

NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE PLAYERS IN GLOBAL AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Josefa Salete Barbosa Cavalcanti

UFPE/ CNPq researcher

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to address three general questions about globalization: 1) what are the major features of globalization? 2) who are its major actors? and 3) what is the outlook for the future? As in the case of the other articles included in this issue, I will use my current research to address these questions. In particular, I will employ the theme of the social creation of food quality and its application to fresh fruit production and consumption to illustrate salient aspects of globalization.

Commodities that circulate in food markets of the world have codes and standards defined according to particular ways in which local and global relations take place (Busch 2000). In this sense, they have a particular life and dynamics. Appadurai (1999) suggests that their life course may be shorter or longer; some commodities may be of recent construction, may disappear, or be replaced by new ones, thus revealing social processes in which capital, labor, territories and technology are involved as well as new signs attached to it. For example, as observed by Goody (1994), the particularities of a commodity's life course may explain changes in content and hierarchy according to the way items are declared luxury goods and objects of consumption for a particular society's upper class or end up as items of mass consumption. The main debates concerning these issues point to the significance of networks - a linkage of objects and subjects involved in the globalization of agriculture and food - and to the relevance of following the actors, including commodities, to understand the constructed nature of food systems (see Bonanno et al. 1994; Friedland, 1994; Goodman and Watts, 1997). Busch (2000) makes the point that globalization actually depends on the standardization of goods. He emphasizes that the whole process of making quality food requires a set of standards. These standards are instrumental in the competition for the ways in which control is established along the supply chain and, as a result, become objects of disputes and resistance.

Employing the relationships that connect producers, workers and consumers in a restructured agricultural site located in the Brazilian Northeast, the San Francisco Valley, the article explores aspects of this debate by underscoring the intricate connection between food 'quality' and social inequality that is a result of the process of globalization. Remote regions of the world - such as the one studied here -- are increasingly part of uneven and hierarchical networks, linked through competitiveness and productivity. Codes and conventions (Barrientos et al, 2001), grades and standards (Busch, 2000) intrude on the way in which commodities, territories and people enter into the evolving networks of the globalization of food, as well as revealing distinctions and inequalities that develop along supply chains (Tanaka and Busch 2003).

Data for this article were collected through a research project carried out for nearly a decade that monitored developments of the San Francisco Valley horticultural region. Empirical evidence has been collected using qualitative methods. These procedures included in-depth interviews with male and female farm workers as well as other key informants. Additionally, following the commodity chain from production to retail, data were collected at fruit and vegetable sections of a Supermarket.

The article opens with a brief discussion of some aspects of global agriculture and food that relate to the social creation of quality and the production of quality food products. In this context, some analytical items generated from the study of the San Francisco Valley are introduced. The second section of the article briefly probes the issue of the construction of quality adopting a North-South approach. It is maintained that the creation of a quality food demand in the North involves changes not only in consumption but also in production and social relations at various levels. The following section discusses in more details the case of the San Francisco Valley in Brazil. In particular the cases involving the production of grapes and mangos are discussed focusing on the impact the existence of quality standards generated for local producers. Many of those producers could not meet the global quality requirements and went bankrupt, providing instances of the creation of inequality through the introduction of quality standards. Additional inequalities are discussed in the next section. Here the construction of quality food in the San Francisco Valley is illustrated in tandem with the exacerbation of age- and gender-based differences between women and men and the counteractions that some groups carried out against the empowerment of female workers in the region. Some concluding considerations end the article.

GLOBAL AGRICULTURE AND FOOD AND QUALITY

While competing definitions of globalization exist, I would adopt that of the noted British sociologist Norman Long. He states that globalization refers to "the rapid dissemination of scientific knowledge and technology, culture and communications, the restructuring of work, industry and economic life, and the fragmentation and reorganization of power domains leading to the emergence of new social and political identities" (Long, 1996: 37). There is also significant agreement that globalization is a process characterized by the faster circulation of objects and subjects around the world that entails a greater need for the existence of standards (Busch 2000; Lash and Urry 1994). These standards make commodities eligible to circulate according to consumer demand and awareness but may result in preventing some people and nations from participating in the markets. Food distribution may reveal or activate social divisions that are historically and contemporaneously present in the world. Based on that assumption, it is presumed that some people and some nations are likely to be included or excluded from those relations and networks altogether due to the fact that they lack the necessary elements or conditions required for participation. Therefore, as Castells (1998:357) comments, globalization is not a homogenous process; the ways in which things are globalized differ, as do the globalizers (Friedland 1997:230). This unevenness of globalization "rather than homogenizing the human condition, ... tends to polarize it" (Bauman 1998:18). There is, therefore, an arena of contention, revealing confrontations and conflicts among agencies in social contexts in which the broader spheres of production, circulation and consumption of goods are shaped.

