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**The Contradictions of
Clean: Supermarket
Ethical Trade and
African Horticulture**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supermarkets in Great Britain joined the country's Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) in the late 1990s to demonstrate their commitment to socially responsible sourcing. They have been particularly concerned to enforce ethical as well as food safety standards in their African fresh fruit and vegetable supply regions. Although this appears to signal an important shift towards more transparent supply chain management practices, this paper argues that the 'fetishism' of ethical standards obscures extraordinarily uneven supply chain power relations. Efforts to impose such standards on African horticultural exporters thus respond more to the particular anxieties of corporate retail management than to the concerns of the workers in the horticultural export industry themselves.

The supermarkets' ethical trade campaign also faces a fundamental and potentially unsustainable contradiction, as can be seen in Zambia. There, export horticulture became one of the few dynamic sectors of the national economy in the mid-1990s. The export companies and outgrowers involved in this sector have been required to shoulder the costs of compliance with the supermarkets' standards, which include the costs of new facilities (child care, clinics, chemical storage), new services, and additional personnel and equipment. The prices they receive for their produce, however, have remained flat. The profit margins that once made export horticulture attractive have thus shrunk, and some outgrowers have abandoned the sector altogether, shedding many jobs in the process.

The export companies have sought to resolve the cost-price squeeze by developing higher and higher value-added product lines, such as pre-packed organic baby vegetables. It is unclear, however, whether this measure will provide more than a temporary fix, given the supermarkets' ongoing price competition. One company has also begun out-sourcing production to cooperatives of black smallholders, on the assumption that they will accept lower prices than the white commercial outgrowers. Although Zambia's smallholders could conceivably benefit from participation in export horticulture, the costs of compliance with supermarket standards may, again, exclude all but the wealthiest among them.

If supermarkets are truly concerned about ethical sourcing, they will need to bear more of its costs. They also need to listen to more workers in the industries most affected by their standards. Supermarkets are unlikely to initiate such reforms by themselves, however. Non-governmental organisations and the popular media should therefore continue to investigate and highlight the ambiguous ethics of supermarket sourcing policies. The supermarkets' intense concerns about public image may yet provide powerful leverage.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CLEAN: SUPERMARKET ETHICAL TRADE AND AFRICAN HORTICULTURE¹

Susanne Freidberg

In London's Earls Court neighbourhood, the Tesco supermarket is a worthwhile sightseers' stop, not just because of the provisions it offers but also the vision it embodies. The huge store is, in fact, entirely transparent, and especially striking after dark, when from across the street you can see shoppers conferring with the butcher, sampling at the cheese counter, strolling through a double-decker array of display.

Inside this supermarket you find the clear box model replicated in miniature in the fresh produce section. There, shrink-wrap gives many of the vegetables an extra gleam, but the most precious are the plastic boxes (or punnets) of 'micro-veg': trimmed French beans and snow peas, baby corn, baby asparagus, baby courgettes and patty pan squash. Nearly all this prepubescent produce comes from Britain's former African colonies, ie. Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. The micro-veg aren't cheap, but they are convenient and fresh, as well as novel and terribly cute.

Pre-packed micro-veg have also recently become 'ethical', meaning that they are produced according to codified environmental and social welfare standards. These standards, as forms of private sector regulation, have been developed during an era of unprecedented supermarket power in the UK: the top five chains alone control around two-thirds of the food retail market, enabling them to demand from their suppliers the kind of products (like the pre-packed micro-veg) that will bring them, as retailers, both high profits and high brand-name profile (Wrigley, 1998; *Guardian*, 1999).

¹. A version of this work is forthcoming in a special issue of the *Journal of Social and Cultural Geography* on new cultural geographies of food.

What are the consequences of this power across international (and especially African) supply networks?² I approach this question by considering supermarkets' use of ethical standards both to control those supply networks and to construct consumers' knowledge about them. 'Ethical', in the food trade lexicon, is not synonymous with the older term 'fair', as I will explain below. For now it suffices to say that the retailers' preoccupation with 'ethical' sourcing marks a strange moment in the recent history of food marketing. Earlier research on the marketing of tropical fruit and ethnic cuisine observed how these foods are subject to a 'double' commodity fetishism. On one hand, in other words, they are marketed in ways that appeal to and embellish consumers' relatively superficial geographic knowledge and curiosity about the far away. By emphasising the exotic and ethnic, they offer consumers a sort of gustatory tourism (Cook, 1994; Cook and Crang, 1996). On the other hand the foods themselves, like other commodities, are promoted in ways that obscure the social relations and exploitative practices of production; advertisements for pineapples associate them with beach vacations, not plantation toil (Willis, 1991).

