice.
- Family-scale farmers and workers in both the Global South and Global North often face volatile prices, low wages, and poor working conditions as a result of unfair trade policies and corporate practices. FWP promotes policy changes and market-based initiatives that address these systemic problems.
- Existing certifiers and membership organizations vary in their criteria and philosophy for qualification of products and brands certified to display eco-social labels or claims, such as fair trade. FWP educates organizations, retailers and consumers on the standards reflected in various certification schemes, and works to keep eco-social terms meaningful.

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## ISSUE 20

### COVER

**Photo:** Mrs. Lee, a Dine grandmother, engaged in spiritual and ecological harvest in the Peyote Gardens of Texas.  
**Credit:** Cody Swift.

# FROM THE DIRECTOR

**T**he most powerful change in this world is driven by the people, for the people; the sparks often fueled by necessity. As I write this, we're in a time of crisis and also in a time of great transition. The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our world, taken countless lives, and upended the global economy. The fight for Black lives and an end to police brutality has swept the globe, mobilizing millions across continents to echo the call: Black Lives Matter.

These crises shine a spotlight on the injustices that are all too familiar to farmers, workers, and oppressed communities around the world, especially Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. Today, the calls for action implore all of us to stand in solidarity and to work collaboratively for a better world. This work has always been critical and now, it is more urgent than ever.

In the 20th issue of *For a Better World*, we're sharing stories of hope from people who are harnessing the power of grassroots action in their own communities. These collectives, cooperatives, and representative organizations remind us of just how much we can achieve when we work together.

This issue's theme is Seeds of Change and the stories share a common message: land and seed sovereignty are critical to preserving cultural identity and economic independence. Featuring the voices of farmers, activists, and organizers from across the Americas, their stories describe community-led efforts that are building just, local food systems, protecting sacred lands, and celebrating traditional practices.

From Peru to Puerto Rico, women and queer people of color are leading the way to a more cooperative and regenerative future. Together with their communities, they're demonstrating how organic farming and seed saving can build food security and generate new income while safeguarding cultural knowledge. Stateside, undocumented and Indigenous communities alike are challenging discriminatory laws to win their basic rights to work fairly and farm freely.

Around the world, waves of change are crashing — challenging the status quo, defending the rights of people everywhere, and demanding that our collective voices be heard. Fair World Project has been here to share those stories with you through this publication for the last ten years. Coming this fall, you'll be able to hear these stories and more on our podcast. Subscribe to our newsletter and be the first to hear about updates, episode teasers, and more.

**To planting seeds of change for a more just economy,**

*Dana Geffner*

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



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PHOTO: Orlando Garcia, Cooperativa Norandino. CREDIT: Julia Gentner.



# Puerto Rico

## Home of the Department of Food

WRITTEN BY

TARA RODRÍGUEZ BESOSA AND LEX BARLOWE

**H**undreds of seeds, some in glass jars, others in envelopes, are being organized on the balcony of a house in the mountains of Puerto Rico.

Parcha: passion fruit from the wild vine up the mountain. Gandules: pigeon peas from the bush behind the community store. Seeds from a watermelon a neighbor grew after eating the rest. All were harvested within the community and gathered together. Some of the seeds are seen in process, fermenting in jars or being cleaned and put to dry on plates on the balcony's edge, with pieces of paper identifying them underneath, and a bright sun shining fiercely over them. The balcony looks out over the farm, and the main view is the mountain in the form of a *cemí*, a Taíno deity or spirit, that residents call "Monte Pirucho." Other seeds are transferred into new jars and labeled before being taken back into the house or packed up to exchange with farmers later that day.

This is a typical scene at the home of some of the members of the collective of El Departamento de la Comida, Puerto Rico's nongovernmental "Department of Food," a small grassroots project nestled in the mountains some 45 minutes south of San Juan. The home, an eight-acre formerly abandoned farm, was purchased in 2018 by Tara Rodríguez Besosa, one of its members, who originally founded the project in 2010 as a multi-farmer CSA model (Community Supported Agriculture). She drops some seeds into an envelope and says, "After giving it much thought and analyzing how our own farm could support other farmers and our own projects within the

collective, we decided to focus on seeds. We are less interested in starting a seed company and more invested in creating a seed 'sanctuary,' especially in Puerto Rico, where we've lost much of our own crop diversity due to agroindustry and colonialism."

### SEED-KEEPING FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Puerto Rico imports more than 90% of its food, a number that increases with time and hurricanes. When food travels, it usually is not fresh, and most imported food is processed and turned into non-perishable, canned goods. Most of the incoming food has traveled thousands of miles, making its way to Puerto Rico through the nearest U.S. port in Jacksonville, Florida. It takes an average of 14 days for most food to travel to Puerto Rico, and many factors affect its travels, costs, and availability to consumers. This is where groups like El Departamento de la Comida come into play.

The collective efforts of El Departamento de la Comida, and many other grassroots organizations, are creating alternatives to federal agencies and multinational corporations for food and farming. El Departamento's work around local heirloom seed is part of that. Here especially, seed-keeping must be central to food sovereignty work. Puerto Rico is one of the world's largest GMO seed producers (Genetically Modified Organism). Most of the soybean and cottonseed used in the United States comes from Monsanto/Bayer on the island.

Deepening Boricua communities' relationship to seed is more than a project in seed saving. Seeds allow Puerto Ricans, like other communities, to reclaim an identity that has for many generations

PHOTO: Samantha María, El Departamento de la Comida. CREDIT: Adnelly Marichel.

been an object of attack, colonization, and erasure. As the genetic variety of crops continues to decrease in Puerto Rico, so do the numbers of people who have inhabited these islands. It is and has been a contested place, once a colony of Spain, now of the United States, making it one of the oldest colonies in the world. This “Rich Port” has always been a point of exchange, travel stop, and an important part of Atlantic trade and slave routes.