Agricultural commodities and the production and commercialization of agro-foods have changed over the past twenty years and new "financial circuits, productive technologies and conditions of the market have transformed the conditions of production" (Raynolds, 1994:143). These transformations of agricultural practices have encouraged increasing levels of competition among those who participate in global circuits, easily observed in the places of fruit distribution such as the port of Rotterdam. Products from several parts of the world are brought in from different continents, competing against each other in markets, under a shadow of "quality."

Products are elements and outcomes of social relationships. As Storper and Salais argued, (1997:17-18) products are created according to 'conventions' – "a rule which is taken for granted and to which everybody submits without reflection, the result of an agreement (a contract) or even a founding moment (constitutional convention)." These are translated into a language of understanding and compromises between consumers and producers that provides the grounds for the establishment of patterns and standards against which their performance is assessed. The construction of quality products requires knowledge, technological capabilities and labor; products are, therefore, constructed and marketed through a set of social relations that develops along with these processes.

Although a dynamic and variable concept, quality is a measurement for control and evaluation in the market dynamics. A definition of quality establishes the relationship between producers and buyers and it is a mechanism by which trust is established among social actors, trustful exchanges may take place, and regulations are activated. Quality is often considered as the driving force for innovation and restructuring of production and production sites, and it is also influential in the implementation of and justification for labor's controls.

The San Francisco region became known for the specificity of its commodities and dedicated products (Storper and Salais, 1997:29). There, the production of 'quality' fruits was identified as the road to the development of the region in a global context featuring intense competition. The increase in the proportion of value added to commodities and the novelty of products and markets in which they circulate have combined to enhance the role, relevance and meaning of defined standards. Those standards are also the measure to evaluate the success of producers and laborers.

Elsewhere (Cavalcanti 1997; Marsden et al. 1996), I illustrated the limits by which the quality of commodities is combined with other qualities such as those of labor and the environment. Men and women may experience the impacts of globalization in their lives in different manners (Cavalcanti et al 1998). In the cultivation of grapes, the feminization of the labor force is one of the outcomes of the gender division of labor. Women are more sensitive to beauty and more gentle dealing with grapes, therefore are more skilled in structuring the grape bunches for export. They are a better choice of labor for this commodity and this situation, in turn, makes them feel empowered. A clear example of this is offered by the impressive percentage of women (sixty percent) participating in the 80,000 member Rural Workers Union of the Valley in spite of the macho bias in the local society. Branco (2001) also

argues that migrant women were happy with their job in viticulture because they became more independent in regard to their partners, family, and to the overall life they had before migrating there.

This gender division of labor, however, generates negative impacts on women's lives. Female workers complain about sexual harassment that they experience while being transported to the fields along with male workers. Additionally, they are threatened with losing their jobs because of their union membership and the union pro-woman agenda. There are entrepreneurs, but also family farmers, who counter these women's Union membership and activism because of the agenda they were able to build: women's rights, maternity leave, and motherhood rights. Consequently, managers proclaim that women have become very expensive labor and want to reorganize viticulture by hiring men only. Paradoxically, high levels of resistance to established forms of labor control, feminist and union militancy, along with the emergence of an ethical trade movement are employed to legitimize added value for local commodities. Currently, in the San Francisco Valley, the quality of mangoes and grapes is advertised based on the fact that they are produced by equal opportunity farms that give actual preference to female workers.

CONSTRUCTING 'QUALITY' NORTH/ SOUTH LINKAGES.

The circulation of goods in the global market creates specific global/local and North/South linkages that, in turn, transform both the North and the South. In the case of the creation of quality agro-foods, the transformation of the sale and consumption of exotic fruits in the Northern markets is paralleled by the transformation of Southern agriculture, impacting, simultaneously, the techniques used and technological changes that accompany the restructuring of rural areas and 'cuisines'. Furthermore, the production of these commodities carry with them the often overlooked features of exploitation and the creation of social inequalities (Lash and Urry: 1994: 1).

