



FAIR TRADE THAI JASMINE RICE: Social Change and Alternative Food Strategies Across Borders



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Exchange (ENGAGE)

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August 2005

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...for a more just, livable, and
democratic region

Introduction: Out in the Rice Fields

Each day I woke up underneath a mosquito net, excitement pushing my tired body down the stairs where I would meet Sohm Rien, Pahd Poom, and mother Coo-eye in the kitchen. At 6 am, they had already been awake for hours preparing breakfast, tending to the water buffalo and getting the day's supplies. We ate quickly on the floor of the kitchen before Pahd Poom and I headed out to the rice field on a motorcycle with Sohm Rien following on her bicycle. I would sit behind Pahd Poom on the motorcycle, a cooler of rice on one knee. After stopping at the *salah* to feed the ducks, put on gloves and sun hats and grab our sickles, we would walk out to the field on a narrow slip of elevated land and begin to harvest. Rice plants filled the plots on either side of us, green stems bent at the top by the weight of yellow rice grains. Grab, hook, cut. Grab, hook, cut. We would each repeat these motions until our hands were full of rice stalks. Then we would cut another stalk closer to its base, wrap it around the bundle and spin it tight before laying it on bare ground to dry. "Noo-eye mai?" (Are you tired?) they would ask me, ready to hear my usual defiant answer. "Mai Noo-eye," (Not tired) I would reply, and we would all start laughing, knowing my words were untrue. We would break for lunch, eating underneath one of the trees in the field, and then continue harvesting until the sun started to set. Sitting behind Pahd Poom as we drove back to the house, I would look out on the rice fields that lined the road and stretched to the horizon, where the setting sun painted the sky with purple and pink hues.

My weeks living and working with Pahd Poom and his sister Sohm Rien in Surin, a province of Thailand near the Cambodian border, were nothing short of magical. Not only because of the loving family I stayed with, the fresh organic food I ate, and my introduction to life on a farm, but also because of the stark contrast I found when I compared life there to the other villages I had stayed in throughout the Northeast of Thailand. My time in Surin was at the end of a five-month program in Thailand during which I researched globalization and development issues by living in different communities and learning from their struggles. People in each of those communities were fighting different things— a dam, a mine, a polluting company— yet they all shared one hardship: they were in debt and losing their land. They talked of sending the men to find work in other countries and sending the women to find work in the cities. They talked about their families and communities breaking apart. They talked about the increasing costs of fertilizer and decreasing prices for their staple crop: Jasmine rice.

Surin was different, though. The farmers I stayed with were saving money. Many were no longer in debt and were able to send their children to school. They also had gone back to growing more of their own food and said they felt healthier. So what was different? Farmers in Surin were selling their rice through a fair trade network to Europe, which guaranteed them a premium price for their prized Thai Jasmine rice. Organized in a cooperative structure, the farmers owned and controlled the milling and sale of the rice instead of relying on exploitative intermediaries.

This experience was my introduction to a potential alternative food and development strategy based on linking fair trade with the emerging "social change across borders" approach described in this report. Before leaving Surin, I asked the farmers what I could do to support their cooperative. They said that they wanted the Thai Jasmine rice that their cooperative produced to become available in the United States and for Americans to learn the importance of Jasmine rice in the lives of Thai farmers. That goal is being pursued by the non-profit organization ENGAGE (Educational Network for Grassroots and Global Exchange). At the request of Thai farmers in Surin and Yasothorn provinces, ENGAGE has begun a campaign in the U.S to inform consumers about U.S. trade policies, genetic research, and patent systems currently threatening the livelihood of Thai farmers. The fair trade approach that ENGAGE has begun to explore has the potential for diversifying and expanding the consumer base for fair trade products, and reorienting the discussion about alternative food strategies to more directly consider both the geographic and cultural implications of crop choice.

The current state of the conventional Jasmine rice trade is negatively impacting Thai Jasmine rice farmers. Since Jasmine rice plays a central role in Thailand's economy and culture, the paradox of increasing Jasmine rice exports, accompanied by a rising incidence of indebtedness among rice farmers, has serious implications. Government encouraged Green Revolution farming, with its emphasis on chemical and mechanized farming, along with current U.S. backed international trade policies, has led to a system that exploits Thai farmers and poses a serious threat to their markets in the future. As two current trade debates -- geographic indication and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) -- are being negotiated in international bodies and through bilateral trade agreements, they are already directly affecting Thai Jasmine rice farmers. Activists, academics and farmers in Thailand have voiced a strong opposition to current domestic and international developments. While Thailand engages in trade with many other countries, the United States has been the focus of this opposition because of the power it holds within the global economy and global governing bodies, as well as its role as a funder of Jasmine rice bioengineering projects.

A Fair Trade Thai Jasmine rice campaign in the United States can address these trade justice issues and address some of the challenges facing the fair trade movement. The U.S. fair trade movement is expanding rapidly, with a fifty-year history of promoting an alternative trading relationship based on principles of equity and social standards. However, fair trade products are seen as niche markets, focused on upper end consumers and not necessarily focused on system and place-based issues central to the sustainable food movement. A Jasmine rice campaign can simultaneously address those challenges facing the fair trade movement, promote the sales of fair trade Jasmine rice, and motivate cooperative action between consumers in the U.S. and producers in Thailand. Links can be made to environmental, sustainable agriculture, human rights, trade justice and development organizations with the message that, for the health of the environment and the livelihood of Thai farmers, the Thai Jasmine rice market should not be undermined by American attempts to capture and control this market.

A Thai Jasmine rice campaign also provides a unique opportunity to utilize the social change across borders concept. This approach seeks to identify opportunities for civic engagement that strengthen both immigrant communities and communities in the area of origin, through sustainable development that can potentially benefit both communities. While remittances (funds sent back by immigrants to family members and others in the country of origin) have long been used to support families and even some social, cultural and civic projects back home, the social change across borders approach seeks to reorient such initiatives through community-based sustainable economic development efforts, with the dual goals of generating long-term sustainability of the projects and by reducing the need to consider migration as the only alternative for livelihood. As described in this report, linking Thai rice farmers with the Thai Community Development Corporation, a Los Angeles-based non-profit organization founded and directed by Thai immigrants, as well as other Thai immigrant groups and networks, could lead to an exciting and mutually beneficial relationship.

This report elaborates the range of issues associated with a fair trade Thai Jasmine rice campaign in the U.S. Part 1 discusses the restructuring of Thai rice farming that has been enormously buffeted by U.S. promoted trade and technology policies dating back to the Green Revolution of the 1950s and continuing through the present, and by the impacts associated with global trade policies and influences. Part 2 describes two key aspects of the global trade/global food system framework affecting Thai Jasmine rice farming: geographic indication (place names) and the patenting of life forms. Part 3 looks at specific developments within the U.S. that have sought to penetrate and to ultimately control the Thai Jasmine rice market, including the introduction of such U.S.-grown products as Jasmine 85 and a potential genetically modified Jasmine rice product. Part 4 describes Thai farmers' responses, including the development of indigenous campaigns to protect this cultural product and the challenge of the role of the Thai government and the global trade structures that have been imposed on them. Part 5 details the development of the fair trade movement and the challenges it faces, while

Part 6 describes the development of a U.S. based, social justice oriented Fair Trade Thai Jasmine rice campaign, linked in part to the social change across borders approach, and the local and global dimensions of an alternative food strategy. The concluding section identifies the goals and potential lessons for the different social movements associated with this campaign.

Part 1: The Restructuring of Thai Agriculture

A. The Importance of Rice

While rice is often considered a side dish in the United States, it plays a central role in feeding and sustaining the world's population. Rice is cultivated in more than 100 countries around the world, and on every continent except Antarctica, it provides a source of livelihood for 2 billion people. Rice also constitutes 20 percent of global caloric intake and is considered a staple food for half of the world's population. Furthermore, rice plays a central role in many religious ceremonies, languages and cultures. This global importance of rice was emphasized when the United Nations declared 2004 the International Year of Rice and initiated a campaign suitably titled "Rice is Life."

The numerous roles of rice are clearly illustrated by the lives of people in Thailand, where rice has been harvested for at least 6,000 years.¹ As a source of nutrition, rice makes up 55-80 percent of Thai people's total calories consumed,² or approximately 332.6 - 385.2 pounds of rice per capita.³ To say, "Let's eat," in Thai translates literally to "Eat rice." In 2004, the country ranked fourth in terms of production of rice (over 48 billion pounds)⁴ and remained the world's largest rice exporter, shipping to foreign markets the highest ever volume of over 22 billion pounds at a value of \$2.73 billion.⁵ As a source of culture and belief, festivals are tied to the rice season, with Phi Ta Haek paying homage to rice spirits during land preparation and Boon Koon Larn honoring the Mother Spirit of rice during harvest. For all these reasons and because of its exceptional quality, Thai rice, especially specific varieties such as Jasmine rice, remains a source of pride for many Thai people.

As Jasmine rice farmer Pahd Poom, explains, "Jasmine rice is the very heart of the Northeast farmer." Jasmine rice is a distinct species, native to the Northeast region of Thailand. Ironically, it is in that region's sandy and saline soil that one of the most highly praised strands of rice grows: *Khao Dawk Mali* (white Jasmine flower). The combination of geography and climate in Northeast Thailand produce the unique conditions in which Jasmine rice evolved and now flourishes. Its name comes from the Jasmine white color of its grain and the fragrance it acquires from the pandan leaf that grows in fields underneath the rice stalks.⁶ Due to this sweet smell and its soft texture, Jasmine rice is coveted as a gourmet, exotic grain by consumers in Western Europe and the United States and fetches a higher price on the world market. In 2004, Jasmine rice constituted 22 percent of Thailand's total rice exports and 33 percent of the total export value.

International prices for rice have been under strong downward pressure since 1997. While the average export price of rice increased 11 percent to \$295.9 per ton in 2004, this is well below the 1999 price of \$330 per ton before the price of rice crashed in 2000.⁷ Furthermore, even when prices rise, most rice farmers do not experience a rise in income.⁸ International factors, such as the dumping of rice by US food aid and other programs, as well as local factors, such as corrupt intermediaries offering below market prices, continue to diminish the price that small-scale farmers receive for their rice.

The low prices farmers receive prevent a sizable portion of the Thai population from being able to provide for themselves. Forty nine percent of Thailand's total labor force, about 34 million farmers and farm workers, are engaged in agriculture.⁹ The average

monthly wage for an agricultural worker is 2,747 baht (US \$71.24), less than 40 percent of the national average wage of 7,015 baht (US \$181.89).¹⁰ The income gap between farmers and non-farmers has risen from 1:8 in 1982-1986 to 1:10 in 1987-1991 (based on GDP per capita of these two groups).¹¹ In the Northeast, where Jasmine rice is cultivated, 71.9 percent of the population is involved in the agricultural sector, with an annual income of 19,331 baht (US \$503.46), one third of the national average.¹² In 2004, more than 61.1 percent of landholders in the Northeast were in debt from agriculture, averaging 45,079 baht (\$1172) per household and totaling 73 billion baht (about \$1.9 billion) for the region.¹³ That means the average agricultural household debt is \$669 more than the average agricultural income.

This situation significantly impacts core Thai values concerning family and community. Debt has led many farming families to seek off-farm employment in overcrowded cities, often in low-paying sectors such as factory work, construction and commercial sex. The number of farming households in Northeast Thailand relying on supplemental income from other sources rose 50 percent between 1998 and 2004.¹⁴ Out migration brings instability and insecurity to the entire community. As Jasmine rice farmer Wattanasak Sitsungneng explains, "Debt caused a lot of stress. If the kids wanted to go to school, then we had to borrow more money. I had to send my children to Bangkok to work for 120 Baht (\$3.00) a day. Is that enough to live on? No! When we could be together, we would spend time fighting about money. We were always scared we would lose our land."

It is striking that the increase of Jasmine rice exports has paralleled the rising incidence of landlessness and amount of debt facing farmers. As an article about similar farmer issues in the Philippines notes, "The fact that small Thai farmers are still debt-ridden is ironic, given the much-touted success of Thai rice's export...the benefits of its export policy has not trickled down to [rice farmers]."¹⁵ Thai farmers' situation conflicts with the mantra of Western development schemes: that increased production leads to better living conditions for the underprivileged. Rice farmers join coffee farmers, tea farmers, corn farmers and cocoa farmers from all over the world in facing a combination of decreased prices, increased costs, and heightened competition from the global system of trade. While the Thai government has agreed to extend the length of time farmers can take to repay their debts, the issues creating the debt go beyond the reach of the Thai government. Policies such as these function merely as a band-aid or at best postpone the problem, but do not constitute a solution. Therefore, to understand the current situation facing rice farmers and move towards a sustainable solution one must understand the context of international trade policy and the changes in farming practices that have taken place.

B. Thailand's Green Revolution

These changes can be traced in part to the advent of the Green Revolution in Thailand. A multifaceted government-promoted strategy that emerged during the 1950s to restructure agriculture along industrial lines in developing countries, the Green Revolution contributed significantly to the debt farmers presently face. With its argument that modernizing agriculture would raise the standard of living for the world's poor, the Green Revolution promoted the production of a single cash crop for export and a reliance on imports for other foodstuffs.

Through the Green Revolution, various research institutions were erected to create "improved" rice varieties designed to produce increased yields. In 1960, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations established the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines to find sustainable ways of improving the living standards of poor rice farmers and producers. The IRRI's stated mission has been "to conduct research that helps developing countries grow more rice."¹⁶ The IRRI supports scientists working on rice research and oversees a gene bank to which Thailand is the fourth-largest donor. (Approximately 5,500 varieties of Thai rice are stored there). Currently, the IRRI is just one player in a worldwide system of rice research with various aims, from genetically

altering rice species to grow in non-native locations to developing species that increase yields for basic crops.

These “improved” rice varieties are produced from parental rice varieties (often indigenous species) through hybridization and/or mutation induced by radiation exposure. Such varieties in turn require heavy chemical inputs to achieve increased yields, contributing to the new kinds of costs that lead to debt for farmers.¹⁷ Thai critics have argued that the Green Revolution, as Professor Dr. Yos Santasombat has written, has “invariably destroyed rural self-reliance, self sufficiency and local seed varieties. Technology was transferred from villages to scientific labs, germplasm was transferred from agricultural fields to gene banks, [and] agricultural research centers were set up to destroy local seed varieties.”¹⁸

In Thailand, the Green Revolution was carried out through a program called the Rice Variety Improvement Project. The program was initiated in 1950 when Thailand accepted bilateral aid from the US Department of Agriculture in exchange for welcoming plant breeding experts from the United States. Along with encouraging farmers to plant fewer rice species, the program promoted the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to increase yields and support monocropping. However, most farmers did not receive training in how and when to apply fertilizers and pesticides. As Pahd Poom describes it, “I learned that whenever the rice turned green you should put more on. I was so scared of not growing enough [rice] that whenever it turned green I’d just put more on.” This lack of education led to a rapid increase in unsafe use of fertilizer and pesticide. Fertilizer use grew from 22 pounds per acre in 1967-1971, to 167 pounds per hectare for the main rice seasons and 296 pounds for second rice crops in 1997/98.¹⁹

While the Green Revolution increased rice yields, it simultaneously increased the costs of farming and decreased the price of many agricultural products. Changes in technology and policies caused world rice yields to rise 85 percent and total production to double, while real prices fell by more than 50 percent between 1961 and 1990.