But current practices in supermarket supply networks suggest – and I use this tentative verb purposefully – a radical about-face. Especially in the highly concentrated UK food retail sector, the shift goes beyond broader trends in corporate 'accountability' (Zadek, 1998). Whereas relations between supermarkets were once characterised by a policy of 'don't ask, don't tell' regarding, say, pesticide use and labour conditions, now supermarkets *do* ask, and suppliers *must* tell all about the production process: what chemicals are used, how the labour is clothed, housed, and kept well; how the environment is protected. All this information is required *in addition* to the data required to assure product 'traceability'.

In turn, the supermarkets are eager to tell the consumer how their foods have been produced according to the highest environmental and social standards. Product packaging communicates some of this information; in fact, retailers prefer pre-packed produce over loose in part because they can put more messages on a box. In addition, they use in-store publications, press releases and, increasingly, company websites. One site, for example, features photos of smiling farmers and explanations of the company's policies concerning on-farm worker housing and wildlife protection.

2. This question is the subject of a growing literature. See, for example, Barrett *et al.*, (1999); Dolan *et al.*, (1999).

You could argue that the retailers' 'ethical turn' is simply a benign by-product of an intensely competitive retail market. Already competing to offer their customers the choicest, cheapest, safest food, supermarkets are now racing each other up to the moral high ground. You could argue: all the better, if this competition forces suppliers to clean up their act. But a critical, historically-informed analysis of the supermarkets' approach to 'cleaning up' (understood in both the literal and colloquial senses of the term) reveals that, like colonial era 'civilising missions', ethical trade is fraught with irony and contradiction.

After providing a brief overview of 'ethical' and 'fair' trade, I build this argument through a review of select literature as well as interviews with individuals in the fresh vegetable business in both Zambia and the UK.³

Fair versus ethical

Both the similarities and the differences between fair and ethical trade are important to this story. Fair trade came first, as part of a 1960s movement seeking to address the structural inequalities of North-South relations. Its original and still defining purpose is the fair *price*: it guarantees producers a price pegged above the world market's and shielded against market volatility. Although fair trade, unlike 'organic', has no official designation, its standards were harmonised after many of the major fair trade organisations (Transfair, Max Havelaar, and Fairtrade Mark) formed the umbrella group Fairtrade Labeling Organization International (FLO) in 1997 (Raynolds, 2000).

Once labelled, fair trade products are now marketed far beyond the 'Third World' shops where they were originally sold. The labels assure consumers not only that the producers of their coffee or bananas receive a price premium (i.e., fair trade bananas producers receive \$1.75/box above the world market price), but also that they invest this premium in "*social and environmental projects*" (Raynolds, 2000). The labels also certify that the producers, whether they are peasant cooperatives or plantations, meet specified labour and environmental standards, and that they undergo regular audits by independent monitors. Lastly but perhaps most importantly, the labels represent relations of solidarity between groups of producers,

³. In Zambia, I interviewed the general and technical managers of both the country's horticultural export companies. I also interviewed several of the companies' former and current outgrowers, as well as consultants. In the UK, I interviewed the two companies' import agents, and the produce managers of the supermarkets that purchase Zambian fresh produce. These interviews were conducted in July-August 2000 and January 2001. See also Freiberg (2001).

consumers and intermediaries committed to alternative trade networks (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997).