The case of 'luxury' goods is telling. There is a consensus among authors that the transformation of goods and their 'fresh' contents are outcomes of technological changes and labor processes, including timing, harvesting and selling, practices and conditions of storage, packaging and transportation. Jack Goody (1994) discusses such features in the development of production and marketing of flowers stressing the ways in which flowers -- their varieties, colors and meanings --- have changed as they are marketed around the world. He calls attention to the effects of new markets on the varieties and quantity produced and that of their symbols and images on their production and commercialization. From luxury to necessity goods they have been developed through a combination of means and technological changes; technological changes may further drive consumption. Goody gives a clear example of how technological changes brought about new patterns of consumption. "As mercantile capitalism gave way to industrial capitalism the market expanded, in terms both of supply and demand, and what were at one time luxury goods were seen as objects of increasingly wide-scale usage until they eventually became items of mass consumption... moving from category of luxury to necessity" (1994:210).

Using an example of the flower market, says Goody, "The market dealt with more than cut flowers alone...Each of the floral products were in their turn affected by the successive changes in transport, bulbs, seeds... from Holland... to Brazil, to Russia (1994:211)" In this way, distant parts of the world were supplied with annuals and other plants from the more temperate areas of Europe. The sophistication in transport and cooling devices has also impacted the selection of management strategies used in the sector and created a need for change in the commodities as a whole. "Since the flower trade dealt in luxuries, the market expanded with rising standards of living and with the coming of train, truck and airplane..." (Goody, 1994:231). From 'natural' to high value products, these examples show the extent technology contributed to the 'industrialization of agriculture: a process marked by the distinct social relations and inequalities that drive them.

There is also evidence that social inequalities within countries with higher consumption of those goods (as in the North) do not allow all citizens to consume the same 'quality' goods. In spite of the expansion of the fruit market in the United Kingdom, not all fruits reach all markets with the same standards; local markets and superstores offer distinct 'quality' products; there are markets -- and markets; people's choices and consumer performance in the markets may be restricted because of their distinct income, ethnic diets, and so on. Therefore globalization engenders inequalities at the consumption as well as the production levels.

CONSTRUCTING QUALITY IN THE SAN FRANCISCO VALLEY

The fruit region of the San Francisco Valley produces more than 90% of the total Brazilian export of table grapes (36,848 tons of table grapes with a value of US\$ 58,740,000) and 124,620 tons of mangoes with a value of US\$

68,256,000; (VALEXPORT, 2004). While local producers enjoy a strong and expanding presence in global markets, they continue to promote their products and the region aided by governmental assistance. Producers enhance their competitiveness through the creation of improved colors, flavor, sizes, and fruit presentation. They have learned to advance or retard the fruit maturation phase according to market times, a great advantage to the region. Because there are two and a half harvests a year, grapes are a commodity that requires a large amount of labor, as compared with mangos. In addition, grapes require differing amounts of labor in the pre- and post-harvest times of trimming and packing. Mango for export is grown predominately in the Northeast. However, contrary to the traditional or small farms cultivation, the quality mango for export is a recent development in the San Francisco Valley and there is steady growth projected for this area. The fruit is primarily consumed fresh, although some experiences have indicated developing industrialization of products such as jams, pulps, and for grapes, raisins.

The Valley region was constructed as a result of, and in pace with, Brazilian economic modernization in the 1970s (Graziano da Silva, 1996). The construction of dams to supply electricity, meant to fuel the industrial plans of the Brazilian military government of that time, contributed to the availability of water for irrigation. During this process, the banks of the San Francisco River were cleared and the population relocated, not without resistance by those most affected, the small and poor farmers, *the ribeirinhos* (Sigaud, 1992). To deploy the water, a plan for agricultural development was presented, providing a means for agriculture under irrigation, which was also intended to soothe conflicts following the displacement of '*ribeirinhos*' riverside farmers.

One must understand the relevance of this restructuring of the region for both local development and Brazilian exports considering that only 0.37 percent (3,169,000 hectares) of Brazil is irrigated (Euromonitor, 1999) and that the San Francisco Valley has around 120,000 irrigated hectares. Around 70,000 hectares are fully in use; this number represents 23 per cent of the 774,000 irrigated hectares in the Northeast. Technological and research developments provided a more intensive use of land and multiple harvests per year (two and a half, in the case of grapes) as well as the opportunity to adjust the plots to the timing of market demands. There are several packing houses in the region, installed in around 160,000 m² and freezing capacity of 68.200 m³,

Government policies provided funds and technical support for the establishment of the CODEVASF (Corporation for the Development of the San Francisco Valley), an agency that coordinates irrigation and technical assistance projects for small and large enterprises. All these activities transformed the semiarid region into an important niche in the food network for world fresh fruit and vegetables (Araújo, 1997). Recent development plans for this region anticipate a doubling of the number of irrigated plots between the years 2000 and 2010 (Brasil, 1996). These changes respond to the reorganization and coordination of the global market (McMichael 1994:7).