Worsening this problem, many industrialized “Green Revolution” methods of farming have decreased the quality and the price of a rice harvest, while adding costs for the farmer. For example, the use of harvesting machines has affected the quality of rice grains, causing prices to decrease. Monocropping, the mass planting of one crop, has led to increased problems with insects and pests requiring the use of expensive pesticides. Fertilizer and pesticide use have made farming more expensive because they have resulted in a loss of biodiversity and an increase in soil salinity and health problems. Furthermore, in Thailand, the Green Revolution-inspired reliance on modernized irrigation methods led to the construction of twenty-three dams, each of which resulted in displacement of farmers and a further erosion of traditional small-scale farm economies.²⁰

In order to pay for the chemical inputs recommended by government agencies, farmers were obliged to take out high interest loans from agriculture banks. As chemical farming degraded the soil over time, more fertilizer was needed to support production. In Thailand, the ratio of rice yield to fertilizer per acre of rice production dropped to six in 1997-98 from 28 in 1967-71.²¹ As a result, farmers took out more loans each year to pay for increased chemical inputs.

At the same time, rice prices have been falling, with farmers increasingly producing crops at a loss each season. A study completed by the Agricultural Economic Research Section of the United States Department of Agriculture estimated the production cost of paddy rice to be 3,249.35 baht (\$84) per ton in 1993 while the average price for paddy rice in that same year stood at 3,215.33 baht per ton.²² Farmers, therefore, have not been able to repay their old debts, but instead have taken out new loans to cover the costs of the next season’s harvest. In this way, a cycle of debt has been created.

Sarun Wattanutchariya and Thanwa Jitsanguan of the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics at the Kasetsart University in Thailand have described the impact of the Green Revolution, the promotion of export-oriented development policies and incentives for large-scale production as contributing to a continuing squeeze on

“independent small-scale farmers, once the majority of the population in many developing countries, [who] are struggling to survive in a changing economic situation.”²³ Simply stated, recommendations made by government officials and agencies have led to increased costs of production and related costs, hurting small farmers.

Against this backdrop, U.S. international trade policies and institutions have now begun to make a bad situation worse.

Part 2: “Neither Free Nor Fair”: International Trade Issues

A. WTO’s Role

In conjunction with the Green Revolution, the policies of U.S. dominated international trade organizations have come to threaten the economies of developing countries and the livelihood of rice farmers. Cloaked in the rhetoric of “free trade,” current trade policies and practices create trade advantages for developed countries. In the global rice trade, the laws governing such key issues as the place-related name of a product, as well as questions about patents, serve to benefit countries with more infrastructure and capital, thus widening the gap between developed and developing countries. These trade advantages have led to an imbalanced international trading system that is neither “free” nor “fair.”

One of the major multilateral bodies governing international trade is the World Trade Organization (WTO). In 1995, the WTO evolved out of the 1947 General Agreement on Taxes and Tariffs (GATT) as a forum for international trade negotiations aimed at eliminating barriers to the free trade approach. Each member country of the WTO appoints representatives to make trade decisions by consensus through a series of councils. According to the WTO, its 150 members currently account for 97 percent of world trade, with its adopted policies setting the framework governing trade issues.

Currently, the WTO is engaged in a series of trade debates called the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) initiated in 2000 in an effort to reach agreements over:

“...agriculture and services...non-agricultural tariffs, trade and environment, WTO rules such as anti-dumping and subsidies, investment, competition policy, trade facilitation, transparency in government procurement, intellectual property, and a range of issues raised by developing countries as difficulties they face in implementing the present WTO agreements.”²⁴

While the extended deadline for this round of negotiations was January 1, 2005, many issues remain unresolved. Recently, developing countries have stalled negotiations by insisting that the issues affecting their well being be included in trade discussions. To do so, these countries have created partnerships, or blocks. In response, the U.S. is moving towards working through bilateral and regional trade agreements, such as the proposed Thailand-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and the recently enacted Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

While the U.S. is only one country in international negotiations involving hundreds of countries, its size, strength and international influence allow its policies and practices to greatly impact other countries. Therefore, even though 90 percent of world rice production and 63 percent of the rice trade comes from Asia,²⁵ U.S. decisions are the focus of grassroots organizing, academic research and political negotiations around the world. For example, U.S. food aid programs have been criticized for dumping subsidized rice on foreign markets, subsequently hurting rice farmers by driving down domestic

prices. Additionally, farmers in Brazil, a country that recently won a suit in the WTO Tribunal against United States cotton subsidies, are now pushing their country to file a complaint against U.S. rice subsidies on the basis that they distort trade. In Thailand, the two most contentious trade policies affecting rice farmers involving place names and patent issues have become the focal point in the struggle over the imbalances disadvantaging small-scale farmers through the current “free trade” system.

B. The TRIPS Debate

These two trade policies are elaborated in the WTO Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Agreement. Instead of eliminating barriers to trade, the TRIPS Agreement creates them by granting monopoly rights over certain goods. By determining which goods qualify for such rights and the process for receiving protection, the WTO favors countries with political infrastructure, resources and technology; i.e., developed countries like the U.S.

The TRIPS Agreement binds each country to set up a domestic system that works to recognize intellectual property rights from other countries. Intellectual property rights are the rights granted to a creator of a good that prevents others from using the invention without authorization. Copyrights, trademarks, geographic indication, industrial designs, patents, layout-designs, and undisclosed information (like trade secrets) are all considered intellectual property and are thus covered by the TRIPS Agreement.²⁶

Far from resolving international trade issues, TRIPS has widened the rift between the developed and developing countries within the WTO, including the geographic indication (place name) and patent policies that directly affect Thai rice farmers. To overcome this divide, policies in dispute have been referred to the TRIPS Council, set up to review the TRIPS Agreement. TRIPS Council debates deal with the authenticity of and rights over products and, therefore, heavily impact the role and value of farmers within the global trading system. Developing countries have built coalitions to oppose parts of the TRIPS Agreement, countering the politically and economically more powerful developed countries who argue that the current policies do not need revision, or that other international bodies should deal with the debate. The failure to reach consensus has stalled negotiations. The WTO meeting in Cancun was abandoned on September 14, 2003 after, as *The Guardian* reported, “richer countries failed to meet the demands of poorer nations for drastic reform...”²⁷

C. Geographic Indication

Within the TRIPS Council, one key debate has focused on what types of goods should be awarded “geographic indication status.” The WTO defines geographic indication as “...place names...used to identify the origin and quality, reputation or other characteristics of products.” For example, champagne, under current WTO rules, refers to the bubbly white wine produced in a specific region in France and specifies that other sparkling white wines not be sold as champagne.

There are two articles in the TRIPS agreements dealing with geographic indication. Article 22 covers all products with a standard level of protection, while Article 23 grants a higher level of protection for wines and spirits such as the champagne example. A block of countries, including Thailand, Bulgaria, China, Nigeria, and Switzerland, want to extend the protection granted under Article 23 to other types of products. These countries see the use of geographic indication as a way to increase the appeal of their goods and to protect their markets by preventing other countries from usurping the terms identifying their products. For example, if increased protection was to be given under geographic indication, only rice produced in certain areas of India would be allowed to be sold as Basmati, just as only the white sparkling wine from France can be sold as champagne.

Other countries, including the United States, oppose the extension of Article 23 while questioning the legitimacy of the debate over geographic indication. These countries

argue that Article 22 is sufficient and that enhanced protection would be too expensive. They reject the accusations that terms like Jasmine rice have been usurped and attribute current cases of one country growing and selling another country's indigenous products to a natural process of migrants bringing their products with them when they change their country of residency. The U.S. further questions whether the rules governing these negotiations (the Doha Declaration) allow for this debate.²⁸

The United States has been contradictory in its policies regarding geographic indication, pushing for the protection of its own products while fighting extending protection for other countries' products. Since current WTO trade rules only create geographic protection for wines and spirits, other products are left up to individual review between countries. This means that the U.S. is deciding case-by-case which products it considers geographic specific and which it considers generic. This process does not provide any mechanism for challenging such rulings, except in U.S. courts, leaving other countries powerless to counter the inconsistent position of the U.S. For example, while fighting the expansion of Article 23 in the WTO and ruling against Thailand in relation to the use of the term "Jasmine rice", the U.S. has moved to limit imports of products carrying the same name as their U.S.-produced competitors. In this context, the U.S. is claiming that Thailand cannot sell any fish products that use the name "catfish" because "catfish" refers to a species that only comes from the US. With Jasmine rice, the U.S. has decided that a U.S. product, such as "Jasmati" rice, that seeks to capture the Jasmine rice identity, is not in violation of the language addressing geographic indication in the TRIPS Agreement.

D. Patenting of Life Forms

The TRIPS Agreement also stipulates what qualifies as a patentable product, how countries must protect and enforce intellectual property rights (IPR), and how to settle disputes regarding intellectual property rights. Essentially, it applies U.S. patent laws worldwide. U.S. intellectual property law allows the patenting of "anything under the sun that is made by man" which, according to a 1980 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, includes living, genetically engineered organisms.²⁹ While "a new plant found in the wild is not patentable," genetically modified or cross-bred plants are protected.³⁰ That interpretation is reinforced by the WTO language that states, "In general, inventions eligible for patenting must be **new**, involve an **inventive step** (or be **non-obvious**) and be capable of **industrial application** (or be **useful**). Article 27 also lists inventions which governments do not have to make eligible for patent protection." (bold in original)³¹

Through its approach to international patent rights, the TRIPS Agreement has favored capital-intensive methods of improving plant varieties, such as genetic modification, which in turn has favored capital abundant countries. Under the TRIPS Agreement, trade advantage is granted to developed nations because traditional cultivation methods, such as keeping seeds for the next year's harvest to improve a crop, are not recognized as patentable. Therefore, the centuries of cultivation in Basmati rice in India or Jasmine rice in Thailand, for example, do not qualify the plants for patents. As one analyst explains, "because our patent laws do not recognize this traditional form of breeding as 'prior art,' sophisticated biotechnological corporations have successfully sought patents on Basmati rice by genetically modifying it so that the rice is able to grow in the United States."³² In essence, the TRIPS Agreement, including Article 27.3 (b) that deals with the patentability of plants and animals, creates a trade advantage for developed countries that have the capital and resources required to invest in biotechnology and to fund domestic systems facilitating the procurement and protection of intellectual property.

Other international agreements have also come into play. In 2001, the Doha Declaration recommended that the TRIPS Council examine the relationship between the WTO TRIPS Agreement and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).³³ Signed in 1992, the CBD was the first international agreement to address the concerns expressed by many of the developing nations. Article 8 of the Agreement states that each contracting party shall "respect, preserve, and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and

sustainable use of biological diversity.” However, the United States has refused to adopt the CBD.³⁴

The passionate debates within the WTO over the TRIPS Agreement have covered a range of issues. Countries differ in their views of what should and should not be patentable, whether or not farmers should be allowed to save and exchange seeds, if and how traditional knowledge, folklore, and genetic material should be protected, whether the WTO is the forum for a debate on TRIPS, whether patent applications should require the disclosure of genetic sources and related traditional knowledge, and if and how to implement benefit-sharing with the place of origin.

In 2001, the United States stated that the TRIPS Agreement should not be amended and that it was consistent with the CBD.³⁵ The Africa Group, a coalition of African nations, tabled a motion in 2003 demanding that all patenting of life forms be prohibited and that traditional knowledge be protected.³⁶ Another group of less developed countries (LDCs) including Brazil, China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, India, Pakistan, Peru, Thailand, Venezuela, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, submitted a proposal in 2002 to protect traditional knowledge under the TRIPS Agreement. The proposal makes the granting of a patent dependent on evidence of prior informed consent from the genetic material’s country of origin, disclosure of the origins of genetic material, and benefit sharing with the country of origin.³⁷ Both Switzerland and the European Community have called for Article 27.3 (b) to remain unaltered and for the World Intellectual Property, another international body, to amend its laws in order to allow domestic patent applications to require the disclosure of genetic origin and traditional knowledge. Switzerland has further stated that this disclosure should be allowed to be a requirement for approval.³⁸ These contrasting positions have been difficult to reconcile, with the U.S. position strongly influenced by corporate interests, such as biotech firms, who have the most to gain from the U.S. government’s interpretation that only recognizes technically advanced adaptations and industrial applications.

E. The Thailand-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

As the debates over patents and geographic indication reveal, developing countries have begun to insist that the issues affecting their well-being be included in trade discussions. To counter this new force, the U.S. has sought to work through bilateral trade agreements, notably the Thailand-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

The proposed Thailand-U.S. Free Trade Agreement emerged out of a series of discussions between the U.S. and Thai governments. In 2002, a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement was reached to frame the discussions that would lead up to a final agreement, anticipated in 2006. The focus of the discussions, including intellectual property right protections that particularly favored the introduction of genetically modified products, has led to a growing protest movement under the umbrella of FTA-Watch, a broad coalition of Thai human rights advocates and civil society groups, pushing for a more democratic process of negotiations and seeking to raise opposition to the Thai-US FTA as an assault on fundamental human rights.³⁹

The focus on intellectual property rights was heightened by the U.S. introduction of a ‘TRIPS-plus’ package in its negotiations with Thailand, which extends the time period of corporate patents by five years, and broadens the scope to cover more products. This package of laws increases incentives for firms to alter and patent the biodiversity of other countries without including any mechanism to share benefits with the countries of origin or to grant rights to biological resources. In this way, “TRIPS-plus” strengthens developed countries’ trade advantages while imposing stricter barriers to free trade. Mr. Sane Jamarik, the Chairman of Thailand’s National Human Rights Commission, notes, “Thailand has got rich natural resources and biodiversity whose intellectual property rights need protection.”⁴⁰ Therefore, on November 13, 2004, Thai academics attending the “Globalized FTA and Human Rights Conference” called for a suspension of the trade talks to protect farmers’ rights.