Ethical trade is a more generic term that first gained currency in mid-1990s discussions of corporate responsibility along with terms like ‘sound’ and ‘socially responsible’ sourcing (Blowfield, 1999; Hughes, 2001a, 2001b). The Body Shop, for example, was one of its early proponents. Definitions of ethical trade vary, but the UK government-sponsored Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) focuses on the goal of “*helping to make substantial improvements to the lives of poor working people around the world*”. Unlike FLO, the ETI’s membership includes not only NGOs and trade unions, but also corporate retailers. Member companies are required to bring their supply chains into compliance with ETI’s ‘base code’, which draws on the International Labor Organization’s standards for, among other things, working conditions, wage levels and child labour.⁴ It is assumed that for companies with many product lines, like supermarkets, the compliance process will take time, but the ETI has made African horticultural supply chains one of its top priorities (ETI, 2001). Currently, the supermarkets do not advertise their ETI membership on product labels, though they do on other kinds of publicity materials.

In addition to the ETI, the UK supermarkets belong to the European Retailer Fresh Produce Working Group, which has its own protocol of ‘good agricultural practice’, the EUREP-GAP. This protocol aims to bring suppliers into compliance with standards covering not just worker welfare (which actually accounts for only a small part of the protocol) but also food safety, farm chemical use, natural resource conservation and wildlife protection.

Importantly, neither the EUREP-GAP protocol nor the ETI base code include provisions for a fair price, nor do they specify who will bear the costs of complying with their standards (which in the case of EUREP-GAP are defined by 41 pages of ‘best practice’ criteria – EUREP-GAP, 2000). Unlike fair trade organisations, in other words, neither the ETI nor EUREP take issue with inequalities that have historically defined relations between North and South and retailers and producers.

These distinctions are unlikely to concern the vast majority of consumers. Recent market research in the UK found that while more consumers claim to be concerned about ‘ethical issues’ than a decade ago, only two percent of them would seek out

4. The supermarket chain Waitrose did not join the ETI because of differences with some of the International Labor Organization’s criteria, but it does have its own ethical guidelines.

and pay extra for ‘cause-related’ products. Twenty to 30 percent, classified as ‘armchair ethical’, were willing to pay a ‘modest’ premium for such goods, while the rest would buy them only if it cost no extra time or money (Mintel, 1999). The top UK supermarkets compete so intensely with one another, however, that even this latter category of shoppers – the ‘would-be ethical’ – must not be lost to a competitor offering price, convenience and the appearance of better ethics. I use the term ‘appearance’ to emphasise that ‘ethical’ is a quality which, unlike price, most consumers cannot assess directly. This is partly because of the term’s many possible meanings, but also because the practices in question happen far away. Ethical therefore has to be marketed as part of a company’s public image, and with careful consideration to how that image can be tarnished not simply by the media but also by the NGOs that regularly conduct media campaigns, such as Greenpeace and Christian Aid.

In sum, fair trade began as a market-based political movement that, to the extent that it raised consumer consciousness, paved the way for ethical trade to become a politically savvy marketing strategy. Fair trade also showed how a normative value could be defined by a set of specific criteria, enforced through audits, and marketed through relatively compact forms of publicity, such as labels. But fair trade coffee alone did not wake up a latent consumer desire for this quality.

Ethics anxiety

In this section I argue that the contemporary anxieties of both food retailers and consumers have resulted in the fetishism of ethical standards, and this fetishism has historical precedents. In *Imperial Leather*, for example, Anne McClintock shows how the destabilising and disorienting effects of imperialism led not only Africans but also Europeans to fetishise certain material objects (McClintock, 1995). Fetishes provided weapons, as much psychological as practical, against contamination, disorientation and confusion. So while the Asante people used gold-weights as protective amulets, late nineteenth century Europeans depended on soap to wash off “*the very stigma of racial and class degeneration*” (McClintock, 1995). Although McClintock’s analysis of the soap fetish does not extend beyond the late Victorian era, newspaper advertising in twentieth century colonial Africa indicates that purity and whiteness remained a preoccupation of European settlers there for considerably longer (Kallman, 1999).

Today, the world of food and agriculture faces its own crises of value, especially in Europe and perhaps most of all in the UK. As during the imperial era, it is impor-

tant to remember that these crises have not been set off by any one event or trend but rather by the confluence of macro-scale forces at the micro-level of daily life. If eating is inherently a source of anxiety (Fischler, 1980; Fischler, 1993; for a review, see Messer 1984), over the past several years this condition has been exacerbated by a series of food scares and controversies. These have made clear to consumers that what they don't know about food production processes may, in fact, hurt not just them but also the environment, and the people and animals of agrarian communities. This has been particularly apparent in the UK, where the mad cow crisis and then the foot-and-mouth epidemic brought mass livestock slaughters and farm closures.