Tara’s partner, Lex Barlowe, adds, “The only way to counter corporate control is a community-controlled seed supply,” as she labels seeds on the balcony. Lex maintains the inventory of most of the seeds of El Departamento de la Comida, as well as her own collection, in her small studio apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Lex works to build community seed networks and is a member of Reclaim Seed NYC, a seed library and education project for seed sovereignty in New York City. “Seeds connect people. To each other, to our histories. And that connection builds self-determination. Seed libraries are forms of cooperation and mutual aid, sharing stories, seeds, skills for a collective resource people can all contribute to and depend on.” Lex draws inspiration and guidance from this type of resource sharing that has always happened in Black communities, especially amongst Black farmers. And she focuses on gathering and sharing seeds and stories of the Black/African diaspora, which are central to food and culture across the United States and the Caribbean.

### HONORING THE STORIES OF SEEDS

Projects focused on seeds are emerging everywhere, with seed libraries and exchanges popping up in urban areas, rural communities, schools, and museums. But seed saving is an ancient, ancestral practice; it is nothing new. It is true that all people who have fought to maintain collective community control over seed have been affected horribly by the industrialization and privatization of seed. Today the control over

huge amounts of seed is maintained mostly by white people — their companies and organizations. Simultaneously, across the world, seeds (among many other things) have been stolen from BIPOC communities (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) while their efforts toward seed

sovereignty remain under-resourced.

Together, Tara and Lex started the campaign #QueNoSePierdaLaSemilla, “may the seed not be lost” in Spanish. For them, #QueNoSePierdaLaSemilla is a call to all marginalized and colonized people to reconnect with their

ancestral foods and seed, in community with others. It offers steps for building seed sovereignty, sharing and honoring seeds’ stories, peoples, skills, and traditions. The name is in Spanish, and the content is

bilingual to expand the existing resources in Spanish around seed sovereignty, since there are very few. Most farmworkers in the United States speak Spanish, and their knowledge and labor is the foundation of our current food system.

Seeds have become the heart of El Departamento’s work. Goals include supporting farmers who save seeds already and making seeds more accessible to others. Right now, this looks like seed exchanges; visiting farms to help them gather, clean, and organize seeds; and managing a community seed, tool, and educational materials library.

The contents of the seed library are based on what farmers have already been saving. People bring seeds that are important to them to the seed exchanges. They bring the seeds they want to see others growing. “Exchanges are moments of education between growers. They are places to gather and share stories. When people bring seed, we interview them and hear their story and the story of each seed. Others at the exchange listen, learn, and can then apply it with the seeds they take home. People share stories and advice and lessons. Those stories immediately become the community-generated expertise that we look to about how to grow, keep, and use the seeds.” El Departamento’s seed resources and gatherings emerge from what people bring to each other, how they gather together, and how they learn from each other.

### REBUILDING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

New food systems require shifting our food cultures and reclaiming generational wisdom as part of creating different models. “The cultural information shared through story at our seed exchanges is so important. It helps younger generations understand different traditional practices and carry them forward. With this knowledge we can best figure out what our strategies need to be to build a culture of food and farming that works for and supports the community.” This sharing of culture is the foundation of El Departamento’s efforts to create more structures and opportunities for food-based development and local economies. Their most recent “Intercambio de Semillas” took place in their base community of San Salvador, a barrio of the Caguas municipality, during the town’s annual celebration of agriculture, food, and agricultural legacy. The culture of San Salvador is shaping El Departamento’s work, which will be focused there as will their seed projects.

Back on the balcony, Tara and Lex review the seed inventory after the day’s organizing. In San Salvador, seeds will continue to be collected and redistributed, but also replanted. Farm planning for seed cultivation will begin here soon. Their storage will be moving to a small building at the bottom of the mountain, El Departamento’s new headquarters opening in 2020. It will hold the Agroteca — the resource library of seeds, books, and tools — and, mainly, the kitchen. Some seeds are getting packed away to prepare for this move. Others will be labeled and put into the traveling seed library, a cooler for fishing equipment turned seed box. With its hub here, members of the collective bring in seed from farming communities that span Santurce, Puerto Rico to New York City, and other queer and BIPOC communities from many places. “We hope to make our ancestors proud, and our communities stronger.”

PHOTO: Tara Rodriguez Besosa. CREDIT: Adnelly Marichiel.



# Product Picks

Around the world, grassroots and community-led development models are empowering communities from within and from the ground up. To truly build a just economy, it is crucial that we support these community-led efforts of farmers, workers, activists, and their organizations. Thankfully, there's no shortage of ways to do that.

We asked members of our staff and editorial board to share some of their favorite products brought to life by the grassroots efforts of the communities that produced them. Find them online, in your community, or at your favorite natural foods store!