Another reason FTA-watch has opposed the Thai-U.S. FTA is because of the pressure being exerted by the U.S. for Thailand to accept Genetically Modified (GM) food and seeds. At the same time, the U.S. is lobbying against the labeling of such products. For example, the US exerted pressure via the WTO to overturn a ban on GM crops in Sri Lanka and has threatened to prosecute countries, including Thailand, within the WTO for requiring food to carry a Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) label.⁴¹ GM seeds have created controversy around a number of issues, such as the high rate of cross-pollination and have raised questions about food security.

The Thai public has a history of successfully protesting genetically modified agricultural products. Thailand's first experiments with GM crops were supported by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1997. Thailand's Department of Agriculture conducted the experiments with a variety of rice with bacterial blight resistant genes, called BB rice, but the Thai government subsequently announced the cessation of the experiments and the destruction of the GM seeds in response to strong objections from local farmers and environmentalists. In 2001, after increased protest, the Thai government imposed a ban on field trials of GM crops and the commercial planting of GM crops. That year the government also terminated field trials of GM cotton and corn carried out by Monsanto, an American agri-conglomerate and a leading player in GMO promotion.⁴² However, Thailand's National Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (Biotech) continues to participate in the International Rice Genome Sequencing Project, run by a consortium of ten countries and funded by Monsanto. In return for its funding, Monsanto is entitled to a non-exclusive, royalty-bearing license to any patent which arises out of the project.

In 2004 and 2005, the GMO issue flared in Thailand regarding the illegal field-testing by Thai laboratories of genetically modified papayas, chilies and eggplants. At the same time, genetically modified soybeans and maize were being imported for animal feedstock and other commercial uses. In June 2005, the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (Nesac) recommended that the government maintain its ban and that GM field trials only be allowed when sufficient risk management and control measures are created by law to contain and minimize the impact of GMOs. The Council cited the inability of the Department of Agriculture to contain GM papaya seeds during field tests, a situation made public by Greenpeace Southeast Asia in 2004. Not only had the Thai government department illegally conducted laboratory field tests, they had also sold the GM seeds to 2,600 farmers in 34 provinces. After increased pressure from Greenpeace and other groups, the department ran tests on 8,912 samples from farmers growing the station's seeds. It found 329 samples from 85 farms were GM, and ordered them destroyed without publicizing detailed findings. Independent follow up tests claimed to have found more GM papaya in the tested provinces and three additional provinces despite government officials guarantees that all GM papaya had been eradicated. The ability for GM plants to migrate quickly and contaminate other fields in this manner could well be damaging since countries with bans on GM imports are likely to stop shipments of papaya from Thailand if GM fruit were to be found in the food supply. Opposition to the introduction of GMOs was not only due to possible impacts on environmental and human health, but also due to its potential negative impact on export markets.⁴³

As the debates around GMOs intensified, Thai Prime Minister Shinawatra reversed a decision he had made just one month prior that would have allowed the commercial growth of GM crops. The Prime Minister gathered a committee of scientists and officials to review the GMO ban and recommend whether the government should openly promote GM crops, partially plant them, or impose an outright ban. Activists in turn have been calling on the Prime Minister to include civil society and environmentalists in the committee discussing the future of GM crops in Thailand.⁴⁴

Members of both the development community and the Thai government note that the Prime Minister is trying to end the ban on GMs in response to pressure exerted by the United States during bilateral free trade talks. An article about the Free Trade Area Agreement (FTA) negotiations between the United States and Thailand noted that Natural Resources and Environment Minister Suwit Khunkitti "questioned why the US insists that Thailand grow GMO agricultural produce."⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Thai-U.S. FTA increases competition between small-scale producers in Thailand and heavily subsidized producers in the U.S. by forcing Thailand to further open its borders to trade. In fact, the U.S. annually spends \$1.3 billion in subsidies on a domestic rice crop that costs \$1.8 billion to grow. These subsidies allow U.S. farmers to sell their product on the world market significantly below world prices, an act known as dumping. In fact, the U.S. dumps 4.7 million tons of rice on world markets at 34 percent below the cost of production, driving down prices that farmers in poor countries receive for their harvest. The possible impact of the Thai-U.S. FTA can be observed in Haiti, which was forced to reduce its rice imports in 1995. Today three out of four plates of rice eaten in Haiti are not supplied by that country's 50,000 rice farmers, but from the U.S.

As Phil Bloomer, head of Oxfam International's Make Trade Fair campaign explains, "U.S. rice would not be competitive without massive state subsidies. It is scandalous that poor countries are forced to compete with the U.S. Worse still, that they are denied the opportunity to defend themselves from dumping."

The unequal power relationship between the United States and Thailand raises serious questions about the possibility of a just or fair Free Trade Agreement. Nor does the FTA negotiation process directly include the participation of either the Thai or the U.S. public or civil society groups in the decision-making process. In Thailand, the FTA can be signed by the Prime Minister without parliamentary debate. In the U.S., the problem is compounded by the lack of a visible public debate, with attention on the details of such an Agreement only taking place until as little as a week before it is voted upon in the Senate. Instead, the key players remain the vested corporate interests, such as biotech firms like Monsanto, who are able to push TRIPS-plus and GM crops as central requirements in such agreements.

Part 3: Coveting the Thai Jasmine Rice Market

A. RiceTec's Jasmati

While these issues are negotiated in international bodies and through trade agreements removed from public input, they nevertheless directly impact developing countries' economies, farmers and cultures. Thailand's Jasmine rice farmers have been especially disadvantaged by trade rules that allow for U.S. companies to sell rice under the name "Jasmine" and that encourage scientists to develop and patent genetically modified versions of Jasmine rice to be grown in the U.S.

Thailand became increasingly concerned with the fate of the geographical indication issues related to Jasmine rice when a company in the United States started selling "American Jasmine rice" under the name "Jasmati."⁴⁶ In 2001, the Thai government filed a complaint with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission against RiceTec Inc., the American company that had registered a trademark for "Jasmati" rice. The rice, it was discovered, was a hybridized variety called Della that was developed in the United States from Italian Bertone rice.⁴⁷ While a market survey found that over half of the U.S. consumers buying "Jasmati" thought it was related to Jasmine and basmati rice, the United States Fair Trade Commission ruled that "Jasmine" was not a geographic specific term but rather "generic," allowing RiceTec and other companies to continue deceptive labeling practices. This ruling permitted the sale of "American Jasmine" rice, even though the rice was not genetically related to the Jasmine rice grown in Thailand. In response, the Thai government spent around \$4,000 to acquire a new trade name of Hom Mali rice (the Thai word for Jasmine rice). Since consumers outside of Thailand would not have been familiar with the name Hom Mali, the Thai government also initiated consumer awareness campaigns in many of its importing countries.

Given the Thai government's limited response, Thai farmers now fear that they will face the same fate that Indian farmers suffered several years ago when RiceTec Inc., patented and began selling Texas-grown "Basmati" rice in 1997. After four years of opposition from citizen groups, the Indian government, international non-governmental organizations and others, the US Patent and Trademark Office revoked seventeen of RiceTec's twenty claims of novelty and inventiveness on the grounds of "prior art." Groups in India viewed the US PTO ruling as legalizing the stealing of their indigenous seeds because it still gave Ricetec exclusive rights to the three "new" rice plants that it could sell as Basmati without any benefit sharing with India. The rice can now be sold as Basmati because the US Fair Trade Commission ruled that Basmati is a generic term, even though other rice-importing countries like the UK and Saudi Arabia do have specific trade and labeling regulations that only permit Basmati rice from India and Pakistan.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, rice is not given heightened protection under international trade laws and so the Indian government cannot file suit in the WTO tribunal, but must work through the U.S. legal system.

Although the U.S. pledged in 2002 to help Thailand register Jasmine rice as a trademark of Geographic Indication (GI) according to WTO rules, the resulting legislation contains loose wording that may fail to protect Thailand's key goods.⁴⁹ The first step towards GI protection is for a country to pass a domestic law stating that specific products qualify as having geographic indicator status (i.e., that they come from a specific region). In November 2002, Thailand's Senate passed the Geographical Indications of Goods Protection Bill drafted by the Commerce Ministry Intellectual Department by a vote of 65-1 despite disapproval from a group of lawyers, academics and non-governmental organizations. The opposition group felt that the bill did not adequately protect the country's produce because it failed to include some animal and plant varieties, including Jasmine rice, considered a "generic" term under this bill. They predicted that the bill would lead to economic disaster for Thailand, while protecting the trade interests promoted by U.S. lobbyists.⁵⁰ The group called on the House of Representatives and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to set up a joint committee with the Senate to revise the bill and allow the public to participate in the process. In March of 2003, the House agreed with the committee, rejecting the bill because it did not include plant and animal strains or food and agricultural products and would allow competitors to market products native to Thailand.⁵¹

On April 28, 2004, an amended Geographic Indications Act, now including protections for "specific goods," including Jasmine rice,⁵² went into effect. However, many groups, including the Legal Media Group, a company in New York, Hong Kong, and London which publishes information on legal issues affecting international business, have questioned whether this new law will actually provide such broad protections.⁵³ The concern is that the Act's provisions for registering a product to a specific region entail a complicated process that requires significant infrastructure, information and cooperation among different parties. The Geographic Indications Act would be difficult to apply in practice. Meanwhile, Thailand continues to push for expansion of the WTO's Article 23 to guarantee heightened protection for many of its products. At stake is whether the term "Jasmine rice" would signify a specific product, historically and culturally grounded in a specific place, rather than a globalized product that had lost its cultural and historical significance and ultimately did not taste or smell like what Thai farmers and consumers around the world have come to recognize as Jasmine rice.

B. Jasmine 85 and the New Niche Markets

More threatening than the deceptive marketing practices of RiceTec have been the efforts of U.S. scientists to create an "improved" Jasmine rice variety that can be grown in the U.S. The search for a Jasmine rice variety suited for conditions and farming techniques in the U.S. began with Jasmine 85, genetically bred by the International Rice Research Institute in 1966 by crossing Thailand's Jasmine 105 with other rice varieties. Currently, scientists are trying to create a U.S.-grown Jasmine that more closely resembles the

taste and physical characteristics of Thai rice while also testing ways to increase the quality of Jasmine 85 through different storage and cultivation techniques.

U.S. farmers, in an effort to compete in the global market, are increasingly interested in growing Jasmine rice as a way of diversifying their operations and attracting burgeoning markets. Responding to this interest, the USDA Agricultural Research Service and the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, in cooperation with the University of Arkansas, and Louisiana and Mississippi State Universities, made Jasmine 85 available to US rice farmers in 1989. This marked the beginning of U.S. farmers' quest to stake a claim to the Jasmine rice market.

Jasmine rice is an appealing product to U.S. farmers for many reasons. First, Jasmine rice is an aggressive breed and, therefore, a good organic crop, which, in turn, makes it more appealing for potential specialty markets.⁵⁴ The organic market in the US has been increasing by 17-22 percent a year while the conventional food industry has seen growth rates of 2-3 percent, and market researchers expect it to generate sales of \$32.3 billion by 2009.⁵⁵ The Organic Trade Association reports that organic food sales in the U.S. were valued at \$10.8 billion in 2004, a 20 percent increase since 2003.⁵⁶

Furthermore, aromatic rice, which includes Jasmine, is a product showing growth in an otherwise contracting rice market. For example, in 2003, while rice sales dropped 5 percent in the US, the specialty rice market maintained growth.⁵⁷ In 2001, 10 percent of U.S. rice consumption (340,000 tons) was of imported Jasmine and Basmati rice, a 248 percent increase from 1990 (137,000 tons).⁵⁸ Sales are projected to continue to increase since ethnic-Asians, the main consumers of aromatic rice in the US, are one of the nation's fastest growing ethnic groups.⁵⁹ Not only is Jasmine a product that captures a growing market, it also commands a higher price, approximately 30 percent above conventional US varieties.⁶⁰

Interestingly, despite efforts to create an association with Jasmine rice, Jasmine 85 failed to take off in the ethnic Asian market, according to USDA and rice industry documents. As a result, U.S. farmers, such as Lowell Farms and Lundberg Farms, which sell both white and brown Jasmine 85 as organic Jasmine rice, started selling their product through health food stores and natural food supermarkets such as Trader Joes and Whole Foods, focusing on the consumer group driving the expansion of the organic market. RiceTec Vice President for Sales, Mark Denman, in an article in *The Rice World*, notes, "...it's frustrating that we can't break the Thai Jasmine barrier in ethnic channels."

Since ethnic Asians are the main consumers of Jasmine rice in the U.S. (consuming about 150 pound of rice yearly per person),⁶¹ the challenge for researchers and their corporate sponsors remains how to cultivate an an equivalent product in the U.S. without losing the qualities that make it so popular. A Texas A & M University (TAMU) study, *Evaluating the Effects of Rice Quality Attributes on Consumer Preferences and Rice Demand*, evaluated the tastes of Filipinos, mainland and Taiwanese Chinese, Thais, Cambodians, and Vietnamese, who indicated a clear preference for Thai Jasmine rice over two domestic aromatic rice varieties, including Jasmine 85, and two non-aromatic domestics. Color and shape of the grain were noted as reasons for this preference.⁶² This has led TAMU to study the effects of different soils, climates, and farming, processing, and storage methods, on the desirability of local aromatic rice varieties among ethnic-Asians.⁶³ Furthermore, the Rice Research Station of the Louisiana State University AgCenter started a rice-breeding program in 1992 emphasizing the development of Jasmine and other aromatic varieties adapted to local environmental conditions with "specialty characteristics that match those of imported rice." In an article in *Louisiana Agriculture*, a professor and a director of the center state that their research "will help the Louisiana rice industry to obtain a sizable portion of this fast-growing, high-value rice market, both domestically and internationally."⁶⁴ Currently this center is perfecting LA 2140 (a mix of Jasmine 85 and Della, an older U.S. grown aromatic rice variety) that has tested well in terms of appearance, flavor, aroma, tenderness, and whiteness.⁶⁵ All of these experiments are focused explicitly on developing a U.S. grown rice that retains the characteristics favored by ethnic Asians.

C. GMO Jasmine

The most controversial of these experiments involves the research started in 1995 by Chris Deren, a professor at the University of Florida's Everglades Research and Education Center in Belle Glade, and Neil Rutger, of the United States Department of Agriculture. This team is attempting to produce a mutation of Jasmine rice that will grow in Florida's Everglades while retaining the characteristics derived from conditions in Thailand. To reach this goal, Deren is identifying the genes determining flavor, combating the problem of shorter day lengths in the United States by creating mutations that flower early and accommodating for mechanized harvesting methods by manipulating the rice to grow shorter. Deren predicts that a commercially viable crop of Jasmine rice will be grown in the United States by the year 2011.⁶⁶

Controversy regarding this research erupted in Thailand after BioThai, an organization addressing biopiracy and bio-safety issues, made it public in 2001. One key issue raised was that Deren and Rutger had obtained Jasmine rice seeds from the gene bank of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) without following two mandatory procedures:

1. Alerting the donor and owner of the seeds (the Thai government)
2. Requiring lenders to sign an official contract that ensures against future patenting.