The provided infrastructure and the prospect of land and employment attracted migrants from several Brazilian states. Job supply and the dream of a plot to cultivate pulled in thousands of people to the most important Municipalities of the San Francisco Valley, Petrolina and Juazeiro, which speeded up the urbanization process. Seventy per cent of the 175,506 Juazeiro population lives in urban area, whereas in Petrolina this proportion is higher, 73 percent of a population of 218,538. These figures, provided by the IBGE census, reveal a continuous trend towards urbanization, making clear that fruitculture in the San Francisco Valley depends on workers who do not live on the farms. In the total population, female participation is around 51 %.

The presence of different social groups contributed to the specific development of the region. Simultaneously, this new system brought out differences and inequalities that proved to be a particularly fertile ground for growth (Cavalcanti 1996; 1998). Large and medium entrepreneurs, as well as small settlers, came to share the irrigated lands of the San Francisco Valley from the outset. At the beginning of the 1990s, the export of fruits became the main objective in the region; ideological and skill differences appeared between the large and small producers who were competing for markets and opportunities in what they considered "the business of the century".

Mario, an elderly man from the district of Araçatuba, was one of the first to implement grape fields in the Valley. He is the son of a Japanese family who migrated to San Paulo in 1927. His father came to San Paulo to work in a coffee plantation. With his savings he bought a 150 hectare farm and continued as a coffee grower until 1940, when there was a crisis in coffee production. He shifted production to silkworms until 1946; after that he bought a farm in the state of Paraná, where he worked until 1976. Mario worked with his father and in 1970 bought a farm more than 2000 hectares in size in the San Francisco Valley. There he started growing grapes in 1973; for

this he hired a manager and other consultants from Getulio Vargas Foundation in San Paulo. He had a dream: to produce grapes year round. "At that time grape season was only three months and I decided to produce for the national markets during the entire year," he stated, and hired about 800 workers for this job.

As a pioneer, Mario visited other irrigated lands in Israel, and Japanese farms in Los Angeles, California. Savings and credit from a bank loan helped him travel around to learn more about the business. To travel to different places in Brazil, he had a private airplane. Thinking in advance, he thought about diversification of production by introducing wine making, but was not successful. In 1989 he joined a cooperative which grew to a membership of 50 Japanese families. That cooperative was replaced by another, CAJ, in 1994 (Pires, 2003), now a well reputed exporter, according to external regulations. In 1990 Mario's firm bankrupted as he was not able to continue payment of bank loans. Now Mario realizes that he was not very organized, did not save enough, did not take advantage of the new export opportunities. Reflecting on his experience he states:

"What I did wrong was to want to solve the social question; I was not an individualist. In today's world socialist ideas do not survive....and my philosophy of how to run a farm came out of this kind of thinking. This is a Japanese philosophy, and Japan is facing difficulties to solve the problems raised by thinking about the others, not only about ourselves... let's think about creating jobs, more employment, more freedom."

The local or regional *colonos* (small farmers who received plots of irrigated land from CODEVASF through its colonization project) also felt the negative effects of harsh competition; they "didn't know how to be competitive in this new environment." Of 40,000 irrigated hectares that comprise the official colonization project, two-thirds were left to large enterprises, around 219 units, while the other third was used by 2,163 *colonos* units (Silva, 2001). The *colonos*, however, were steadily expelled from agriculture and replaced by larger independent farmers. They were unable to successfully compete in the markets for onions and tomatoes for processing and internal markets. While they tried to reconvert their plots to fruits, and grapes in particular, they lacked the necessary experience and credit.

They did not know how to address the issue of the new required quality standards for export. They did not know how respond to patterns, grades, wrappings and packages required. As part of this new world of production, they came to know that they could not be competitive enough to stay in this market: quality and timing became the primary obstacles to their success. "I could not produce on time" is the answer I received from members of a small cooperative whose commodities did not fulfill the standards for export.