## ZAMBEEZI LIP BALM

I love Zambeezi's organic and fair trade lip balms from Zambia. Zambeezi works with local communities in the Miombo forest to wild harvest organic honey and beeswax. By producing beautifully crafted balms, Zambeezi is supporting economic alternatives to mining and logging industries in the region - RYAN

[zabeezi.com](http://zabeezi.com)



## HAKHU, SAS KUYLLUR NECKLACE

What a beautiful necklace and an amazing way to support women in frontline communities of the Ecuadorian Amazon! Hakhu is the community development initiative of women of the Sarayaku community. The Sarayaku People champion a long history of fighting extraction and protecting Indigenous rights and the planet. Their designs are Amazonian Kichwa inspired patterns, and all purchases go toward supporting local, community-led projects. -JULIA

[hakhu.net](http://hakhu.net)



## PACARI CHOCOLATE

Family-owned Pacari Chocolate is the first single-origin organic chocolate bar made entirely in Ecuador. The brand claims its chocolate is made with some of the rarest and most delicious cacao beans on earth — and after tasting it, I can see why! This bean to bar brand gives a damn about the environment and workers — and in the chocolate trade, that's not very common! - FLETCHER

[pacarichocolate.us](http://pacarichocolate.us)



## COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

You can support small-scale farmers in your own community by purchasing a share from a local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Participating in a CSA means more than just buying locally — you'll be investing in the farm: sharing in the financial risk and providing farmers with the money they need, when they need it. In exchange, you'll enjoy farm-fresh food while strengthening sustainable, local food systems. -JENICA

[localharvest.org/csa](http://localharvest.org/csa)



## THE KNAPSACK PROJECT BY MAGGIE'S ORGANICS

Maggie's Organics is a leader in the organic and fair trade apparel industry. Their beautifully crafted knapsacks are made in collaboration with women-organized sewing centers in Tanzanian organic cotton farming communities. Here, the women's talent and expertise, typically used to sew and repair cotton-harvesting sacks, are used to create functional, new knapsacks for the global market. Maggie's will also include a free knapsack in orders of 12 pairs of socks or more and will donate \$12 from the order back to the farming communities where the bags were sewn. - DANA

[maggiesorganics.com](http://maggiesorganics.com)

# Why Regenerative Agriculture?

## CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION:

Cuts options and concentrates profits from seed to store. Meanwhile, farmers earn just pennies of each dollar spent on food.

## SYNTHETIC FERTILIZERS:

Emit greenhouse gasses and leach into waterways. In our oceans, this has created massive “dead zones,” areas that have quadrupled in size since the 1950s.

## POVERTY PRICES:

Make it hard for farmers to make ends meet — let alone innovate or invest in their farms and farmworkers are paid poverty wages.

## TOXIC PESTICIDES:

Destroy more than just weeds—they’re killing off bees, bats, poisoning workers, and polluting the water and soil.

## FOOD INSECURITY:

Affects up to 80% of farmworkers and nationwide, rural communities are among the least food secure.

## MASSIVE MONOCULTURES:

Depend on genetically uniform crops that are vulnerable to pests and exhaust the soil, increasing the need for more and more chemical solutions.

## FACTORY FARMS:

Produce a huge amount of pollution and confine animals to tiny spaces, exchanging suffering for profits.



Truly regenerative agriculture is about more than just the soil. Look for farming systems that:



Our climate crisis is rooted in this truth: our economy is built on extracting more than our planet can sustain.

Our food and farming systems can be a contributor to greenhouse gas emissions — or they can offer concrete solutions that turn back the clock on emissions and sequester carbon.

To truly regenerate our planet, we must address the many exploitations of the conventional agriculture system: not just the soil — but farmers, workers, animals, and water.



## REGENERATIVE ORGANIC VISION

### ANIMAL WELFARE:

Provides ample pasture for animals, natural diets, and humane handling.

### HEALTHY SOIL:

Sequesters carbon from the atmosphere. A resilient soil system is fed by diverse crop rotations, cover crops, and conservation tillage practices.

### AGROFORESTRY AND PERENNIAL CROPS:

Keep carbon in the ground by intercropping shade, fruit, and other trees or plants that grow year after year.

### FAIR PRICES:

Compensate farmers for their stewardship and provide fair livelihoods for farmers and workers.

### BIODIVERSE FARMS:

Create systems where crops and animals help nourish each other and the land. They also reduce a farmer's reliance on just one crop.

### COMPOST:

Transforms food and crop waste into fertile soil, supercharging carbon sequestration instead of contributing to greenhouse gas emissions in landfills.

### FARMER ORGANIZATIONS AND CO-OPS:

Allow farmers to process and market crops, keeping more of the value in their communities.

- 1 Skip Synthetic Pesticides
- 2 Focus on Fair Livelihoods for Farmers
- 3 Protect Workers' Health, Safety, and Rights

# Keeping the Sacred, Sacred:

## The Indigenous Peyote Conservation Initiative

WRITTEN BY

SANDOR IRON ROPE, STEVE MOORE AND MIRIAM VOLAT



PHOTO: Nicholas Iron Rope, making an offering. CREDIT: Cody Swift.

For 10,000 years, Indigenous peoples of the Americas have utilized and preserved their sacred medicine, peyote, from South Texas, across the Rio Grande, to Wirikuta in San Luis Potosi. In Mexico, the Wixaritari, Yaqui, Cora, and Tarahumara collect the medicine as an integral part of their way of life and agricultural cycles. For the Wixaritari, residents of the Sierras, there is no separation between their staple foods — corn and deer — and their relationship to the cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*). For tribes North of the Rio Grande, peyote use came more recently, a Spiritual Medicine addressing ongoing colonial trauma and a central guide to maintaining Indigenous identity, religion, and cultural sovereignty in a rapidly changing world. Pilgrimage and community harvest in the native gardens of the peyote have always been a part of this way of life, for the whole community and members of all ages. Pilgrimage begins the Wixaritari agricultural cycle and the connecting of sacred sites that make up their world. Native Americans of the United States and Canada travel to South Texas, to the gardens, to present offerings and prayers, and collect what medicine is needed for the healing and celebration ceremonies of the coming year.