In response to criticism, the IRRI had Deren and Rutger sign a written guarantee that they would not attempt to patent or restrict the use of their GM Jasmine. The possibility of a patent troubles Thais because if there are doubts about the similarity between Deren's rice and Thailand's rice, it is Thai exporters who would have to provide scientific evidence in a patent infringement suit that the rice they sell in the U.S. constitutes a different variety.⁶⁷

The IRRI itself has recognized the implications of this new effort to develop a GMO Jasmine rice product. There is "little doubt," an IRRI statement suggested, "that it would have been far more difficult for Thailand to become the world's leading rice exporter, were it not for such free and open sharing of rice varieties."⁶⁸ However, Deren and Rutger's research does not share IRRI's goal of "helping farmers in developing countries produce more food on limited land using less water, less labor, and fewer chemical inputs, without harming the environment."⁶⁹ In fact, their research does much to disadvantage poor farmers, working towards a market in which Thai farmers, who have cultivated and developed Jasmine for generations, cannot compete. As the Action Group on Erosion, Technology, and Concentration (ETC), an information and analysis organization headquartered in Canada, states, "Far from eradicating poverty, the transfer of Jasmine to the USA would create poverty."⁷⁰

Rice farmers, researchers and publications have each made it clear that the motivation behind creating hybridized Jasmine rice varieties is to capture the growing aromatic rice market. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service describes its work with Jasmine 85 by stating, "For the expanding Asian market, both here and abroad, we've worked on a long-grain rice that smells of Jasmine as it cooks."⁷¹ The USDA report estimated that by 1990, 10,000 acres of land in the U.S. were devoted to Jasmine 85 production, accounting for approximately 50 percent of the land planted with aromatic varieties. The report states, "[Jasmine 85's] introduction in the U.S. is recent and production expansion will hinge upon producing and merchandizing competitively relative to Thailand imports.... Until this occurs, the growth in rice imports would be expected to follow the trend from 1980 to 1990, which implies that 10 percent of domestic rice food use would be imported by 1995."⁷² Dr. Ben Jackson, who created Jasmine 85 says, "[Jasmine 85] helps U.S. rice producers compete with Asian imports."⁷³ Furthermore, an article in *The Rice World* titled "Jasmine 85—Almost Named 'Imelda'—Helps U.S. Compete with Thai Imports" states, "The idea [behind releasing Jasmine 85] was to compete with growing Thai imports..." Similarly, Dennis Hensgens, owner of Eunice Rice Mill in Louisiana, supports the hybridization of Jasmine rice by local research stating, "We can't give up because the Asian market is so huge. So far, we haven't had the quality to compete. But if we can come close to the (Thai Jasmine's) quality

with a high-enough yielding variety, maybe we can compete.”⁷⁴ SemChi Rice Products Corporation has already expressed interest in growing 9,000 acres of Deren’s rice and, based on the level of interest in the research, other companies are sure to follow.⁷⁵ As numerous sources illustrate, U.S. growers and businesses support Deren’s research because of a desire to replace imports with domestic production of Jasmine rice, a traditional Thai crop.

In this way, even if Deren adheres to his pledge not to apply for a patent, a competitive variety of Jasmine grown in the United States will impact Thai farmers by creating a competitive product that undermines the place-based nature and cultural and historical significance of Jasmine rice and will ultimately decrease the Thai Jasmine rice market in the United States. In 2003, the U.S. imported 300 million killograms of rice from Thailand at a value of \$160 million. This accounts for over 60 percent of the U.S.’s total imports of rice (431,306,816 killograms) and total value of imports (\$242,312,480). Almost all of the U.S. imports are of aromatic rice, with Jasmine rice accounting for 75 percent of the imports in 2001.⁷⁶ Furthermore, since the U.S. is the world’s second leading rice exporter, a cheaper U.S. Jasmine could have effects on Thailand’s other export markets as well.

Thai farmers also feel threatened by the creation of a competitive Jasmine breed in the U.S. because American farmers operate on a large scale with higher yields and heavier subsidies. Approximately 90 percent of farms in northeastern Thailand are sixteen acres or smaller, while the “small scale” operations of one Jasmine 85 producer in the U.S., Lowell Farms, total 350 acres.⁷⁷ U.S. rice farmers produce at an average yield of 6.6 tons per hectare, nearly twice the world average of 3.8 tons per hectare, exceeded only by Australia and Egypt.⁷⁸ Moreover, a Jasmine-type breed created by the research team in Louisiana yielded 7,421 pounds per acre in 2002.⁷⁹ In contrast, average yields for Jasmine rice in Thailand are less than 2,000 pounds per acre.

Additional advantage comes from U.S. government farm subsidies, which totaled over \$16 billion in 2003. Although the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act was designed to eliminate all government intervention in agricultural prices by 2002 in order to liberalize trade, total USDA subsidies have actually more than doubled their \$7.3 billion value in 1996. From 1995 to 2003, rice subsidies constituted the seventh largest federal farm program in the United States, worth more than \$9.3 billion.⁸⁰

Due to these existing imbalances, U.S. farmers can sell rice at a cheaper price than Thai Jasmine farmers. Unfortunately, the cheaper product lacks a comparable taste, texture, and scent and its place-based connections to where and how it is grown and valued.

D. Biopiracy

Deren’s research provides one important illustration of biopiracy, defined as the “unauthorized and uncompensated taking of biological resources.” Other examples include Australian farmers growing popular fruits native to Asia, such as durian, mangosteen, longan, and lychee, and the use of traditional medicines to create drugs that pharmaceutical companies then patent and sell.⁸¹ Even though WTO members argue about how to stop industries in developed countries from using the genetic resources from developing countries, none of the communications on TRIPS or Geographic Indication effectively address the multiple forms of biopiracy associated with the global economy.

Developing countries are often the source of the genetic resources used by breeding programs in developed countries. The absence of a property rights regime protecting the genetic diversity of developing countries coupled with the potential profits of selling a patented plant variety (increased by the monopoly rights granted under TRIPS) has led to a high incidence of biopiracy. Biopiracy tends to victimize Less Developed Countries (LDCs) because they have abundant genetic resources, but lack the advanced technology and enforcement mechanisms needed to protect them under current trade laws. Furthermore, there is an absence of enforceable international laws protecting

indigenous knowledge and the natural resources of less-developed countries. Within the WTO, a group of LDCs has argued, “to the extent that biopiracy is today accepted as a major problem, the challenge is to determine what measures need to be taken within the framework of the TRIPS Agreement.”⁸²

In agriculture, biopiracy occurs when biotechnology firms use a germplasm without prior consent, somehow alter and/or code its DNA, and then patent the resulting product and/or information. The resulting crop may be exported to the source-country where it will compete with the traditional plant. Furthermore, if the company applies for intellectual property protection within the source country, the original producers could be prohibited from producing the original variety or use it for breeding purposes. While this is an infrequent and extreme outcome, it has occurred, such as in the case of the Mexican yellow bean which was patented by a Colorado farmer in 1999.⁸³

The patenting of rice species native to Asia is a clear example of the widespread prevalence of biopiracy and its associated problems. The patenting of rice genes and breeds by a handful of corporations has led to a consolidated ownership of biodiversity, with plants from developing countries controlled by a select number of large multinational companies. In 2002, nearly 70 percent of the 1,000 patents granted for genetically modified versions of rice, wheat, maize, soybeans and sorghum food patents were held by six corporations headquartered in developed countries: Aventis, Dow, DuPont, Mitsui, Monsanto, and Syngenta.⁸⁴ In September of 2000, 609 rice genes had been patented to large research companies, with U.S. corporations holding 45 percent of them. DuPont held 95 percent of the United States rice patents.⁸⁵ Since Syngenta (from Switzerland) and Myriad Genetics Inc. (from the United States) announced that they had completed sequencing 99.5 percent of rice DNA in 2002, the number of patents on rice genes has risen to approximately 900. These genes represent a variety of traits such as resistance to droughts and pests, higher yield and nutritional characteristics.⁸⁶ Such patenting lessens the role of farmers and allows a few large corporations to control the world’s food supply, threatening food security, national sovereignty and personal food choice. In August 2005, 100 percent of the gene sequencing was completed, its implications still to be determined.

Part 4: Cultivating an Alternative

A. Living Under Natural Law

U.S. rice producers and their allies in government and the research community have targeted Jasmine rice as a key market for the future. In doing so, they have highlighted the inequities associated with the development of their new rice varieties, global trade positioning, and disregard for the cultural values and ethnic associations of products. Key issues raised by the effort to co-opt the Jasmine rice market include the role and meaning of *place* in agricultural production for such products as Jasmine rice, and how production shifts, influenced by global actors like biotech firms or through international trade policies, can have major impacts on economies, livelihoods and cultures. As these impacts have become more visible and pronounced, they have contributed to the growth of new movements and alternative approaches that seek to counter these developments. The issues the new Jasmine rice movements have raised are fundamentally about questions of environmental sustainability and ethics.

Scientists, businesspersons and politicians who defend the efforts to genetically modify rice products point to the fact that farmers have been breeding rice for centuries. Farmers, it is argued, select which seeds to keep from the previous year’s harvest and crossbreed varieties to combine coveted characteristics. However, this type of adaptation produces rice breeds that are suited for the local environment and are not intended for

cultivation in areas with different ecosystems. Traditional rice breeding works within environmental limitations and does not try to alter nature. As Vitoon Panyakul, director of Green Net, an NGO supporting organic and fair trade farmers in Thailand, states, "Traditional farmers may have also adapted local agro-ecology to fit their agricultural requirements, but this adaptation of local ecology was still based on the notion of living under natural law, not trying to conquer and control nature as expressed in the beliefs of the Green Revolution. Therefore, indigenous plant varieties are diverse, and they are all appropriate to their local environment."⁸⁷ While productivity is important in traditional breeding, Vitoon argues, the goal is "maximum yield for the whole production system" rather than "maximum crop yield." The farmers' needs and resources are respected in the traditional seed saving process since the farmer selects the crop him/herself.

B. Thai Farmers Mobilize

As farmers became aware of the efforts to undercut their approach to growing Jasmine rice, they began to mobilize. In Thailand, the media increased its coverage of the rapidly expanding threats to Thai Jasmine rice farmers when the anti-biopiracy NGO BioThai alerted the public and the government about Chris Deren's Jasmine GMO rice research in the U.S. Newspapers included descriptions of farmers' protests, analyses of domestic and international trade policies, responses from the environmental and NGO sector about issues discussed in parliament (such as GMOs and Geographic Indication), and information on the growing organic movement. While this sudden exposure may suggest a relatively new development, the Thai farmers' rights and alternative agriculture movements have been growing for over forty years.

In 2001, rice farmers traveled from all parts of Thailand to protest at the U.S. embassy against the sale of RiceTec's deceptively labeled Jasmati rice and the GM Jasmine research conducted by Chris Deren. Outside the embassy, farmers burned chili pepper as part of a ritual expunging evil and delivered a letter written to President Bush.⁸⁸ The letter, addressed to "His Excellency," stated:

"Jasmine rice is the pride of Thai farmers and Thai people. Our close bondage with rice does not stem from the fact that we are the biggest rice exporter in the world, but because "rice" is [an] integral part of our way of life and our spirit. Thai farmers and people's organizations are determined to continue our campaign to stop the stealing and illegal usage of our Jasmine rice."⁸⁹

This passage presents the dual importance of rice underlying the activities of the farmers' movements in Thailand. The role rice plays in providing a source of livelihood and a focus for culture and spirituality inspires a movement that is about changing economic and trade policy as well as altering farming methods and personal perceptions. For example, the Asian Long March to Protect Biodiversity, a 12-day mobile caravan campaign that visited six areas of Thailand in 2000, was designed by Thai organizations to "sensitize public opinion on the threat of GMOs and the promise of peoples' alternatives for food security and agricultural biodiversity in Asia."⁹⁰ Afterwards, grassroots organizations from seven Asian countries formally agreed to commit themselves to both political action (such as lobbying, boycotting and publicly protesting GMO field trials) and farming changes (such as promoting sustainable agriculture systems and protecting local species).⁹¹

Farmers in Thailand have used direct action to raise public awareness and pressure government officials. During the Asian Long March, Thai organizations, academics and farmers organized a demonstration of five hundred farmers in Roi Et (a province in the Northeast).⁹² Furthermore, these parties rallied during Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's visit to the northeast province of Surin and burned effigies of George W. Bush and Mike Moore, the former head of the WTO, at protests in Mahasarakham province.

These actions have been accompanied by demands grounded in the belief that only local people can protect biodiversity, and that resource destruction is directly related to a form of “colonialism.”⁹³ GMOs and Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) are viewed as threats to food security and as detrimental to the rights of farmers, consumers and nations, since they allow for a private monopoly on food. GMOs and IPRs are also denounced as adverse to Asian religious and ethical principles.

The Thai farmers’ movement has applied these core beliefs when responding to debates within the WTO and Thailand’s governing bodies. Two positions are voiced in terms of TRIPS, one that calls for the protection of rights to biodiversity and traditional knowledge and a second that calls for “no patents on life.” As Witoon Lianchamroon, head of the premier organic business in Thailand, states, current trade policies are “a mechanism for monopolizing knowledge for the commercial benefits of transnational corporations [which] prevent Thailand, as well as other developing countries, from gaining access to knowledge...for national development.”⁹⁴ Intellectual Property Law, he argues, is restrictive, adds extra costs for farmers and, therefore, intensifies rural poverty. He calls for the development of a new Intellectual Property system “suitable to local economic and social conditions” which takes into consideration “farmer rights, indigenous knowledge, and biodiversity.”⁹⁵ This proposed revision to international trade laws would not abolish Intellectual Property Rights, but would instead grant these rights to plants improved through traditional mechanisms, thus leveling the trade playing field.