In short, the perceived dangers of the globalised, industrialised food system have provoked anxieties that are at once acute and fuzzy. They extend well beyond the ancient fear of poison and the modern fear of fat to concerns about the survival of species, habitats and ways of life. These anxieties have put retailers, especially in the UK, in a powerful but also perilous position. On one hand, the collapse of public trust in government regulatory capacity has provided top retailers with the opportunity to portray themselves as the new and more effective gatekeepers of the food supply (Marsden and Wrigley, 1996; Marsden *et al.*, 2000). On the other hand this role, together with evidence of the supermarkets' near-monopoly power, has made them all the more vulnerable to criticism.

For example, during the height of the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak, a *Guardian* newspaper special report titled “*What is wrong with our food?*” condemned the supermarkets' profit-maximising supply strategies, along with the post-World War II value system that sanctioned these strategies in the name of cheap food (see also Humphreys, 2001). Individual supermarket chains are also subject to ‘naming and shaming’. Besides the government's own policy of releasing the names of companies that sell foods with illegal pesticide residues,⁵ the retailers fear media reports of sicknesses linked to one of their products, or any media coverage that even suggests abusive practices within their supply chains. According to one supermarket middle-level manager, such coverage must be avoided at all costs because “*if we tarnish our brand in any way then we will see a migration of customers moving elsewhere.*”

The retailers' embrace of ethical trade reflects this corporate-level anxiety about the ‘tarnish’ of bad press. One employee in a major UK produce import company

5. Annual report of the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Pesticide Residue Committee.

asserts that the newspapers are, in fact, “*the driving force behind ethical standards in this country.*” This is a strong claim, but it does suggest how such standards, as documented in company codes of practice, have taken on fetishistic power within press-sensitive supply chains; they are as much protective as cleansing. In addition, of course, the companies adopting such codes hope that they will earn the loyalty of customers who themselves seek protection – not just from unsafe food, but also from inadvertent participation in unethical food supply chain practices, whether in the form of slave labour or wetland destruction.

Benign dictators

The imposition of ethical standards on African fresh vegetable exporters is part of a broader restructuring of production and trade relations. This process is perhaps most visible in Kenya, Sub-Saharan Africa’s biggest and oldest exporter of French beans and other high-value vegetables. For many years, most of Kenya’s export production – approximately 75 percent as of 1992 – was contracted out to smallholders, whose household labour was considered best suited to fragile, labour-intensive crops like French beans (Jaffee, 1995). Development agencies touted contract vegetable farming as a ‘non-traditional’ export strategy that would generate jobs, rural food security, and much-needed foreign exchange (Little and Dolan, 2000).

In the past decade, however, the UK retailers have ‘rationalised’ their Kenyan supply chains in favour of a small number of large, well-capitalised, and predominantly white-run export firms. The degree of rationalisation in these supply chains contrasts with the still relatively decentralised sourcing practices of French importers, who do business in Kenya as well as francophone countries such as Burkina Faso.⁶ By 1998, Kenya smallholders’ contribution to horticultural exports to the UK had dropped to 30 percent of the total volume. Meanwhile, the UK supermarkets had also begun sourcing more produce from Zimbabwe and Zambia, where large, white-run farms dominated export horticulture from the beginning. Supermarket representatives quite openly explained this trend in terms of the need for suppliers who could be trusted not only to meet high-volume orders, but also to implement every food safety standard set before them. In light of this trend, one study concluded that the future of African smallholders in export horticulture depended on “*benign dictators*”; in other words, “*major, well-established*” firms, capable of “*assuming responsibility for the rigid enforcement of standards*” (IDS/NRI, 1999). In short, even before the supermarkets had developed a full range

6. Based on findings of research conducted in Burkina Faso and France in 2000-1.

of ethical standards, they were using consumer concern about food safety to justify the exclusion of small-scale producers.

Mission improbable?