### CONSERVING A THREATENED WAY OF LIFE

This sacred way of life, which connects Native communities to annual cycles and to crucial community activities that maintain ancestral traditions and knowledge, is increasingly threatened.

Peyote can be a central guide to maintaining Indigenous identity, religion, and cultural sovereignty in a rapidly changing world.

In South Texas, in the United States, it's almost entirely stopped. Threats are ecological, economic, and political. The Indigenous Peyote Conservation Initiative (IPCI) was formed in 2017 to respond to this crisis, almost 100 years after the first Native American Church (NAC) was incorporated. Led by the National Council of Native American Churches (NCNAC); Boulder, Colorado's Native American Rights Fund (NARF); and a generous group of philanthropists including RiverStyx Foundation, IPCI determined that a unified, Native-led, community-supported, spiritually and ecologically designed effort was needed to protect their sacred medicine and way of life.

Peyote spiritual practices have needed protection through modern legal strategies for a long time. In 1918, the first Native American Church was incorporated in Oklahoma to protect the peyote way of life as a religion. Even still, people were prosecuted and jailed for using their medicine because peyote was considered a Schedule 1 controlled substance under federal and state law. Only in 1994, when an amendment to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) was enacted,





did federal law clarify that federally recognized Tribal members' use of peyote for traditional religious purposes was protected in the United States. But AIRFA was not enough to protect from the real threats to the Medicine Way of Life: lack of access to the private ranch lands in the gardens, improper and overharvesting, root-plowing, industrial agriculture, mining, oil and natural gas production, poaching, and illegal sales to non-Natives in the United States and Europe.

### NEW BEGINNINGS TAKE ROOT

In 2017, the NCNAC — comprised of the presidents of the Native American Church of Oklahoma, Native American Church of South Dakota, Native American Church of North America, and Azee Bee Nagaha of Dine Nation (ABNDN) — gathered in Laredo, Texas to form the Indigenous Peyote Conservation Initiative. Great fortune would have it that they were offered and accepted a philanthropic gift of a 605-acre ranch in the Peyote Gardens to root the new organization. This conservation effort will exist to sustain the spiritual practices of Indigenous peoples for generations to come, promoting health, well-being, and Native cultural revitalization through sovereignty and sustainability of the sacred peyote plant and the lands on which it grows. Key components of the project in Texas include:

- A new system of Native-led peyote harvesting and distribution, based on respectful land access patterns, to provide spiritually and

ecologically harvested medicine to Indigenous communities.

- Resumption of Native pilgrimages, where grandparents and children can harvest for their family and community ceremony together, giving offerings and learning about the life cycle of the plant, the other organisms who live with it, and the spiritual and community health its ceremonies sustain.

## The conservation effort will sustain the spiritual practices of Indigenous peoples for generations to come, promoting health, well-being and Native cultural revitalization.

- Ecological assessments and repopulation on the surrounding ranches from the nursery on the spiritual homesite, a nursery managed in culturally appropriate ways by a Native conservation manager, youth and families, and communities on pilgrimage.

- Youth programs and cultural events that would bring many Native languages, architectures, and ceremonies to the gardens, which would in turn support sovereign responsibility and access to those living across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Today, the IPCI Spiritual Homesite in the Peyote Gardens has hosted five pilgrimages for offerings and harvests, and has an onsite host and conservation manager. Leases are in development with local landowners for upwards of 10,000 acres, and assessments of peyote density and health are underway. A culturally appropriate nursery and distribution center are being built by hand in adobe by community members, as well as a welcome center, youth housing, and a bathhouse. Native American Church/ABNDN members from around the country return the medicine's cleanings (its skin, duff, and hair), which are cleaned off before use, to be spread back on the land. Hundreds of people have already visited the offering garden to learn about the medicine's history, ecology, and spiritual tradition. In 2020, the new distribution and replanting projects will begin, putting the care of medicine directly in the hands and hearts of the Indigenous people who rely on it for their way of life.





# BLAZING TRAILS

AN INTERVIEW WITH: **ESPERANZA DIONISIO CASTILLO**

**E**speranza Dionisio Castillo has been the General Manager at the Pangoa Coffee Cooperative in Peru for over 20 years. From farming to roasting, the coffee industry is often a male-dominated space, but today that is changing. In her interview with Julia Gentner of Grow Ahead, Dionisio Castillo shares her experience as a woman in leadership within Peru's coffee industry.

**TWENTY YEARS AGO, YOU BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN IN PERU TO BE A GENERAL MANAGER AT A COFFEE COOPERATIVE. THIS ISN'T VERY COMMON IN THE COFFEE INDUSTRY OVERALL, EVEN TODAY. CAN YOU TELL US WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN LIKE FOR YOU?**

I have had many opportunities to access positions that are traditionally only available to men. First of which was when I went to university and there were only 13 women and 150 men.

When I finished school, I went to work at the Satipo Coffee Cooperative. It was a challenge because one of the male agricultural engineers was not doing his job well and the cooperative was unhappy. The administrative board said, "well if a man can't do the job maybe a woman can." It was posed as a challenge.

When I started, they did not have anything, just a motorcycle to go to the countryside. So, I organized with the Educational Committee (at the cooperative, all the support for technicians comes from the Educational Committee), solidified the schedule of farm visits, and maintained a nursery of citrus to help with coffee income diversification. This was during the time of the first attack of the coffee leaf fungus, "la roya."