Other Thai farmers have joined organizations around the world with the extreme demand for “no patents on life.” They reject the current proposals tabled by the LDCs in the WTO to amend the TRIPS Agreement because they do not guarantee any benefits or protections to local communities “who are the real providers of resources and knowledge.” Such proposals base patent approval on prior consent and benefit sharing with government agencies, which many times do not directly answer to the people. As GRAIN, an international NGO, put it, “...the proposal defines TK [traditional knowledge] as being itself a form of intellectual property. This is in sharp contrast to the prevalent understanding among TK holders themselves, who usually regard TK as an integral part of a cultural and spiritual context, not simply as property to be bought and sold.”⁹⁶

The farmers’ movement has also pressured Thailand’s House of Representatives to revise the Geographic Indication bill⁹⁷ and forced the Prime Minister to reverse his decision to allow the growing of GMOs.⁹⁸ These acts by farmers have demonstrated enormous determination and their own clear convictions about culture, tradition and human rights.

The farmers’ movement is also building support groups for farmers to analyze their lifestyles, learn from each other and adopt more sustainable farming methods. As Daycha Siriphat of the Technology for Rural and Ecological Enrichment (TREE) explains, “Agriculture has been regarded [by governments] only from the trade point of view, at the expense of cultural and spiritual values- what we call the ‘Monoculture of the Mind’...”⁹⁹ The work of the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) and similar local initiatives have played a central role in refocusing agriculture from production to sustainability goals. For example, organic training sessions by AAN focus on both sustainable farming methods and personal transformation. Farmers discuss what their needs are, how capitalism has changed their culture and how they can simplify their lives. In this way, the farmers’ movement uses a twofold approach to improving the condition of Thai farmers: one focusing on the personal and the other demanding a change in approach from government bodies and international agencies.¹⁰⁰

The Thai farmers’ movement is gaining further strength by building international ties. For instance, NGOs have arranged conferences in Cambodia¹⁰¹ and India¹⁰² to discuss sustainable rice farming methods, grassroots activities, rice policy developments and research trends. Furthermore, an Asia-wide coalition of NGOs gathered in Tokyo to protest the International Rice Research Institute’s World Rice Research Conference¹⁰³ and groups in ten Asian countries organized the People’s Caravan for Food Sovereignty. For thirty days in September 2004, a People’s Caravan of events and actions was

organized in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia and the Philippines by a coalition of organizations, academics and farmers. During the caravan's time in Thailand, seminars, street drama, press conferences, and rallies demanded that the Thai government "advocate an agricultural reform that gives the poor peasants access and control over the land, seeds and water; yields which are pesticide free and GM free; guarantees an ecological production for present and future generations; supports the rights of women farmers; and strengthens the communities in rural areas."^{104, 105}

These Asian movements are also uniting with organizations from developed countries. For example, European branches of the Foodfirst Information & Action Network (FIAN), an international human rights organization with members in over sixty countries defending the right to food, orchestrated campaigns to coincide with the People's Caravan. They raised awareness and lobbied governments and international bodies about food security issues such as biotechnology and biopiracy.¹⁰⁶ Preceding this show of solidarity, over one hundred and fifty organizations¹⁰⁷ signed a 2001 petition supporting the Thai campaign and urging the international community to "advocate for an efficient protection of...Farmers' Rights and for a fair and equitable benefit-sharing."¹⁰⁸ The letter of support, penned by the European Fair Trade Association, noted, "...privatization of the access to natural resources -including to rice, humanity's main staple food- infringes upon the right of the peoples to food (defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)."¹⁰⁹

The farmers' movement in Thailand has also built coalitions to address rice trade issues at multiple levels. Emphasis is placed on outside forces affecting Thai farmers and the decisions they can make regarding the sustainability of rice farming. The international coalitions formed throughout this process follow a similar multi-dimensional approach, working for change within conventional international trade while building an alternative trading arrangement. By operating in these different arenas, the Thai farmers have pointed to alternative paths for both the global flow of food and an expansion of the global justice and sustainable food movement's focus and agenda.

Part 5: Expanding Fair Trade

A. Thai Fair Trade Networks

The situation facing Thai Jasmine rice farmers has generated interest in developing alternative production methods and a fair trade approach to more equitable trading arrangements. Fair trade has generally referred to a direct relationship between producers and consumers that ensures a higher price for farmers by minimizing the often-exploitative middlemen who give farmers, in conventional trade situations, a lower than market price for their rice. Currently, approximately 7,600 farming families in Northeast Thailand sell organic Jasmine rice to seven European countries through a fair trade network.¹¹⁰ Farmers who participate in the fair trade Jasmine rice network work in a cooperative to annually set their rice price and to enforce organic standards. Farmers receive a premium price and yearly dividends while enjoying long-term relationships with buyers and maintaining a community savings fund. The cooperative also supports and provides training for farmers transitioning from chemical production to organic farming.

For the farmers growing Jasmine rice, fair trade has provided significant benefits. It has generated a steady income for farmers that have enabled many to get out of debt while also reviving the community unit. Furthermore, since the rice is organic, both the health of fair trade farmers and the environment have improved. As Wattanasak Sitsungneung, a farmer in the cooperative, describes it:

"Since we've changed to organic production, through the fair trade network, we've started [to] be happier as a family. Debt caused a lot of stress. If the kids

wanted to go to school further then we would have to borrow more money. But by selling fair trade, we have more money left and can pay for things like sending our children to school. The whole family can sit down and talk with each other about what we are doing. If we can talk and find understanding within our own family, that's happiness."

In its tenth year, the Fair Trade Jasmine Rice Network is looking to expand to accommodate the increased number of farmers interested in membership, and to spread this development model. Presently the 7,600 families benefiting from fair trade constitute less than five percent of the farming population in their provinces. Ensuring that fair trade rice is a success in the U.S. will expand the markets for producers in Thailand. In addition, this rice will empower consumers in the U.S. by assuring that behind the fair trade Jasmine rice label is the genuine (geographically indicated) Thai crop grown in harmony with nature to promote sustainable development for small-scale farmers.

Fair Trade rice from Thailand, including Jasmine, red, and coral rice, has recently been imported into the United States with Fair Trade white and brown Basmati rice soon to follow. The organic Thai rice comes from the province of Surin that is located on the border between Thailand and Cambodia. Already the new market found in the U.S. has led to the establishment of SDK, a new Fair Trade cooperative in the region. SDK works with Surin Farmers Support, a local Thai NGO that helps farmers growing Fair Trade rice for the European market operate their rice mill and facilitate their relationship with Green Net, a Thai Fair Trade and organic exporter. Unlike SFS, SDK does not work through Green Net and instead has been accredited as a Fair Trade cooperative by the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO). SFS is currently going through the process of accreditation so that it can operate autonomously from Green Net in the future.

The transition to organic farming is further supported by the Alternative Agriculture Network, a Thai NGO that educates farmers and grants them loans for sustainable farming activities. Recently, the fair trade network has expanded, involving farmers from other provinces and allowing for increased professionalism. Due to the program's success, Surin has become a model province for the government's new efforts to actively encourage organic production throughout the country.

The Fair Trade Jasmine Rice Network has sought to empower farmers as part of a larger movement working to promote sustainable agriculture and development. In 1989, the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) was established in response to the cycle of debt that farmers faced from industrialized agriculture. This group focused on developing and supporting alternative agricultural practices such as organic, natural, integrated farming, and called on the Thai government to promote sustainable and organic agriculture. AAN has regional chapters that work directly with Thai farmers to "promote sustainable agriculture, reduce use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers and prevent exploitation of farmers by governments, corporations, and trade regulations."¹¹¹ The AAN arranges farmer workshops, organizes demonstrations, lobbies government officials and operates a micro-loan program for farmers to improve the sustainability of their fields. Through the AAN, farmers learn the environmentally and economically sustainable techniques of their ancestors while finding ways to use technology to enhance the ecosystem.¹¹²

Additionally Green Net, the first organic fresh produce wholesaler in Thailand, was established in 1993 to promote sustainable development, improve farmer and consumer health and protect environmental well being. Green Net founded the organic certification program, Agriculture Certification Thailand (ACT), to oversee and label organic production. It also researches and develops organic products, trains farmers in organic production, promotes community enterprises, and educates consumers. Green Net now consists of two entities: Earth Net which focuses on establishing and promoting organic production and consumption in Thailand, and the Green Net Foundation which supports and serves as an exporter for Fair Trade Jasmine rice.¹¹³

In addition, Biodiversity Action Thailand, known as BioThai, was started in 1995 to focus on raising awareness and pushing for legislation on issues affecting biodiversity

and local knowledge systems. They hold national and international conferences and organize actions aimed at protecting Thai Jasmine rice from exploitation and stopping the importation and growth of genetically modified organisms.¹¹⁴ The AAN, Green Net, and BioThai are only a few of the organizations which make up the farmers' movement in Thailand, a movement that has shown strength in unity by engaging farmers locally, while challenging the type of development that has been spawned by the Green Revolution and defined by the dictates of the global trade regimes.

B. The Fair Trade Movement in the U.S.

The fair trade movement, initially called the alternative trade movement, began in the 1940s when U.S. churches and faith-based initiatives like Self Help Crafts (now Ten Thousand Villages) and Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation (SERRV) began selling handicrafts made by craftsmen introduced through missions and other service-based projects. Self Help Crafts began by selling products made by Puerto Ricans, Palestinian Refugees, and Haitians while SERRV first focused on helping refugees in post World War II Europe by selling wooden cuckoo clocks from Germany. The movement then spread to Europe, with Oxfam Great Britain selling crafts made by Chinese refugees in the 1950s. Today, world shops, which include stores, internet companies, or mail order catalogues selling only fair trade products, remain the primary retailer for fair trade crafts and a main player in awareness-raising campaigns. In the 1960s and '70s fair trade organizations in developed countries built relationships with NGOs from developing countries that provide technical assistance and support for producers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The first major collaborative effort to affect policy occurred in 1968 at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development when organizations from consumer countries supported the call by producer countries for "trade not aid," seeking to change the underlying conditions keeping developing countries dependent on foreign aid.¹¹⁵

While the United Nations continued to focus on an aid-based agenda, these discussions led activists and organizations to build a more comprehensive and cohesive international movement. Fair Trade Organisatie in the Netherlands imported the first fair trade coffee in 1973 to increase the possibility of achieving an overall livable wage for producers, since crafts are mainly used as a source of supplemental income.¹¹⁶ The promotion and resulting sales of fair trade coffee dramatically rose during the Coffee Crisis of the 1980s when prices for coffee crashed, impacting farmers in Africa and South and Central America. Campaigns organized around this issue combined with an expansion into conventional marketing outlets (such as supermarkets, coffee shops, restaurants, etc.) and a diversification of the fair trade product line increased the visibility of the fair trade movement while raising awareness of the conditions facing producers.

In fact, fair trade is part of a larger trade justice movement organizing to change the trade rules that make the Fair Trade Movement necessary. As Oxfam explains in its fair trade organizer packet:

"Fair trade provides substantial benefits to small-scale producers, however...fair trade alone can't address the crisis faced by the millions of small-scale farmers and producers whose livelihoods are threatened.... Long-term change can only be achieved by making the rules of world trade work for small-scale producers as well as rich multinationals.... When we demand trade with justice, we are building sustainable relationships between producers and consumers that benefit all of us, rather than just buying and selling more products."¹¹⁷

While fair trade raises living conditions for the farmers involved, it remains a niche market. When considering the global context, it has a relatively small impact on select producers of specific products from certain countries.

The complexity of issues surrounding the impacts of international trade has led to a trade justice movement which is diverse, ranging from advocates proposing an end to all

trade to those seeking to develop trade regulations that even the playing field by favoring developing nations. These trade debates have become increasingly visible, generating media coverage and political commentary. The 1999 demonstrations held outside the Seattle meeting of the WTO were a pivotal event, significantly raising awareness about the bodies governing international trade and the criticisms regarding current global trade conditions. The trade justice movement has since succeeded in bringing international trade issues to the attention of the U.S. public, although the public debate has also revealed a protectionist tendency fueled by fears of loss of U.S. jobs through outsourcing. A more critical dialogue is still needed on how trade agreements and globalization-related policies have created an unequal distribution of wealth and power throughout the world; a dialogue that could potentially be influenced by a more expansive fair trade movement.

While the current fair trade and trade justice movements support and promote each other in various ways, many players in the fair trade movement have tried to remove themselves from any direct political advocacy role so that fair trade as a market can broaden its appeal with a more positive (and not necessarily critical) message. Fair trade organizations have worked to expand the fair trade market by getting transnational corporations and major labels, the nemesis of those who have assumed an anti-globalization stance, to offer fair trade products (ultimately increasing their sales and improving their public image).

With the trade justice movement raising the public's awareness of trade issues, the sales of fair trade products grew rapidly throughout the 1980s in Europe and throughout the 1990s in the U.S. In order to ensure that "mainstreaming" fair trade did not erode its guiding principles, independent fair trade labeling organizations were created, starting in 1988 with Max Havaleer in The Netherlands.¹¹⁸ Currently, nineteen national labeling initiatives, unified as the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) since 1977, affix a fair trade label to importers and manufacturers who undergo yearly independent audits to identify adherence to product-specific standards created and enforced by the labeling initiative and producers.¹¹⁹

In the 1980s, the fair trade movement was further united by the creation of umbrella organizations for world shops and fair trade organizations in both importing and exporting countries. The International Fair Trade Association (IFAT), a coalition of producers, importers, retailers and financiers, created nine standards for all parties involved in the fair trade market chain and provides links to services and resources.¹²⁰ In 1984, the Network for European World Shops (NEWS!) was established to build united campaigns among its 2,500 member world shops in fifteen European countries. Groups in the U.S. have also participated in a number of campaigns such as World Fair Trade Day held annually on May 4th. FLO, IFAT, NEWS!, and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) cemented their cooperation in 1998 by establishing FINE to harmonize advocacy, campaigning, standard setting, and monitoring.¹²¹

In the U.S., the fair trade movement has come to consist of many large and small initiatives. Transfair USA, started in 1996 and now grown to a staff of approximately 25 individuals, is the only independent labeling organization certifying fair trade products in the US. Sixty percent of their \$2.1 million budget is committed to marketing (39 percent) and business development (21 percent). Revenues, totaling \$1,665,687 in 2003, are mainly earned from certification fees (56 percent) and from grants, contributions and in kind donations (34 percent).¹²² Transfair USA, a member of FLO, has lead fair trade's push into conventional markets and mainstream consciousness.

About 100 of the wholesalers, retailers, and producers of fair trade products sold in the U.S. are members of the Fair Trade Federation (FTF), which educates consumers and provides information, resources and networking services. While conventional retailers are contributing to the expansion of fair trade sales, it is these fair trade organizations, World Shops, trade justice organizations and a few alternative food stores that combine selling fair trade items with awareness-raising and lobbying campaigns. The best-known World Shop in the U.S. is the nonprofit program Ten Thousand Villages, which has over

one hundred and eighty stores in North America selling handicrafts, jewelry, and a few food products.