Retailers originally looked to Africa for fresh fruits and vegetables because it offered both year-round supply and dirt-cheap labour. These are still bottom-line concerns. But in order to address the anxieties described above, they are imposing a neocolonial ‘civilising mission’ in their supply countries. During the period of European colonial rule, ‘civilising’ the Africans meant bringing them improved technologies (railroads especially), hygiene, workplace discipline, vocation training and a respect for (if not necessarily wholehearted adoption of) European norms of taste and behaviour, especially in the realm of consumption (Schreuder, 1976; Conklin, 1997; Adas, 1989). All these improvements were supposed to be good for Africa, but of course they also served the purposes of the colonies’ employers (housewives as well as industrialists) and, more broadly, the empire. Or at least that was the intent; in fact, multiple aspects of the civilising mission ran up against the political economic and social contradictions inherent in colonial rule: between improvement and exploitation, and socialisation and segregation (Burke, 1996; Cooper, 1996).

Today, the managers and technologists in charge of the supermarkets’ overseas fresh produce supply chains anticipate how containerisation and new packaging techniques will help pull landlocked countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia more fully into the transoceanic trade in freshness. They speak of how export horticulture will help these regions ‘evolve’. According to one such manager, describing Kenya:

You can almost see a mirror image – some of the things that have happened in Europe are going to happen in Africa. So, those successful exporters currently will get bigger and better, they will capture more land, however they do that. And hopefully the economy in total will become better, the infrastructure will get stronger and better and everybody will directly or indirectly benefit. That’s what I’d like to think...

More immediately, the UK retailers’ demands of their African suppliers have led to the development of new workplace surveillance and hygienic practices, as well as vocational programmes aimed at creating a skilled (but still relatively cheap) African ‘quality control’ workforce. These form the basis of a ‘neocolonial civilising mission’ that allows retailers to ‘come clean’ in more than one sense: they can

provide safer, greener, more certifiably ethical food, and boast in detail about it. But I pose the question of whether the supply chains are sustainable, much less ethical.

Zambia's baby veg industry

During the colonial era, commercial agriculture in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) never amounted to much. As in neighbouring Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), the colony's white settlers enjoyed access to the region's best land (at the expense of the Tonga people (Vickery, 1986) as well as government assistance in crop marketing and labour recruitment. But their numbers were small and relatively scattered, and as an agrarian lobby they commanded little clout compared to the mining industry, which at the time was controlled by powerful foreign multinationals (Sklar, 1975). Copper mining, in fact, accounted for the vast majority of Zambia's export earnings, and briefly made it one of Africa's wealthiest colonies, and then countries, during the middle decades of the twentieth century (Ferguson, 1999). Since the 1980s, however, Zambia's copper earnings have plummeted and poverty rates have skyrocketed.

It was in this bleak context that Zambia's horticultural export industry took root. It began in the late 1980s, when a handful of dollar-hungry white farmers, in response to the loosening of foreign currency controls, began growing whatever they could fit onto a British Airways flight to London. According to early participants, their approach was amateurish and experimental; they grew a lot of melons and avocados, for example, because they were popular appetisers at London restaurants.

But this relatively freewheeling phase ended quickly as the demands of the UK supermarkets shrank both the size of the produce exported and the field of exporters. The avocados have been replaced by the aforementioned pre-packed micro-veg; baby corn and mangetout peas are among the major crops. Only two large companies still export directly, both financed by British investment capital: in one case by CDC Capital Partners, a 'public-private' equity investor partly funded by the UK government,⁷ and the other by TransZambezi Industries, an investment firm active in southern Africa but incorporated, incongruously, in the British Virgin Islands.

⁷. At the time of writing, this enterprise was for sale.

White expatriates – men who see their clients regularly on both business and holiday trips to the UK – manage both companies. Both companies have their own packing facilities, increasingly necessary for suppliers of the UK supermarkets (Dolan *et al.* 1999), and exploit thousands of hectares of their own land. The larger of the two companies also buys produce from outgrowers who, until recently, were all white farmers. The latter's holdings are small compared to white-owned farms in Zimbabwe – they typically cultivate between 30 to a few hundred hectares of vegetables – but enormous compared to the farms of most black Zambians. Combined, the two companies and their outgrowers employ several thousand pickers and packers, most of them women earning around a dollar a day (or slightly above the country's legal minimum wage). Although these wages hardly compare with those earned by mineworkers three decades ago, the two companies can boast of having turned export horticulture into the Zambian economy's most dynamic sector by far, with a 20 percent annual growth rate in 2000.