When the Satipo Cooperative splintered off to begin the Pangoa Cooperative, the board of directors said that I could join them and help with the modernization of coffee growing. I said "Great, I'll come!" But it was a fight with the farmers because they said, "Who is this girl that doesn't know anything, what can she teach me after this many years working in the field?" I had to explain that while they had the experience, I had the knowledge and if they let me help them, they could produce even more. I did the most convincing over meals and in the kitchen: talking about politics or, when they were sick, helping to make medicine for them to take and really building the trust between us. Once I had their trust, then I could do the work of teaching them how they could produce more coffee.

I later left the cooperative to open my own office for specialized agricultural and technical advice. This was until 1987 when the Shining Path, a really strong political movement, arrived. I had to close my office because the farmers came to me and told me that they were dying — that the police were killing them and the Shining Path was killing them.

In 1996, the Pangoa Cooperative called me about the management position. At this time, they were having a lot of problems. They had lost nearly 2,000 pounds of coffee from the humidity since they had done a bad job of storing it and lost a lot of money. I agreed to take the position and stay for a year — now it's been 20! After ten years, we were able to pay off all the debts, and later we were able to develop and invest in organic agriculture and fair trade.

In 2008, we started to expand our work with organic fertilizers, compost, and micro-organisms. We went to a farmer-to-farmer training at the COMSA Cooperative to see their biodynamic farms, and now we are working with our nearly 700 cooperative members to spread that knowledge.

### **CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT SOME OF THE CHANGES YOU'VE WITNESSED AT THE PANGOA COOPERATIVE IN THE PAST 20 YEARS, AND HOW YOU'VE WEATHERED THE CHALLENGES?**

When we started, we were selling conventional coffee and we had to be very careful with handling money — every dollar of income we had to use to our advantage. Fair trade premiums have helped our cooperative weather the ups and downs, but even fair trade depends on the market. When the market price of coffee increases, so does the fair trade price. And when the prices fall, fair trade roasters still pay the fair trade minimum price. I really do admire the fair trade roasters. They are our greatest allies and through them, there is an entire group of consumers that believe in this movement. This [support] is the most important because it means we won't have to stop producing coffee. In earlier years when I didn't know about fair trade and there were hard times, farmers would simply come to us and say, "the price is so low, we can't put up with it anymore" and throw away their coffee. This was because we did not have the protection of fair trade and in reality, producing coffee without it is not sustainable.

### **CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT PANGOA'S WOMEN'S COMMITTEE? WHAT ARE THEY CURRENTLY FOCUSED ON AND HOW DOES THEIR WORK IMPACT THE COMMUNITY MORE BROADLY?**

The Women's Committee formed in 1997. The topics we were focused on then revolved around capacity building for self-esteem and how to take control over your situation as a mother, to support

yourself and your family. Another goal of the committee was to have opportunities for the women to have their own income separate from coffee. We worked on activities like planting vegetable gardens, raising guinea pigs and chickens, and the creation of a market for the women to bring their own products and food to sell. Currently, the Women's Committee is also working on a reforestation project with Grow Ahead.

Today, there are many examples of women who are leaders and have taken on positions of authority in their communities. They have become municipal officers and taken on roles in schools because they know how to read and write and can share knowledge in leadership roles.

### **WHAT KIND OF ROLE DOES THE PANGOA COOPERATIVE PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY?**

A very important role. There was an idea to close the cooperative in 2001 because our organic certification was [temporarily] taken away. We had lost \$20,000 dollars because we had already paid the farmers the higher organic price but couldn't sell the coffee as organic. The farmers came to the general assembly and said if the cooperative can't sell their coffee, then the cooperative didn't make sense anymore and that selling to the coyotes (middlemen) would be better. But there was a tremendous message from the members that said, no, impossible. If we close the cooperative the coyotes are going to be abusive and take advantage of the farmers because it is the cooperative that regulates the prices. We at the cooperative can come and say how the finances are, how the

market price is, inform the farmers with trust and transparency. They can't go to a coyote and demand information and transparency. So, it is a really important role — we are the protectors of the prices of coffee, cocoa, and honey.

In our stores and our cafés in the village, we are promoting the consumption of our own coffee with the youth in the community. This is a huge public objective so that the younger generation can try more coffee, get to know quality coffee, and become local consumers of their families' own products. Their parents are coffee growers and they need to know the value in their community's own products.

### **ARE THERE ANY FINAL THOUGHTS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH OUR READERS AND WITH COFFEE DRINKERS?**

Yes, with the consumers, especially those who buy fair trade coffee and chocolate: I hope that they can read more stories from producer cooperatives so they can know what we are doing in our towns and villages and that they will support us by seeking out fair trade products.

Grow Ahead is a non-profit that connects people directly to small-scale farmer organizations to support farmer-led reforestation projects that benefit people and the planet. To learn more and support community-led initiatives, visit [GrowAhead.org](http://GrowAhead.org)





PHOTO: Jose, Pioneer Valley Worker Center Farm. CREDIT: Jason Kotoch.

# Community as Capital

## HOW ONE WORKER CENTER IS SOWING THE SEEDS OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE

"Building power with low-wage and immigrant workers": That's how the Pioneer Valley Workers' Center (PVWC) describes their work in communities in Western Massachusetts. Fair World Project's Anna Canning sat down with Gabriella della Croce as she talked about the organizing they do, and how food system workers, mostly on farms and in restaurants, are coming together to combat the big issues in their communities — while they build toward a vision for a future of economic justice, nourishing food, and resilient networks.

### BUILDING KNOWLEDGE BUILDS POWER

The Center acts as a platform for a diversity of initiatives and organizing, all driven by our membership. Currently, we're part of a statewide campaign with the Driving Families Forward coalition, fighting for driver's licenses for undocumented people in the state of Massachusetts. That campaign was voted on unanimously by our Worker Committees because most of our members are undocumented. The peril of driving without a license is a huge issue that they face. No matter where you work, you have to drive to get there: to bring your kids to school or go to the doctor. And, just as in other parts of the country, people get racially profiled and pulled over. Those little traffic stops then often drag them into the immigration system.