Many of the products sold by these groups are not Fair Trade Certified, either because standards do not exist for the specific product, or because they do not want to reduce the amount of money that goes back to the producer. (To qualify for certification, producers are required to pay significant fees, including an initial inspection fee of \$3,400-\$9729 depending on the size of their operation, a yearly renewal fee of \$935 and a yearly fee equaling 0.45 percent of the freight on board product value). For example, Global Exchange is a non-profit based in San Francisco which works on international justice campaigns around trade, development, and health, arranges ethical tourism programs around these issues, and sells both certified and non-certified fair trade coffee, tea, chocolate, crafts, jewelry and clothing over the internet. Many of these groups mobilize consumers to raise awareness in their communities and push their local retailers to stock more fair trade products, asking people to create more competitors. Other non-profit organizations, such as Oxfam America, focus on similar environmental, human rights, development, and trade justice campaigns while promoting fair trade, supporting and/or funding Fair Trade organizations, but are not directly involved in selling fair trade products. Faith-based initiatives and churches are still another integral part of the fair trade movement. Equal Exchange sells Fair Trade Certified coffee to mainstream supermarkets (3,168,000 lbs. in 2003) and 8,000 faith-based communities (200 tons in 2003).

Students have also gotten involved in this movement, linking producers and consumers for a more equitable trading system. As a result, Fair Trade Certified products are available on 361 college campuses. The United Students for Fair Trade acts as a forum for activist groups on one hundred campuses to learn from each other's experiences and build united campaigns targeting food service providers and mainstream retailers and roasters.

Compared to European countries, the U.S. has a far more limited fair trade product range. Alter Eco, a French Fair Trade Organization, is expanding into the U.S. market by introducing fair trade Thai Jasmine, red, and coral rice, and sugar from the Philippines. Other newly released and scheduled products include fair trade bananas and other fresh fruits.

The fair trade market has been expanding rapidly as fair trade organizations pressure mainstream supermarkets, retailers, and roasters to provide fair trade options. Coffee, the first fair trade food product, came to the U.S. from Nicaragua in 1986 through Equal Exchange. During 2002-2003, Fair Trade Certified coffee was the fastest-growing segment of the specialty coffee market, with sales growing 91 percent, an acceleration of the average 75 percent yearly growth rate between 1999 and 2002. In addition, Transfair USA reports yearly sales totaling 100,000 lbs of Fair Trade Certified tea and 200,000 lbs of Fair Trade Certified chocolate products. The number of importers, manufacturers and roasters working with fair trade products increased 50 percent during these years to 300 while the number of supermarkets, cafes, and restaurants carrying these products rose about 170 percent to over 20,000. Consequently, the number of countries exporting fair trade products to the United States grew to 24 of the 48 countries with FLO certified operations.¹²³

Securing media attention and tapping into mainstream retail outlets have also translated into increased visibility and understanding of fair trade. Transfair USA reports that 500 articles about fair trade ran in national media outlets during 2003. Furthermore, national retailers such as supermarket giant Ahold, Dunkin Donuts, Proctor & Gamble, and Caribou Coffee committed to offering fair trade products nationwide while Starbucks, Green Mountain, Wild Oats, and other large-scale businesses increased their fair trade offerings. This introduces new consumer sectors to the fair trade model and makes it easier for consumers to buy in accord with fair trade principles.

The fair trade movement is at a critical point in its history. In England, increased visibility of fair trade products in mainstream stores and the media has led to a rapid expansion of

both fair trade sales and fair trade awareness. In 2004, Cafe Direct, which strictly sells fair trade roasts, became the fifth largest coffee company in the UK and two in five people were able to identify the fair trade label.¹²⁴ Based on growth rates in the last two years, fair trade is on the path for this type of explosive growth in the US. This will require a lot of restructuring to accommodate for new products since current campaigning and marketing efforts are almost solely focused on coffee. It will also require a response to the large mark-ups some conventional retailers are placing on fair trade products. For example, Cafe Borders, a coffee shop inside the chain bookstore Borders, was found selling fair trade coffee at nearly \$16 per pound. Despite this mark-up, farmers growing the fair trade coffee available at Borders receive the same \$1.41 per pound given to farmers growing the fair trade coffee available at Wild Oats Market, which sells for \$9.99 per pound.¹²⁵ This issue has already been cited in the media and if Fair Trade Organizations do not respond, a loss of consumer trust is sure to follow. In order to grow efficiently and remain an effective alternative to global trade inequities, the U.S. fair trade movement will have to focus on the dynamics of the market, its own internal debates, and the objectives of the broader social justice and trade justice movements.

C. Fair Trade and Trade Justice

In addition to the issues around pricing and mark-ups, the fair trade movement in the United States, similar to the movement in Europe, has also been experiencing internal tensions. Within the movement, one group of fair trade advocates views conventional companies and retailers as important allies in strengthening fair trade's impact while another faction thinks that working with these businesses is antithetical to the goals of the movement. Transfair USA is the major player in fair trade "mainstreaming" efforts, maintaining that they are responding to producers' desires for a larger market. Only if fair trade grows, they argue, can more farmers get involved and sell a larger portion of their crop for an equitable price. To generate more sales, they argue, fair trade must be made easily accessible and visible to a larger sector of the population.

Conversely, many smaller operations and trade justice groups, such as The Human Bean Company which sells coffee from Chiapas through an informal distribution channel, feel that it is contradictory to build an alternative trade arrangement based on respect for producers through mainstream outlets like Starbucks and chain supermarkets. Ultimately, they argue, fair trade is an excellent PR opportunity for these large corporations, many of whom exploit workers and the environment. Many of these Fair Trade Organizations have decided not to apply for a Transfair label and have often returned a higher percentage of sales' profits to producers. They feel that the latter is more important than marketing, advertising and packaging and try to expand the fair trade market through education and person-to-person contact.

The largest segment of the movement is situated between these two positions: believing that it is important to expand fair trade beyond a niche market and looking for other ways to achieve this goal while fighting to keep Starbucks and other chain retailers out of their communities.

These different views can clearly be seen within the student fair trade movement. At the USFT National Convention in 2005, students arranged workshops and discussions with titles like "How Anti-Capitalists Can Be Part of the Fair Trade Movement," "Mainstreaming: Scaling Up Without Selling Out," and "Challenges Within the Movement: Are There Multiple Ways to Be Fair?" During this conference, student activists also discussed the challenges that are starting to be addressed by the larger trade justice movement such as the exclusivity and homogeneity of the fair trade constituency, the possibility of linking to domestic worker and immigrant rights organizations, and ways to more directly connect producers and consumers.

One key challenge facing the fair trade movement is the issue of exclusivity or the niche market phenomena associated with fair trade consumers. Most fair trade promotion is directed at the 63 million consumers considered to be part of what has been called

the “Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability” (LOHAS) sector which has been driving the expansion of organic produce, recycled products, sweat-free clothing, and other ethical products. Individuals within this market segment earn an average of \$53,000 a year, with more than a third making at least \$75,000 a year.¹²⁶ Even though select health food and alternative stores sell fair trade coffee for the same price as their organic blend, this is still a rather upscale \$9.99 a pound. Furthermore, other goods at these stores are also relatively expensive so lower-income buyers are unlikely to frequent them often or at all. The challenge for the fair trade movement and some of its environmental and social movement counterparts is to find ways for those who cannot afford to buy its products to nevertheless still establish a direct link to producers who practice sustainable development.

Transfair’s decision to focus on the LOHAS consumer sector has reinforced the perception – and often the reality -- of a more limited and homogenous fair trade movement. Fair trade products, similar to organic food, have come to be seen as middle and upper-class goods. This strategy suggests that to be part of the movement one must be able to afford premium prices. While many lower income U.S. residents would understand and sympathize with the situation facing producers in developing countries, the fair trade movement has not been able to identify ways to make a more expansive consumer-producer link. Although fair trade marketing and campaigning does not discourage broader constituencies from supporting fair trade, the fair trade movement has done little to actively reach out to a more diverse support base.

Another challenge facing the U.S. fair trade movement is finding ways to build coalitions with domestic worker and immigrant rights organizations. Currently, these groups are united in that many of the people campaigning for fair trade also campaign around worker rights, such as the recent boycotts against Taco Bell to support the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. However, the movements themselves do not work in cooperation towards common goals. The goal of the fair trade movement, namely to lead “to higher family living standards, thriving communities and more sustainable farming practices,” should apply to all people, whether residing in developing or developed countries. Believing in the right to a dignified wage for those working in Thailand should be consistent with a position that supports the rights of those working in the U.S. This is especially the case since a large percentage of the unskilled and blue-collar workers in the U.S. come from producer countries, often due to the impact from international trade in undermining their former livelihoods. Yet many of the conventional outlets being pushed to stock fair trade products have a history of paying low wages and offering few benefits for their workers. In essence then, fair trade organizations are increasing the profits of businesses who also contribute to social inequities while giving them the opportunity to appear socially conscious. For example, Proctor & Gamble, which uses GMO foods in its products and lobbies against measures that would require GMO labeling, is hailed by Oxfam for being “the leader in paying coffee farmers a decent price.”¹²⁷ This contradiction hinders the ability of the fair trade movement to advocate positions that respect the human rights of all people, and that protect environments and ensure a living wage *across borders*.

D. Faith-Based Movements

Trade justice and informal fair trade organizations and other groups are trying to deepen the producer/consumer connection. Faith-based groups have been central to those efforts. The Lutheran World Relief coffee project, for example, co-founded the Interfaith Coffee Program in 1996 with Equal Exchange. Through this program, eight Christian denominations receive church bulletin inserts, profiles of farming programs, fundraising ideas, and other tools to educate parishes and switch the coffee served by individual churches to a fair trade brew. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, United Methodist Church and United Church of Christ have developed institutional support for fair trade through official resolutions, pledging to serve fair trade coffee at official functions and in the workplace while encouraging individual churches to do the same. The Interfaith Coffee

Program has increased the support of fair trade among churches, with Equal Exchange reporting 400,000 pounds of coffee sales to religious groups in 2003.

This approach differs from expanding sales through commercial outlets because the principles driving faith-based support are distinct from (though can complement) arguments about the distribution of economic resources. For example, the United Methodist Church explains its dedication to fair trade by citing a scriptural teaching in Numbers 26, Leviticus 25, that “biblical justice brings all into the economic community, with a share in productive power as seen in the provision of land to every family unit.”¹²⁸ Similarly, the United Methodist Church supplies the reasoning that the “basic story of God standing with the powerless against the powerful is common,” and, therefore, encourages individual churches to “dedicate themselves to take on this program as a mission project.”¹²⁹ In this way, fair trade is positioned as more than a product, but as a religious responsibility.

This deepened connection has led many parishioners to travel to producer countries and build cooperative campaigns on social justice issues. This solidarity movement dates back to the 1970s and 1980s when faith-based groups in the U.S. linked with Latin American churches and communities to provide for refugees and pressure the U.S. to end its support of repressive regimes. After the Cold War ended, the solidarity movement shifted its focus to economic issues with groups like Equal Exchange as well as the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA), by addressing international debt, free trade, and immigration. To tackle these issues, congregations and faith-based groups in the U.S. have bought stock in companies to change corporate practices through shareholder resolutions, arranged visits to fair trade producer cooperatives, pushed their church to serve fair trade coffee at meetings, and educated other members of their parish. Many also attend meetings of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization to participate in protests and lobby policy makers, create links with regional and international activist movements at The World Social Forum, and raise awareness about bilateral trade agreements like the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA).

A key focus for the trade justice movement, with its stronger focus on equity and social justice, is to shift the discourse around fair trade by convincing its consumer participants to actively oppose current trade practices through lobbying efforts, boycotts, and other activities. Faith-based solidarity campaigns have been successful, from a trade justice perspective, because they motivate action by tying fair trade to ideas of faith, goodwill, compassion and fellowship. The trips to producer countries are another important component because they connect a human face to the issues, which helps sustain momentum and passion within the movement. Lisa Gaugaard of the Latin America Working Group explains that the solidarity movement, “isn’t exclusively the faith community, but that’s a very strong part of it. And that makes it very deep, because it goes beyond the issue of the moment to a connection with people that persists.”

The challenge facing the fair trade movement is finding ways to build this type of connection between producers and other segments of the American public. Geographical, class, and cultural divides need to be bridged to spur people to take action beyond the purchase of a particular fair trade product, or the movement will remain an island of justice within a larger exploitative trading system. Successfully fostering a deep level of conviction among other consumers would simultaneously increase the power and strength of the trade justice movement and further increase sales of fair trade products. Most importantly, it could help transform fair trade into a more dynamic and interactive relationship between producer and consumer. Such a transformation should – and could -- be ultimately grounded in the power of place.

Part 6: A Fair Trade Thai Jasmine Rice Campaign

A. The ENGAGE Network

The Educational Network for Global and Grassroots Exchange (ENGAGE) is one of the groups that have recently emerged to address some of the challenges facing the fair trade movement, including the issues associated with fair trade Thai Jasmine rice. ENGAGE 501 (c) 3 was founded in 2003 by former students of the Council for International Education Exchange (CIEE)'s study abroad program in Khon Kaen, Thailand to involve people in cross-cultural communication and grassroots action for social justice. The CIEE organization oversees more than sixty study abroad programs in thirty host countries along with programs helping people work, volunteer and teach abroad. Its stated mission is "to help people gain understanding, acquire knowledge and develop skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world." The CIEE-Thailand program, based at Khon Kaen University, takes students to villages throughout the Northeast to learn about environmental, development and globalization issues from villagers, business people, government agencies and academics. After connecting with Jasmine rice farmers in Surin and Yasothorn provinces as part of this study abroad program, ENGAGE decided to lay the groundwork for a Fair Trade Rice Campaign to get Fair Trade Rice into retailers across the country and raise awareness of the issues affecting rice farmers in developing countries. The campaign, it was hoped, would be able to increase the diversity and decrease the exclusivity of the fair trade movement, link it to domestic worker and immigrant rights organizations, and build relationships between Thai farmers and U.S. consumers.

One of ENGAGE's first actions was a 2003 Thai Farmers Speaking Tour that brought a Thai farmer, NGO worker, and student activist to 33 different venues in the US. This fair trade trio spoke about unfair trading practices and their impact on Thai farmers' livelihoods. Subsequently, ENGAGE conducted extensive research into fair trade issues and the budding fair trade network in Thailand and explored creating a Fair Trade Jasmine Rice import business in the U.S. and the related educational and organizing campaigns associated with it. This possibility was strengthened when ENGAGE activists learned, in 2004, that Alter Eco, a French fair trade organization, had made plans to launch the sale of Fair Trade Jasmine rice in the U.S.