CONSTRUCTING QUALITY FOOD AND INEQUALITY IN THE SAN FRANCISCO VALLEY

Quality is a matter of dispute among social actors in the global networks and as such is a source of inequality. The essence of the dispute arises from contents of the product, as defined by regulations. Recently there has been more concern about how to fulfill the expectations of consumers, formalized in the protocols such as EUREPGAP and in USDA rules; these instruments, codes, grades, standards are part of the '*knowledge*' of how to comply with consumers'/retailers' expectations. The prevalent idea in the San Francisco Valley is that those standards make it possible to trace all inputs and technological practices used, contributing to the accumulation of a 'know how' -- how to produce and reach the market in time. As a producer stated: "We have to learn how to produce in the market time", meaning that you have to produce out of season, out of a supposedly natural 'timing', in times of higher demand, i.e. a new notion of time is created, no matter how it will aggravate the conditions for the sustainability of local development or the environment. Processes of subverting seasonality, in advancing or postponing harvest of mangoes is very often used in San Francisco Valley (Marsden and Cavalcanti, 2001; Adam 1998).

In the attempt to enhance market opportunities, informational technology is being used by San Francisco Valley producers, thus making them up to date with market developments. They learn about *blanks and windows* for particular products, speed up their links with prospective buyers, producers, and their associations, and have their own electronic addresses and web pages in order to establish and improve commercial linkages world-wide. According to a director of an agro-industry, the use of computers and virtual programs are tools of control in agriculture. As a result, there is a displacement of elderly and illiterate workers who are replaced by the younger and better educated workers who are computer literate. A 19 year old with a secondary education and skilled in computers was hired to replace a 47 year old worker; an 18 year old female agricultural technician was also hired to register all the practices in the field of grapes, replacing a much older worker.

A 'knowledgeable' producer is one who knows how to assert him/herself vis-a-vis others in the market, who is able to foresee changes, counteract difficulties and multiply the effects of comparative advantages. She also needs 'to enhance her strengths and minimize her weakness', as a small entrepreneur describes: "To get to know the market is an asset to those who want to improve competitiveness." Producers, in general, have precise ideas of standards and products demanded by the markets at different times. Therefore, they organize farm activities accordingly.

'Quality' standards are now seen as the controller of production. Management strategies and decision-making processes are 'quality' led, as quality informs the deployment of technology, labor, and performance assessment. Quality fruits are produced to meet a certain set of parameters defined by prospective North American and European consumers (Marsden et al 1996; Busch, 2000; Barrientos et al, 2001). Producers usually say that the monitoring of fruit quality is largely in the hands of retailers at the expense of local producers. This is visible both in the fields and in the major retail distributing centers. In the fields, there is a strong feeling that each worker is closely watched, as is the producer. At the retail level, supermarket chains can make or break producers and regions by simply evaluating their ability to meet the "quality standards" that they adopt.

Due to its climatic and morphological conditions (it is a semi-arid area) and socio-economic features (immigration), the San Francisco Valley fruit production attracted unemployed men and women from the entire Northeastern region (Cavalcanti, 1997). In the cultivation of grapes women clearly outnumber man. In many ways, women benefit from this gender division of labor because they are viewed as particularly skilled to deal with grape pre- and post-harvest requirements. As indicated above in this sector, women constitute more than sixty-five percent of the work-force. Men, on the other hand, are the majority in the mango sector.

The gender division of labor has worked as a mechanism through which more women were incorporated into the fruitculture labor market. Women were put in charge of post-harvest tasks to comply with the 'quality' requirements imposed by external markets (Cavalcanti et al. 1998; Bendini and Bonaccorsi, 1998) and became known for their expertise in the tasks needed to produce quality table grapes. The duties of men and women were divided, in general, according to greater or smaller physical energy waste, based on the prevalent gender definitions of "masculine" and "feminine". In the San Francisco Valley, grape harvest tasks are considered to be feminine and mango tasks are masculine. Because the harvests are labor-intensive, and because the majority were female workers, grapes were considered proper for family farming (Cavalcanti, 1997; Cavalcanti et al. 1998).