Both companies' headquarters are located on the outskirts of Lusaka, where their carefully tended farms and immaculate, climate-controlled packhouses contrast sharply with the dusty, rambling (albeit still relatively wealthy) surrounding neighbourhoods. Their facilities bustle with regimented activity; in addition to the base labourers, a corps of middle managers, technicians and bookkeepers ensure that all their operations are 'up to code'. Or rather, codes. In addition to the ETI base code, the EUREP-GAP protocol, and individual retailers' codes, they are now expected to comply with the few hundred pages of standards compiled in the Zambia Export Growers Association (ZEGA) Code of Conduct. These two companies, by far ZEGA's largest members (the other two dozen are small-scale rose growers), were driving forces behind the development of the ZEGA code. Why would they want to subject themselves to yet more paperwork and more audits, given that the retailers do not require it? Because the ZEGA code demonstrates, according to one company's technical manager, that "*Zambia's clean*".

These codes cover everything from soil care, pesticide use and pack house sanitation to on-farm wildlife management, worker housing and health care. They specify how harvested crops must be kept cool; how chemicals must be stored and how records must be kept to ensure crop traceability. Ethics, in other words, are just part of the checklist, along with food quality and safety measures. But company managers consider all parts equally necessary to the 'clean' image.

Maintaining this image requires an extensive crew of technicians and bookkeepers. Partly in order to reduce their dependence on costly expatriate staff and partly to show that the horticultural industry's 'face' was not entirely white, ZEGA has launched a horticultural vocational programme for young Zambians, funded in part by foreign donors. Development aid, in other words, is subsidising the corporate exporters' training of a cheap, skilled local labour supply.

But demonstrating compliance with supermarket standards requires more than field managers. It also requires inspectors and guards, such as those posted in packhouse restrooms to enforce hand washing. "*We're dealing with people who aren't very used to sanitation,*" explained an expatriate packhouse manager. The restroom guards also watch for signs of illness among workers because the latter, according to the same manager, "*won't say anything (if sick); they're just interested in making money... You have to treat them like children.*"

Children – the real ones – are an especially sensitive issue. All the farms must have crèches for employees' babies and young children. But these facilities get little use, because most rural women workers prefer not to leave their children with strangers. According to one outgrower, "*It's not part of their culture; they just won't do it.*" But the workers are not allowed to bring their babies to the fields with them, because of sanitary standards. They also cannot bring their older children to help them out after school (as they used to), because the supermarket codes forbid under-16 child labour.

The farm managers, importers and even the senior supermarket buyers realise that the child labour restrictions make it harder for some women to send their children to school at all, and make it harder for teenage AIDS orphans to find the work needed to support themselves and younger siblings (Zambia has one of world's highest rates of HIV infection). They also observe, with irony, how they used to pick potatoes themselves as children in the UK. Nonetheless, the enforcement of code spares the supermarkets the possible ire of consumers who associate child labour with sweatshops and slavery. More to the point, it protects them and their Zambian suppliers from the dreaded Bad Press, which could strike at any time. Indeed, even inquiring about child labour is tricky in Zambia, because some company managers suspect researchers of being undercover journalists.

But just as colonial era civilising missions faced certain contradictions – white settlers wanted blacks kept apart, but needed their domestic help; white-run indus-

tries wanted cheap African labour, but needed African consumers – so too does the contemporary, ‘neocolonial’ version. *This* is the contradiction masked by the ‘fetishism’ of standards guaranteeing clean, green ethical trade. Namely: standards cost, and the retailers are not willing to pay. The costs of crèches and clinics and chemical storage facilities, of protective clothing and medical checkups for all the pesticide sprayers, of the labour to keep records and monitor workers – all these are borne by the supermarkets’ suppliers, meaning the companies themselves and their white farmer outgrowers.