AlterEco is a fair-trade business that started in 1999 as a small shop in Paris. It now sells 36 branded fair trade products including coffee, tea, sugar, rice, hearts of palm, and spices through mainstream retailers in France. In the summer of 2005, Alter Eco rolled out its operations in the United States, highlighting its fair trade Jasmine rice, red rice, coral rice and sugar products.¹³⁰ Additionally, an India-based fair trade organization, Ahaar Organic Foods, also decided to launch in 2005 the sale of Fair Trade white and brown Indian Basmati rice in the U.S.¹³¹ As a result, ENGAGE decided to expand its campaign to support both initiatives, since the issues affecting Thai and Indian farmers were nearly identical. Moreover, ENGAGE saw itself as well positioned to assist the three key fair trade groups -- Alter-Eco, Ahaar Organic Foods, and Transfair -- in building the market for fair trade rice since it had developed a strong relationship with fair trade farmers and farmers' organizations in Thailand and had experience conducting awareness raising efforts around rice trade issues in the U.S.

ENGAGE's structure of parallel groups in Thailand and the U.S. facilitated the process of encouraging cooperative action across borders. While the ENGAGE Thailand branch works closely with local Thai organizations, Thai farmers and current CIEE students, the U.S. group has become immersed in both the mainstream fair trade and trade justice movements. Through its CIEE relationships, the Thai group works with interns who are placed in communities in Northeastern Thailand where the present state of development provides an important opportunity to examine the connections between local and global issues. While the interns become engaged in a learning process, many

of them subsequently come to represent a base of activists helping both Thai NGO's with grassroots community organizing and the development of a more expansive and inclusive fair trade movement in the U.S. around Thai rice issues.

The ENGAGE USA branch has now been constituted as a non-profit organization made up of over 140 former CIEE students living throughout the country who work on national campaigns. When students return from Thailand they are invited to join the network to channel the energy and passion created abroad into local activism and campaign activities around Thai issues. Projects have included collecting and distributing oral histories of Thai villagers and creating slide shows about the Green Revolution and other related developments and their impact on Thai villagers. ENGAGE participants have organized rallies and hosted conferences in the U.S. and organized workshops in Thailand on building earthen homes and sustainable communities.

Related to its effort to broaden the racial and class diversity of the fair trade movement, a main focus of ENGAGE's fair trade campaign has been its relationship with the Thai community in the U.S., the key constituency in promoting a more expansive approach to fair trade. Ethnic-Asians are the largest single consumers of both milled white rice and Jasmine rice in the United States, consuming nearly ten times the volume of rice as the overall average consumption in the U.S. (150 pounds per person compared to 16.6 pounds). Moreover, according to one survey, Asian-American taste preferences are for aromatic varieties like Jasmine rice rather than conventional U.S. long grains.¹³² As discussed earlier, immigrant Asian/Pacific Islanders represent a rapidly growing community in the U.S., with the census numbers indicating that the Asian population, nearly entirely (95 percent) clustered in metropolitan areas, had grown to 12.5 million by 2002.¹³³ As the primary consumer of aromatic rice, including Basmati and Jasmine rice, the Asian population in the U.S., including 150,000 Thais, represents a large potential for growth in the fair trade rice market. Furthermore, it is precisely this population that has also become the target of U.S. rice producers, including those seeking to develop genetically modified Jasmine rice.

Rice as a commodity also presents the potential to expand fair trade's appeal. That is, rice is a staple good which makes it different from other fair trade goods found in the U.S., like coffee, that are thought of by many as a luxury good. Many ethnic groups depend on rice as a large part of their diet. Demand throughout the world doubled during the past two decades and one study estimated that as many as 4.6 billion people will depend on rice for survival by the year 2025.¹³⁴ While promoting the sale of a staple good as a fair trade product that is likely to have a higher price will present added difficulty, it also provides the opportunity to reach more people, many of whom come from producer countries. The challenge for groups like ENGAGE has been how to then link its mission to support sustainable development with identifying innovative ways to connect community development in Thailand to similar communities and efforts in the U.S., providing an opportunity for low-income and immigrant constituencies to become a part of, if not the central players in the fair trade movement.

ENGAGE also has proven capable of using the discussion of rice trade issues and fair trade rice to connect consumers to producers. The relationships ENGAGE has in Thailand have allowed it to include Thai farmers in the efforts to stimulate U.S.-based activism and marketing while also providing the opportunity to bring Americans to Thailand so that they can learn about these issues by living and speaking with Jasmine rice farmers. For example, it fostered discussion among Thai farmers, U.S. students, farmers and others during the Thai Farmers U.S. Speaking Tour. As the first Thai farmer speaker tour ever to come to the U.S., the effort built a coalition that now fuels the Fair Trade Rice Campaign.¹ In addition, the large network of ENGAGE members in the U.S. expands the geographical reach of the campaign, allowing for nationally aligned local efforts. Since ENGAGE members are motivated by the experience of living with those involved in the people's movements in Thailand, campaigns are driven by a value-based passion similar to the conviction underlying faith-based organizations.

Rice as a commodity also increases the possibility of establishing this direct relationship because of the connection non-ethnic Americans can learn to make between rice and different cultures. For example, rice is easily associated with Chinese food, Indian dishes and Thai curry while tea does not have the same preexisting association with Pakistan. This cultural association allows for a more direct venue in illuminating producer-related issues. The key to such a campaign, however, is the capacity for a different fair trade framework, one that escapes the niche market and enters into a broader framework that captures the language and goals of a social change across borders and sustainable food system approach.

B. The Campaign Begins: New Constituencies

ENGAGE's Fair Trade Rice Campaign has sought to expand the fair trade movement through both traditional and innovative strategies. The campaign consists of two parts. The first involves working closely with AlterEco and Transfair on the traditional "niche market" strategy that focuses on LOHAS consumers. Distribution is being designed to initially focus on health food stores and chains in the San Francisco area, with plans to expand over a five-year period. This location is attractive because of the widespread support for fair trade and because it is the headquarters of other fair trade organizations. ENGAGE will supply information and material for Transfair's promotional tools while facilitating the relationship between Thai farmers and AlterEco.

ENGAGE has also created the materials needed for individuals and groups to bring Fair Trade rice to their communities. The Fair Trade Rice Organizer Packet includes product information, educational materials and systematic guides. These resources support people who solicit local grocers about stocking fair trade rice, and who hold fair trade rice events, organize letter writing to national food chains and take other campaign steps. This part of the campaign includes a partnership with the United Students for Fair Trade (USFT). Interested members of USFT are being provided Fair Trade Rice Organizer Packets to help approach local grocers and campus dining services about stocking fair trade rice. USFT is interested in ENGAGE's Fair Trade Rice Campaign because it has the capacity to foster continued involvement for graduating members and because it can be adopted by groups which have successfully brought other fair trade products to their campuses.

The other more dynamic and expansive component of the Fair Trade Rice Campaign focuses on reaching Thai immigrant consumers through Thai organizations, restaurants and Buddhist centers. A second Thai Farmer's Speaking Tour, scheduled to take place September 24-October 11, 2005, has been designed to facilitate this type of outreach and relationship-building with Thai communities in the US.

The partnership between ENGAGE and Thai community groups illustrates potential opportunities for other fair trade organizations. For example, selling fair trade coffee can be used as a source of income for Latino immigrant associations or garment workers centers, while fair trade tea can be used as a fundraiser for Indian cultural centers. This would not only introduce new consumers to fair trade products but could also be a source of revenue for social justice organizations. Faced with funding cuts, many non-profits have started for-profit components to provide a reliable source of revenue. Fair trade products could be used to support the efforts of social justice organizations in the U.S. and vice versa, promoting equitable conditions both domestically and globally.

Reaching out to Thai immigrant organizations in the U.S. furthers several of ENGAGE's campaign goals. First, it expands access to Thai consumers whose decisions will ensure either that Jasmine rice remains a Thai specialty or allow it to become a U.S.-grown product. Since efforts to create a Jasmine rice product for U.S. growers is aimed at capturing the ethnic Asian American market, significant energy will be spent urging these consumers to continue buying Jasmine rice from Thailand. The Los Angeles area is of major importance in this effort, given that 50,000 Thai Americans live in Southern California, the majority immigrating in the last ten years.¹³⁵ Recent immigration status

is significant because research conducted on rice preferences of Asian-Americans continues to indicate that annual rice consumption is greater among this group and that they more clearly favor Thai rice over domestic rice.¹³⁶ With their strong ties to Thailand, Thai immigrants represent a core constituency for both increasing the sales of fair trade rice and in campaigning around trade justice issues.

Another campaign goal addressed by reaching out to Thai community groups is its desire to strengthen relationships between fair trade and immigrant rights organizations. These are natural alliances given that the erosion of the agricultural sector is a leading cause of migration, as people leave the village to find work in cities and other countries. Creating an equitable trading arrangement, then, can help address the push factors causing people to leave Thailand, often for sweatshop jobs and substandard living conditions in the United States. With this joint work, fair trade organizations have an opportunity to diversify their partnerships, and immigrant groups can address the international factors affecting Thai immigrant populations.

ENGAGE is launching various efforts to reach the Thai-American population. For example, ENGAGE has built a partnership with the Thai Restaurant Association (TRA). The TRA is a national consortium of Thai restaurant owners founded in 2001 that provides opportunities for networking and business services. Coming from an agricultural family in Southern Thailand, the founder and president of TRA, Jua Rattanaphun, has been an ally of ENGAGE since the first Farmer Speaking Tour in 2003. The TRA is committed to promoting the use of fair trade rice in Thai restaurants and to getting more importers involved in the fair trade network.

The increasing popularity of Thai cuisine has created a growth in the Thai restaurant business, providing a powerful distribution channel for fair trade Jasmine rice. In 2004, there were approximately 3,000 Thai restaurants in the U.S. The growth of this industry has been supported by a wave of Thai immigrants, the desire of Americans to try different types of cuisine, and a Thai government program training chefs and managers while offering low-interest loans to help open restaurants in the U.S.¹³⁷ The Thai government reports that, worldwide, Thai restaurants bought approximately \$130 million worth of produce and food products in 2004. Since 49 percent of Thai restaurants in 2005 were located in the U.S., they represent a major outlet for food exports from the country.¹³⁸

Restaurants provide an ideal avenue to connect Thai-Americans to Jasmine rice farmers while also offering a unique opportunity to build support among other consumers in a cultural setting. Getting Thai restaurants to use fair trade rice would further connect Thai entrepreneurial activities in the U.S. to sustainable development in Thailand. The Thai government reports that the 6,800 Thai restaurants worldwide in 2005 employed approximately 52,000 Thai workers.¹³⁹ As the Thai government is helping more Thai Americans gain the skills and capital necessary to open Thai restaurants, these businesses could boost the welfare of small-scale farmers in Thailand by serving fair trade Jasmine rice. Furthermore, ENGAGE could disseminate awareness-raising material through Thai restaurants, reaching both ethnic-Asians and other consumers. The Thai Restaurant Association estimates that 300,000 customers eat at Thai restaurants each day in the U.S.¹⁴⁰ Carrying out awareness-raising efforts through restaurants is an attractive opportunity because diners choose to frequent these establishments to experience the culture and food of Thailand. Therefore, introducing Jasmine rice farmers to consumers in restaurants could be used both by restaurants to attract more customers to an “authentic Thai dining experience” and by ENGAGE to reach people at a moment when they may be more receptive to supporting Thai farmers.

There are many options that could be explored by ENGAGE and the TRA in this effort. Restaurant owners could set up large displays detailing the benefits of fair trade rice or hang pictures of farmers with slogans such as, “Look for ‘from Thailand’ on your Jasmine rice.” They could distribute educational literature or sell packets of Jasmine rice with recipes for Thai dishes. Simple postcard campaigns or petition drives organized through restaurants could increase the power of activism around trade justice goals. Even if the

premium price of fair trade rice prohibits some restaurants from currently serving the grain, they could participate in consumer education and campaign activities.

ENGAGE-Thailand could also work with the Thai government to consolidate its promotion of organic production through its program supporting Thai restaurants. Through its restaurant support program, the government could train managers to capitalize on the growing organic movement through specific marketing and business planning. More than 80 percent of Thai restaurants are located in the US, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, all countries where the organic movement has seen marked growth. By serving fair trade organic rice, Thai restaurants in certain regions where organic is particularly popular, such as in California or New York, could increase their uniqueness, provide an outlet for the Thai government to distribute an increasing supply of organic rice, and support the efforts of Thai farmer groups to build sustainable communities through alternative agriculture practices.

Another strategy the campaign has begun to employ to reach ethnic-Asians in the U.S. is to build relationships with Buddhist centers following the model of Equal Exchange's Interfaith Coffee Project. Building upon its relationship with Buddhist thinker Sulak Sivaraksa, the campaign has been seeking to encourage Buddhist centers and temples to serve fair trade rice at events and participate in ENGAGE's awareness-raising and trade justice campaigns. In the future, Buddhist community members can be brought to Thailand to meet farmers in order to build solidarity, operating in a similar manner to church organizations campaigning on debt relief, exploitative trade negotiations and other globalization issues. This approach can tie fair trade rice to the Buddhist tenet of "tam boon," or "making merit", in the same way that Christian-based groups have linked fair trade coffee to its beliefs about compassion. "Tam boon" means performing unselfish deeds, such as feeding monks or donating to charity. Due to the importance of "tam boon" in lay Thai Buddhist practice, the Thai Jasmine Rice campaign has the capacity to build strong and passionate support by illuminating the ways in which supporting fair trade rice represents a form of making merit.

The Thai Jasmine Rice campaign could also address the issues affecting Thai farmers by expanding sales of Fair Trade Thai Jasmine rice and building relationships for campaign efforts. It could use methods proven to be successful in the fair trade movement while also trying new approaches to fair trade. These additional pursuits would serve not only to build a base for trade justice campaigning, but also benefit the overall fair trade movement by serving as a model for addressing the barriers to expansion and developing a more diverse and justice-oriented constituency.

C. Expanding Horizons: the Social Change Across Borders Idea

ENGAGE's commitment to building relationships with Thai community organizations raises yet another unique and exciting opportunity by linking farmers struggling to build sustainable communities in Thailand with Thai immigrants engaged in economic development efforts in the US. This "social change across borders" approach is a fundamental feature of the work of the Migration Policy and Resource Center (MPRC), a division of the Urban and Environmental Project Institute at Occidental College. In partnership with UCLA's Center for the Study of Urban Poverty (CSUP), the UCLA Downtown Labor Center and the Transnational Communities Program of the Immigration Museum of New Americans, MPRC is developing the Social Change Across Borders Institute to support an emerging movement of transnational social justice civic engagement.