It's always been our dream to not only push back against abusive and oppressive systems, but to create spaces where people can build hope.

We also do know-your-rights trainings on immigration and labor laws. We find that often, people either don't know about the laws that are there to protect them or think that the laws don't apply to them because they are undocumented. A lot of what we do to build power involves preparing people with the tools and knowledge to defend themselves. Last night, I was meeting with a farmworker I hadn't seen in a while. When I first met her a year ago, she spoke very limited Spanish. She's Guatemalan and her native language is Acateco, and it was very hard for me to understand her. She told me about a situation she faced on the job where she got really sick as a result of pesticide exposure in

the strawberry fields where she worked. Her throat swelled up, she had to go to the hospital, and then she got fired because of needing to miss work. Yesterday she said to me, "Now I tell my manager, 'you have rights, but I have rights too. You can't treat me that way.' And now he doesn't bother me as much because he knows that I am going to tell him what my rights are." What shifted in the last year was, in her words, that she has been coming to the Worker Committee meetings and going to our workshops, and "Now I know that I have rights."

We do a lot to educate and bring people together, such as soccer tournaments, art events, and concerts. Immigrating to the United States can be really isolating, and even when people have family nearby, their communities have been fragmented through the process of migration. We provide a space and a platform for people to come together, to strategize, and to take collective action against oppression. These events also build community and allow us to get to know each other so that when emergencies come up, we are able to respond and support one another. In the wake of the 2016 election, we also formed a rapid response network, Solidarity in the Streets, which has now grown to include 3,000 people. Through this network, we're able to organize mutual aid programs — including a rideshare and food distribution program — for which our members actively solicit donations and pass out supplies at our Worker Committee meetings. So, there are a lot of ways that we try to plug people into this supportive, resilient network — to organize and to lean on in the absence of basic services that aren't provided anywhere else.

### COMMUNITY AS CAPITAL

It's always been our dream to not only push back against abusive and oppressive systems, but to create spaces where people can build hope and alternative economic structures. So, when an organization called All Farmers — which does land access work with refugees and people of color — reached out to us asking if our members might be interested in farming a seven-acre plot

near Northampton, we jumped at the opportunity.

Our Worker Committees were really enthusiastic about the idea of starting a farm. Many members work long hours on farms, but at the end of the day, they go home and can't afford to buy the kind of vegetables that they are breaking their backs producing in the fields. Many of them were farmers in Latin America before coming to the States, so they have a lot of knowledge and skills. That initial enthusiasm in the Worker Committees then evolved into seven people who got serious and decided to organize and form a worker cooperative farm.

The summer of 2019 was their first season. Throughout the summer, members of our Solidarity in the Streets network went to weekly work parties to help out on the farm. We started very small, actively growing 2 acres of vegetables on the 4.5 acres that we lease. All of the members still work their day jobs — so they would sometimes spend 60-70 hours a week working in the fields and then, on their one day off, worked on starting their own farm.

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## This farm is sort of a star in the constellation of organizations that we want to be a part of building toward our goal of a more just economy.

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Now the farm has a full year under its belt and a new name, too: Riquezas del Campo. At the start of the first season, all we had was a bare field: no irrigation system, no shed to put tools in, nothing. But, once again, we were able to leverage support from Solidarity in the Streets. Carpenters, including members of the

Springfield Carpenters Union, Local 336, built a beautiful shed. A local ceramicist helped craft a simple, but elegant, irrigation system, hand digging a pond out of a streambed and siphoning water into donated storage tanks to flow into gravity-fed drip hoses. At the volunteer work party days, students and people from all kinds of backgrounds, including other farmworkers who aren't part of the project, all came together to help build out the needed infrastructure.

The farm has been a site for all kinds of mingling and relationship building across cultural, class, and racial divides. And this is a key part of how the farm fits into our organizing. It gets tiring going to workshops and meetings, but the farm is a space where we can cross-pollinate, eat together, hang out, and cultivate hope. And, I think equally important, the land offers us all a place where we can heal. In the beauty of the fields and the woods that surround us, filled with fresh air and birdsong, I see how just being there together helps us relate to one another in a more grounded way. We need more spaces like this for collective catharsis.

During the 2019 season, members planted 30 different varieties of vegetables: tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, watermelon, broccoli, and more. They took produce home to their families and brought crates of vegetables to the Worker Committee meetings for everyone to share. And they sold nearly 2,000 pounds of produce to the consumer co-op just down the road from us.

### A COOPERATIVE VISION FOR ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

At our annual membership meeting, all the groups who organize with us come together, and the members vote on organizational priorities. Last year, the results were overwhelming votes in favor of the cooperative farm, as well as the driver's license campaign. And our members want to work on supporting the future development of more worker cooperatives. People are creative and entrepreneurial; they have a lot of what they need to be able to become their own bosses. But they don't have access to tools, literal or figurative. They don't have fair access to capital, financial or cultural. They know how to produce, but they don't own the means of production. Our organizing approach is two-pronged: offensive and defensive. We fight against exploitative systems, but also build small-scale models of what we want instead. And economic democracy is a big part of the world that we envision.