Most outgrowers support the idea of providing schools and other facilities for their workers, and generally agree with the supermarkets’ standards for minimal pesticide use. But while they have invested in complying with these standards, the UK retailers’ prices have remained flat, leading to shrinking profit margins. Weighed against the long hours and high stress of vegetable farming, the profit squeeze has driven most of the outgrowers out of the micro-veg business. Around the town of Mazabuka, one of the centres of horticultural production, only five farms were still growing vegetables for export in 2000, down from 13 before. Several others on the outskirts of Lusaka have also dropped out of outgrowing. Most of their hundreds of piece rate pickers have thus lost their jobs, because the white farmers have generally turned to much less labour-intensive activities, such as dairy farming.

The export companies themselves have dealt with the profit squeeze in three ways. First, the larger of the two companies has initiated a smallholder outgrower scheme along the lines of the ‘benign dictator’ model discussed earlier. This scheme, still too new to assess in any depth, assumes that the black Zambian smallholders will accept the prices that the white farmers refused. This might be a reasonable assumption except that most of the ‘smallholders’ are actually middle or upper class bureaucrats, businesspeople, politicians, and retirees living in and around Lusaka. Like the white farmers (some of whom are their neighbours), they rely predominantly on hired labour and purchased inputs, and expect to maintain relatively high standards of living. Their costs, in other words, are not necessarily much lower than their white counterparts’.

Second, both companies are seeking to increase production on their own properties. Although their landholdings of a few thousand acres apiece remain small compared to white settler and corporate farms elsewhere in southern Africa, these two companies’ quite total domination of export vegetable production has hardly gone unnoticed. Casual conversations with black Zambian farmers, businesspeo-

ple and middle-level managers within the industry suggest that white control of profits and top management positions is already a source of muted resentment. Continued expansion of these companies' production capacities will likely create more jobs for black Zambians, but it will not necessarily get rid of the perceived racial 'glass ceiling' in export horticulture.

Third, both companies are turning to yet higher value added products. One company, for example, has begun producing packaged 'high-care' micro-veg – essentially sliced, diced rejects. Another is experimenting with baby versions of vegetables not commonly found in bonzai form. But the big push for both companies is towards *certified organic* pre-packed micro-veg, which of course require compliance with yet another set of standards (Guthman, forthcoming).

But the organic option may prove a short-term fix at best, given that this has become another realm of fierce supermarket competition and price-cutting. Case in point: back in the great glass box of Tesco, banners urge consumers to “*go organic...because delicious food doesn't have to cost the earth.*”

CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that much of the original pressure for ethical trade standards came from NGOs, some of whom became founding members of the ETI.⁸ The fact that these groups focused their campaigns on supermarkets rather than states reflects corporate retail capital's growing power to regulate not merely the quality of products, but also the conditions of the production process. This is especially apparent in the global South, where state deregulation has become a prerequisite for foreign aid and investment, and where producers of all kinds of consumer goods – not just baby veg – compete intensely for the retailers' business. Under such conditions, retailers have been able not only to define the terms of ethical trade, but also to deflect its costs.

That said, the emergence of ethical trade has shown that the top retailers are necessarily sensitive to the demands of NGOs, especially those adept at attracting media attention. Concern with media image has, in the past, led both NGOs and retailers to minimise the real complexities involved in defining and implementing 'ethical' supply chain relations, as seen in their typically uncompromising position vis-à-vis child labour. But NGOs, researchers and even the popular media could in fact play

8. Christian Aid's "Change the Rules" campaign was particularly influential.

a useful role by investigating and illuminating such complexities. In addition, they should continue to highlight the limits of voluntary retailer measures, and to push for more substantive progress towards equitable South-North trade (as some groups have already done, by calling for WTO reform).

They should also keep up pressure on the retailers themselves. It is not complicated or terribly controversial to assert, for example, that supermarkets ostensibly concerned with ‘stakeholder dialogue’ and social responsibility should put their money where their mouths are. For starters, this would mean quite literally bringing still-excluded stakeholders – such as representatives of the African horticultural industry’s predominantly female, predominantly temporary labour force – into the dialogue and decision-making around ethical trade that occurs in the many meetings and conferences still attended primarily by UK-based retailers and NGOs. Ultimately, however, it would mean supermarkets accepting their own responsibility for bearing at least some of the costs of their ethical standards. To date, cleaning up down South has proven all too cheap.

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