The original Institute was founded in 1998 by the Latin American and Latino Studies program at the University of California at Santa Cruz with the goal of building bridges for social justice activists across the Americas in an era of increased globalization. In 1994, the Institute moved to UCLA's CSUP, maintaining its commitment to help shape

social justice activism from a transnational perspective, share strategies for increasing capacity of community actors engaged in transnational social change work, and establish meaningful links for on-going collaborations that transcend national borders. For example, an alliance between Thai farmer cooperatives and U.S.-based Thai immigrant organizations creates the potential for greater impacts on both sides of the border and strategic partnerships in advocacy efforts, such as at the WTO.

Each of the Los Angeles-based partner organizations brings its unique expertise, all of which are essential to the Institute's vision. CSUP provides the institutional development, the Downtown Labor Center focuses on workers rights and the Transnational Communities Program works with LA-based Mexican and Central American hometown associations.

MPRC brings to the L.A. partnership its expertise in the area of immigrant rights and policies, an issue that transcends all sectors of transnational social justice actors. However, MPRC's most compelling contribution is its commitment to expanding the Institute's base from exclusively Latino to more diverse collaborations. Locating the Institute in Los Angeles, one of the most multiethnic cities in the world, makes that expansion challenging, inevitable and rich with unique and exciting opportunities. The Thai Jasmine Rice Campaign is one such opportunity.

To advance this goal for the campaign, ENGAGE, with the assistance of MPRC, is in the process of establishing a partnership with the Los Angeles-based Thai Community Development Center (CDC), founded in 1994 by Thai immigrants. Thai CDC is the largest Thai community-based organization in the U.S. and is unique among community organizations in that it focuses significantly on economic development projects, from low-income housing to small Thai-owned businesses. "Thai Town" in the East Hollywood section of Los Angeles has numerous Thai-owned businesses and shops such as restaurants, Thai-massage spas and markets that Thai CDC has had a hand in creating.

As part of its Small Business Program, Thai CDC is developing a Public Market to serve as an incubator for Thai entrepreneurs participating in business skills courses. The plan is for some of these small businesses to sell and/or import products that are building sustainable communities in Thailand, such as Fair Trade Jasmine rice and traditional weaving goods. Thai CDC is also interested in becoming an importer of Fair Trade Jasmine rice to provide a source of revenue for its affordable housing ventures, worker rights projects and other not-for-profit services. ENGAGE and MPRC can then facilitate and extend the partnership between Thai CDC and Thai farmers.

An additional opportunity related to the social change across borders approach lies in the potential for using remittances to support fair trade cooperatives in countries of origin. Remittances, the money migrant workers send back to their home countries, have grown by such a large amount that they are now recorded as part of a country's GNP by the International Monetary Fund. Total remittances rose 3,500 percent between 1970 and 1995, from \$2 billion to \$70 billion, an estimate that many experts believe to be undervalued. A 2004 Inter-American Development Bank estimate placed remittances as high as \$100 billion, with as much as \$45 billion earmarked to Latin American countries alone.¹⁴¹ Increasingly, immigrant workers in the U.S., in addition to sending money to individual family members, are pooling their remittances to fund more strategic development projects. For example, while current projects include fixing roads and building schools, hospitals and places of worship, pooled remittances are also beginning to support community credit unions and economic cooperatives. The next step could be to support the alternative agriculture organizations that help farmers adopt organic farming techniques and develop fair trade networks.

The Thai CDC engagement in a Fair Trade Thai Jasmine Rice campaign illustrates the crucial importance of a social change across borders framework for the fair trade movement. What is critical in such an approach are the cultural, economic, and social affinities of immigrant populations with their countries of origin **and** the lessons and values that a social change across borders approach brings to the broader society about the importance and centrality of diversity in places like Los Angeles and the U.S. as a

whole. Thai Jasmine rice is a culturally specific product (a product in fact that deserves geographic indication protections against the encroachment of such players as biotech corporations). By crossing borders, the cultural value of food and its specific place-based associations can be enhanced due to immigrant populations seeking to maintain connections to their country of origin and greater numbers of consumers seeking to understand the value of -- and delight in experiencing -- food as a part of diverse cultures. That ability to “appreciate across borders” becomes especially significant when attempting to evaluate a product like Fair Trade Thai Jasmine Rice within the framework of the new community food movements that have come to value food as both place-based and local.

D. Sustainable/Community Food Systems: Broadening Agendas

Is a fair trade Thai Jasmine Rice product one that meets the criteria of an alternative or community food system approach? The most common definitions of such an approach include whether a product is local and seasonal and conducive to being grown in a particular place, is grown sustainably, meets certain criteria about food “justice”, and is culturally appropriate. Can an “imported” product, such as Fair Trade Jasmine rice, or for that matter any imported fair trade product, meet such criteria?

The primary importance of advantaging *locally produced* food within an increasingly *globalized food system* lies at the heart of the community food system argument. As food becomes increasingly globalized, it loses association with the places (and cultures) where it's produced. Often it is processed in a manner that standardizes and homogenizes food items, and generates enormous environmental and social problems, including increased pesticide and fertilizer use, more use of chemical additives, highly exploited labor, soil depletion and displacement of small farmers around the world, among other impacts. Food not only loses its cultural meaning but the quality and taste of any particular food item becomes itself subject to chemical manipulation. In the global food system, food tastes the same anywhere, traveling further and further from its point of origin, reshaped and reconfigured to look the same, taste the same, and be consumed in the same manner.¹⁴²

For fair trade, and particularly fair trade social justice advocates, the global versus local issue needs to be addressed directly. U.S. Jasmine rice producers can effectively argue that their product is “local” and therefore should be advantaged from an environmental and community food system perspective, since it would travel fewer “food miles.” In terms of production issues, however, an argument can be made that Thai Jasmine rice, particularly fair trade developed Jasmine rice from regions like Surin, is grown more sustainably. While some U.S. rice production is organic, it is often grown less sustainably than its Thai counterpart.

In the U.S., rice was first grown in Virginia in 1646 and became a major farming enterprise in the Carolinas in 1690. Already by the 1700s, U.S. produced rice, heavily dependent on slave labor, had become an export product. In the late 19th century, major production shifted to Arkansas, eastern Texas, Louisiana and northern California. In most of these areas, rice production is highly water intensive and requires a major irrigation infrastructure. U.S. rice farmers in some areas have leveled their land with laser equipment and earthmovers to minimize water use. While less than one third of agricultural land in Asia uses irrigation, many U.S. rice farmers must flood their land with piped water.¹⁴³ This type of use withdraws water from surface and groundwater sources and immediately loses it through evaporation, incorporation in crops, etc.¹⁴⁴ In California, rice growers report that approximately 2.23 million acre feet of water is applied to rice fields per year, which represents 2.6 percent of the state's total water supply.¹⁴⁵ As the California Rice Commission states, “Although rice is grown in some parts of the world without benefit of irrigation, this would be impossible in California. Furthermore, flooded rice culture is universal in California.”¹⁴⁶

Another crucial argument concerns the food miles required for a product to travel from seed to table. Different estimates in the U.S. have pointed to an average distance of as much as 1500 miles in how food travels to its ultimate destination.¹⁴⁷ The greater the distance a food travels, the more energy required, and, depending on the distance as well as the source of transport, the greater the environmental impacts, from energy consumed to pollution generated. In this sense, although grown locally for millennia as part of a regional diet, Thai Jasmine rice, due to the impact of international trade and the Green Revolution (both key parts of the emerging global food system), as well as the displacement of farmers, increased dependence on exports, and enormous immigration flows, has become a product that crosses borders and has increased the distance, for some, between food grown and food consumed. However, U.S. rice products, including those that have been developed to compete with Thai Jasmine rice, are also long distance and cross-border products. Rice does have a long history in the U.S. but it does not have the same cultural and regional diet associations as Thai Jasmine rice (or Indian Basmati rice). Interestingly, the export trade for the predominant U.S. rice crop (southern long grain rice) was centered up until the 1960s and 1970s in Cuba, Iran and Iraq until those markets were lost due to political changes. Export markets shifted to places like Mexico, Haiti and Canada as well as Saudi Arabia (for parboiled rice).¹⁴⁸ As discussed earlier, U.S. rice is also heavily subsidized, allowing it to compete as a long distance product.¹⁴⁹ Though Thai exports are greater than the exports of U.S. rice producers, U.S. rice exports still account for 11 percent of the rice exports trade (compared to 26 percent from Thailand).¹⁵⁰

Tied to the community food systems argument about food miles and distance traveled are the importance of freshness, quality, place, seasonality, and regional diets associated with the “locality” of the product. U.S. rice production, however, has not been directly associated with those qualities from either a marketing or production perspective. In relation to the Jasmine rice issue, U.S. producers have sought to mimic their Thai counterparts in order to break into the regional Asian ethnic market in the U.S. – and ultimately around the world. This effort to penetrate markets and its related lack of any place-based association becomes even more significant if GM Jasmine rice were to be commercially grown and exported. In this context, Thai Jasmine rice could be considered a regional product for ethnic Asian consumers, with a place-based association, having a particular quality related to how and where it is grown and its rooted role in the farming and cultural traditions of its place of origin.

Perhaps most importantly, from a fair-trade justice perspective, are the issues associated with social justice that have become incorporated into the community food systems and sustainable food systems arguments. How food is grown (and whether it is grown sustainably) is directly associated with the conditions of production, including working conditions related to wages, health, housing, availability of child care, and so forth. For example, the Food Alliance, an organization that seeks to certify whether food is sustainably grown, has a detailed set of criteria for evaluation related to “safe and fair working conditions” that incorporates a “justice” framework into its definition of sustainably grown.¹⁵¹ In that context, a compelling argument could be made that the production of Fair Trade Thai Jasmine rice is far more sustainable than in the U.S.

Beyond the specific conditions of production (organic, sustainable working conditions, a cooperative structure), the social change across borders aspect of the development of this fair trade product provides, ultimately, the strongest argument linking the fair trade justice to the community food systems/sustainable food approach. For ethnic Asians, the primary consumers of Thai Jasmine rice, the product is in fact “local” in that it establishes a direction connection to place otherwise not available. Moreover, community food systems advocates, similar to their fair trade counterparts, need to be able to broaden the movement’s constituent base to speak to multiple communities, particularly low-income and immigrant communities, which a social change across borders approach helps establish. As critics of the global food system, a system that has been so heavily influenced by the global trade infrastructure, an alliance of community food system and fair trade justice advocates can strengthen both movements, and expand their frame

of reference to speak to the range of issues that have become part of the food system battleground.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Overall, the expansion of the Fair Trade Rice Campaign is vital to ensuring that more Thai farmers reap the benefits of this sustainable, environmentally friendly model of development and empowerment. It is important that Fair Trade Thai Jasmine rice becomes available in the United States to counter the impacts from globalizations and international trade that are threatening the livelihoods of small-scale farmers in Thailand. Currently, debates surrounding Geographic Indication and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property are of particular importance to the international rice trade. Negotiations have exposed clear divisions between developed and less developed countries within the World Trade Organization and have extended beyond established deadlines.

While these debates continue in the WTO, current regulations do little to protect biodiversity or respect the rights of less developed countries. This leaves rice farmers in a vulnerable position and has led to numerous threatening developments. For example, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission's decision that "Jasmine" is a generic term allows companies, such as RiceTec, to falsely advertise US grown rice as Jasmine. Furthermore, USDA-funded experiments are genetically adapting Jasmine rice to the growing conditions of the U.S. This research is motivated by the desire of U.S. growers and companies to co-opt the growing aromatic rice market. Essentially, the loose protections granted under current trade agreements allow U.S. businesses to steal and/or corrupt an indigenous crop, which is central to the culture of Thailand and the livelihood of small-scale farmers.

A strong international fair trade movement can address the trade justice issues negatively impacting producers in developing countries, while also building an alternative system of economic development. In Thailand, farmers are organizing to protect Jasmine rice and traditional knowledge while supporting a return to sustainable farming techniques. They have linked with organizations in both developing and developed countries to campaign for equitable, democratic trade negotiations and to create a more equitable system of trade.

The fair trade movement, which ensures a sustainable price for producers, has invited consumers in the United States to think about the farmers picking their coffee beans in Argentina, the workers growing their tea in India, and the men and women completing the first stages of chocolate production in Ghana. In this way, it has complemented the trade justice movement, which calls on officials to create a system of trade that benefits all countries equally. However, the fair trade movement is limited by its lack of diversity and exclusiveness as a consumer movement, by its disconnect from the domestic workers and immigrant rights movement and by the difficult task of establishing cross-cultural connections. This empowering movement has seen large growth, but its internal weaknesses must be addressed if it is to truly build a world order based on justice and respect.

The arrival of fair trade rice empowers both producers and consumers by giving the former control over their product and by providing the latter with knowledge and a cultural connection, while extending the opportunity for both parties to participate in an alternative trading system. ENGAGE's Fair Trade Rice Campaign has the potential to simultaneously address trade issues affecting Thai farmers and strengthen the fair trade movement as well as other sectors of the social justice movement. While the campaign employs traditional "niche market" techniques that target LOHAS consumers, it is also seeking to form unique coalitions to reach the Asian American population and link sustainable development efforts across borders.

Rice production and trade illuminate the extreme variation of resources, methods and values found worldwide. In the present day, rice is produced by both wasteful and sustainable means. It is improved through genetic mutation as well as traditional seed saving methods. As such, rice has sparked controversy, debt, empowerment and protest in developing countries. Thai farmers are ready to share their stories, eager to protect their rights as the holders of traditional knowledge and the cultivators for generations. As Jasmine rice farmer Dhamma Sungsalai says, "if we are able to expand the fair trade network, we would be a country that is able to place emphasis on community; we would place more importance on producers and consumers throughout the world."

Furthermore, cooperative action coupled with engaging the Asian American community diversifies the fair trade and trade justice movement, adding more than variations in color and class. Increased racial and class diversity is important because it brings new understandings, ideas, values, and connections to the struggle for an equitable economic system. Additionally, bridging existing gaps between domestic and international rights organizations increases the validity of both movements, helping them realize a shared goal. These developments are important because both the fair trade and trade justice movements are, at their most basic level, about building relationships on a foundation of understanding and respect. They ask all people to see an object of exchange as more than just a commercial product, but as the work of a person, as a way of life, as a good with environmental, cultural and humanitarian significance. In essence, activists are highlighting interconnectedness and asserting that mutual dependence can be used either for exploitative or beneficial ends. Hence, addressing rice trade issues through a global social change across borders movement is vital for maintaining biodiversity, promoting social justice, and effectively implementing the principles of fair trade and a socially just, culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable food system.

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