However, due to the expanding markets for fresh products, the quality requirements associated with it, and the technological innovations introduced to meet the new and growing demand for local commodities, there have been extensive changes in grape production. The number of workers employed per unit of cultivated land has decreased by more than half, while new partnership systems have been instituted to guarantee productivity. As indicated above, the large number of women in grape harvesting made them active members of local unions. They created a gender-based agenda for better wages, working conditions, childcare and health care. Because of their organizational abilities but significantly because the expansion of the quality product markets and the requirements attached to this production, they were able to obtain important concessions on their agenda. This process empowered women as a group, but also exacerbated the inequality in the sector and area by engendering resistance and counteractions. In effect, male managers and farmers, including medium family farmers, were not particularly pleased with the new position of local women. To improve levels of productivity and counter the success of female laborers, they attempted to de-gender the division of labor, and tried to increase the number of men in the cultivation of grapes. This attempt eventually failed. Indeed, men were not very satisfied with their new activities, and women didn't like their husbands doing "female" tasks. Some farms tried bringing men and women together to carry on similar tasks in grape packing, but even this move was not particularly successful. The bottom line is that, in the San Francisco Valley, the implementation of new labor strategies generated a trend toward a reduction of the number of female workers (Marsden and Cavalcanti, 2001). This situation continues to exist in spite of the fact that some farms have been introducing equal opportunities or gender sensitive politics in labor to appease consumers sensitive to environmental friendly practices, feminist issue, and fair trade.

The fifty/fifty basis for hiring workers is advocated by one of the enterprises of this region. However, the feasibility of doing this type of hiring is questioned by those in the sector who believe that, because of the craft aspect of the production of grapes, men will not replace women. Furthermore, the enforcement of regulations under

new protocols, such as EUREPGAP and, to a lesser extent, those of ethical trade initiatives, is contributing to change this approach to the gender division of labor. I, however, agree with Barrientos et. al. (2001) that the codes of some of those protocols are not yet very sensitive to the gender issues. In the fields, every worker or manager talked about EUREPGAP, they bring these two EUREP plus GAP together for the matter, stressing that these are the major concerns for them. Ethical Trade Initiative, however, is favoring a gender division of labor. A newly bought agri-industry is advertising that the enterprise works on an equal opportunity basis. The context, nonetheless, is for more exploitation of workers in general. Women who work with grapes are working more hours, according to one 46 year old worker: “Because of the low wages and unemployment in my family I decided to accept the opportunity to work more hours a week.”

Actually, what we observed is that the work load for women in the San Francisco Valley increased. Also, as technological innovations become more prominent in this particular region, the proportion of women in the labor force tends to be reduced; this is particularly so in packing and post-harvest activities. New machinery and new varieties of fruit are affecting tasks in the field, mainly reducing women’s jobs, as in the case of the *seedless grape*. There is a tendency for more competition among workers, because their performance is being inspected and closely observed, while informational innovations continue to restructure working practices. The new protocols mirror this tendency. As Wilkinson (2001) comments: in the global restructuring, quality is a substitute for quantity. This aspect requires particular attention to the new regions of food production and processing that have been constructed under those limits imposed by new regulations.

CONCLUSION

Globalization is a complex process. Consumers, farmers, workers, retailers and processors are all connected through the production and consumption of world commodities. Central to this process is the existence of standards and the agencies and agents that allow their existence. The case study gave us some ideas of how this quality is constructed revealing how local farmers and workers are working under both tight control of regulations and regulators. The creation of quality food products is viewed by consumers of the affluent North as a desirable step to take: a norm that should be followed. To establish quality, instruments (standards and regulations) are created and actors and groups operate to employ these instruments. While it can be assumed that the consequences should also be positive for society, the analysis carried out in the article reveals a much more complex reality. The production and consumption of quality food creates new inequalities that disadvantage but also empower various groups. The quality fruit production that takes place in the San Francisco Valley is an illustration of this process. But it is also an illustration of the essential meaning of globalization. The links that connect global production affect groups and social relations in ways that were not seen before. Therefore, to understand globalization, the events of the San Francisco Valley’s fruit production indicate that one has to pay attention to the complexity of relationships linking processes and agents.

In many respects this is the essential message of contemporary constructionist theories, such as those often employed to study agriculture and food standards. Complexity and heterogeneity of experiences and trajectories are much more pervasive in contemporary society than any of the common behaviors and world views so often affirmed in past analyses. While it is certainly the case that corporate actors (in this case retailers) are among the most powerful actors of globalization, consumers and their quest for quality consumption emerge as powerful actors under globalization. Their power constrains the lives and work of laborers in the distant South. These new forms of control are symbolic of the contradictory ambivalence of commodity production under globalization: the search for quality food items translates in new forms of exploitation and inequality.

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