Overall, this farm is sort of a star in the constellation of organizations that we want to be a part of building. And we see this as one small piece of the struggle for a more just economy. The dream is for this farm to provide real livelihoods for all of the co-op members, for them not to have to continue working on other people's farms. They want to be able to make a living wage at their own farm. This is, of course, an ambitious vision, but we are exploring ways to make it happen, including through value-added and niche products. And really, I think the support of our community will make it possible. Like Riquezas del Campo, the Workers Center is a small organization. But we have a lot of power because we bring thousands of people together, both to fight against exploitative systems that aren't working for us and to experiment with better ways of organizing our collective labor and resources.

PHOTO: Eduardo, Pioneer Valley Worker Center Farm. CREDIT: Jason Kotoch.





# WHAT'S FAIR?

## A NEW GUIDE TO FAIR TRADE LABELS

WRITTEN BY ANNA CANNING

“What’s the difference between all these fair trade labels?” It’s a question we get a lot at Fair World Project. Now, thanks to a global coalition of academics and fair trade organizations, the updated *International Guide to Fair Trade Labels* helps to answer this question.

Never has the term “fair trade” been more widely used — or misused — than in this moment. Last fall, the global fair trade movement launched the Fair Trade Charter, recommitting not just to fairer supply chains, but to a vision for sustainable, local development around the globe. At the same time, more of the Big Food companies have launched their own labels, branding their own corporate social responsibility plans with labels that are heavy on marketing, but light on transparency.

### CORPORATE-LED LABELS GET LOW MARKS

The *International Guide’s* analysis is rooted in the principles of fair trade and the vision enshrined in the Fair Trade Charter. The *Guide* makes clear: fair trade is a movement that has agreed to some collective definitions and goals. And some of the labels that call themselves “fair” or “ethical” do not meet those standards. Unfortunately, those labels are some of the most commonly spotted on grocery store shelves here in the United States.

The *Guide* distinguishes between “fair trade labels,” corporate-led “voluntary sustainability programs,” and “sustainable development labels.” The corporate programs vary greatly in requirements, methods (for example, how compliance is verified), and transparency — some of the standards are not even available for public review.

When looking at the rankings from high to low, there’s a clear overarching theme: corporate-led programs get low marks across the board. From C.A.F.E. Practices to Fair Trade USA to Rainforest Alliance, corporate-led or -developed labels exist to put a stamp of approval on the supply chain — not to meet the needs of the farmers and workers they are supposed to benefit.

Whether it’s a fair trade label or one claiming “sustainable development,” it is abundantly clear how important it is to have the intended beneficiaries (farmers and/or workers) involved at every step of standards writing and implementation to build a strong standard that has true impact for those beneficiaries.

### DOMESTIC FAIR TRADE: DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS IN DIFFERENT PLACES

Initially, the term “fair trade” was applied to products and crops made or grown in the so-called Global South and traded with the Global North. The *Guide* highlights the growing use of the term “fair trade” to describe products grown and consumed domestically. What that “domestic fair trade” looks like varies greatly depending on whether you look at India, France, or the United States — the three cases examined in the *Guide*.

In India, traditionally designated a “producing country” by fair traders and colonialists alike, farmers and artisans are developing domestic markets for their goods in dedicated fair trade shops. In France, several small-scale farmer-led initiatives are organizing to tackle low prices, price volatility, and other issues familiar to farmers the world over.

In the United States, instead of an emphasis on small-scale farmers, the focus is on labor protections on large-scale farms.

Farmworkers most definitely need labor protections. Indeed, farmworkers in the United States are exempt from many protections granted to other workers, including minimum wage and overtime laws, freedom of association, and child labor laws. Yet large-scale, plantation-style agriculture has direct roots in slavery and the colonial modes of farming that rely on free or exploited labor. By focusing on the hired labor on these farms, “fair trade” labels for products in the United States have taken the side of the very plantation owners and colonial powers that small-scale farmers globally have organized to combat.

### WHO BENEFITS: CORPORATIONS OR FARMERS AND WORKERS?

Often, articles on certification and labeling focus on the confusion that the abundance of labels create for shoppers. But the confusion is only part of the story. If a corporate marketer is able to convince you that Mondēlez’s CocoaLife program, which doesn’t include minimum prices for struggling cocoa farmers, is the same as a fair trade certification, that’s a victory for their bottom line — and for business as usual, with slightly better marketing. Unfortunately, too many corporate-friendly certifiers are willing to help cash in on the trend. The end result? More claims, but little change. Lots of pictures of happy farmers and workers, but few structures in place to ensure they have a voice in every aspect of setting standards and saying what’s truly fair.

That’s why the updated Reference Guide (page 19) includes a column that rates the involvement of the “intended beneficiary” in the standard setting process and in the corporate governance (board of directors and advisory councils) of the certifiers. Farmers, farmworkers, and factory workers all face unique challenges. And no one is better positioned to understand those specific concerns (and their solutions) than the farmers, workers, and their organizations themselves. The findings of the *Guide* are clear: standards are stronger when the intended beneficiaries are at the drafting table.

There is no single solution for transforming our food system, and no label that guarantees completely ethical production. But the differences between labels are real — instead of letting confusion be the story, it’s high time we ask the bigger questions about power, who writes the rules, and who benefits.

Download the full *International Guide* at [FairWorldProject.org](http://FairWorldProject.org)

# WHY CHOOSE FAIR TRADE?



## FAIR PAYMENT

A fair price covers the cost of production, pays workers fairly, and still leaves enough profit to reinvest.



## TRACEABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Open communication and fair contracts are the building blocks of fair trade.



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Support for local, community-led development. Fair trade premium funds are one way that buyers can support those efforts.



## EDUCATION

Learning is key to empowerment. Fair trade organizations raise awareness about the structural inequities of the global trade system.



## NO FORCED OR CHILD LABOR

Labor exploitation is forbidden. Standards go beyond prohibition to address the root causes of forced and child labor.



## RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Additional premiums are paid for organic farming, recognizing the additional work required and valuing environmental stewardship.



## ENSURING GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS

Organizations are committed to following worker protection laws, reasonable work hours, and healthy conditions for all.



## DEMOCRATIC AND TRANSPARENT ORGANIZATIONS

Democracy is central to fair trade, empowering small-scale producers and workers with a voice and a vote.



## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED PRODUCERS

Small-scale producers are often the most marginalized by colonialism and the current systems of trade.



## LONG-TERM DIRECT TRADING RELATIONSHIPS

The fewer steps between small-scale farmers and artisans and the end user, the more money can return to the producer.



## BUILDING POWER AND PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Organizations are committed to non-discrimination. They actively support gender equity, equal pay, and access to resources. Workers have the right to organize and bargain collectively.



**W**hile there are many certifications with different levels of credibility, the fair trade movement generally agrees on a few key principles. Applied together all along supply chains, these principles can guide us towards building a more just solidarity economy.

# REFERENCE GUIDE



## TO FAIR TRADE AND LABOR JUSTICE PROGRAMS

Many labels appear on products you eat, wear, and use. But not all labels are created equal.

The letter grades below are based on the analysis in the International Guide to Fair Trade Labels, created by a global coalition of fair trade advocacy organizations and academics.

	FOCUS <i>Who is this label and its standards designed to benefit?</i>			STANDARDS <i>Does this label emphasize these key elements of fair trade and labor justice?</i>					BRAND REQUIREMENTS <i>What do these labels require of a brand to sell certified products?</i>	
	Small-scale Farmers, Artisans	Farm-workers	Factory Workers	Price Based on Cost of Production	Fair Wages	Premiums Paid	Emphasizes Freedom to Organize	Formal Participation of Intended Beneficiary*	Commitment to Grow Fair Trade Purchases	Forbids Corporate Fairwashing
	✓	✓		A	A	N/A	A	A	✓	✓
	✓	✓		A	B	A	A	D	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓	C	D	C	D	D	X	X
	✓	✓	✓	B	B	A	A	A	X	X
	✓			A	B	A	A	A	✓	✓
	✓			A	B	N/A	B	A	✓	✓

The Fair Trade Federation is a North American membership organization that verifies company practices and commitments to fair trade principles through self-reported evaluations. While they do not audit supply chains, many of their members' products are certified by a fair trade certification. Their label can be seen on product packaging.

\* The intended beneficiaries, farmers, artisans and workers, have a formal role in standard-setting.

## HOW TO CHOOSE AUTHENTIC FAIR TRADE PRODUCTS



**EVALUATE.** Look for full company commitment, membership organizations and strong fair trade certifications to distinguish products made by dedicated fair trade brands.



**AVOID BAD ACTORS.** Do not buy from corporate bad actors who happen to have a few fair trade products.



**LOOK BEYOND CERTIFICATIONS.** Learn which brands positively impact the communities where they operate and source from.



**READ LABELS.** Determine which ingredients (and what percentage of those ingredients) in the product are certified fair trade.



**BE AN ACTIVIST.** Ask your local grocer to carry more authentic fair trade products and get involved to change policy.

Learn more about the standards behind these labels and find companies committed to fair trade values at [FairWorldProject.org](http://FairWorldProject.org)

# WHEN A TREE ISN'T JUST A TREE

Trees create shade, sequester carbon, and so much more. Yet amid the push to plant trees and meet climate goals, it's becoming evident that not all trees — or tree planting projects — have an equal (or necessarily positive) impact. The species of trees, who plants them, and where or how they're planted makes a difference.



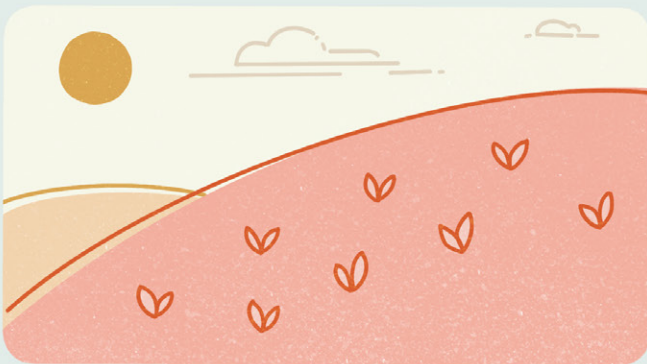
## WHO PLANTS TREES MATTERS

Community-led projects choose trees that meet community needs for food, cash crops, lumber, or other local priorities — and invest in them over the long-term, growing saplings into healthy forests.



## HOW TREES ARE PLANTED MATTERS

Diverse food forests and agroforestry systems provide both cash crops and sequester carbon — and generate income that reduces the drive to clear the forest.



## WHERE TREES ARE PLANTED MATTERS

Indiscriminate tree planting on savannah and grasslands is driving people off of their land and compromising native ecosystems. This “arboreal imperialism” continues a colonial model of control and extraction.



## WHICH TREES MATTERS

A massive monocrop plantation of the same, non-native trees doesn't have the same positive impact as a diverse forest.

When communities lead on reforestation projects, they can choose the methods that meet their specific needs, creating a greater impact both for the climate and for local economies. While the term “agroforestry” is fairly new, sustainable food-forest systems have been used by Indigenous communities for centuries. Carbon sequestration and reforestation can be and have historically been achieved through cooperative and community-driven efforts.

Grow Ahead crowdfunds community-led reforestation projects around the globe, building on the understanding that communities know what they need; they just need financial support to reach their goals.