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2013

# Exploring Linkages between Consumer Food Co-operatives and Domestic Fair Trade in the United States

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### Recommended Citation

Duram, Leslie. "Exploring Linkages between Consumer Food Co-operatives and Domestic Fair Trade in the United States." (Jan 2013).

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6 **Exploring Linkages between Consumer Food Co-operatives and Domestic**  
7 **Fair Trade in the United States**  
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10  
11 **Abstract**  
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14 Consumer Food Co-operatives (co-ops) have provided consumers an alternative to corporate  
15 supermarkets and big-box stores since the 1960s. Producers seeking broader marketing  
16 opportunities often turn to co-ops. This study examines how, within Alternative Food Networks  
17 (AFNs), co-ops play a role in the emergence of the Domestic Fair Trade movement in the US.  
18  
19 The Domestic Fair Trade (DFT) movement is based on the idea that family farms and small- to  
20 mid-sized farms in the global north are facing many of the same pressures as producers in the  
21 global south. The Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA) in the United States is the umbrella  
22 organization for a variety of stakeholders. The DFTA seeks to “support family-scale farming, to  
23 reinforce farmer-led initiatives such as farmer co-operatives, and to bring these groups together  
24 with mission-based traders, retailers and concerned consumers to contribute to the movement for  
25 sustainable agriculture in North America” (1). This study assessed five co-ops (through  
26 interviews and document analysis) to determine their experiences with integrating DFT into their  
27 business practices. The research reveals that DFT concepts are important to co-operative  
28 decision-makers, but they are faced with challenges when it comes to actually integrating DFT  
29 into their business model. Insight into stakeholder perceptions and professional level DFT  
30 activities, indicates that co-ops will be a key factor is whether the DFT movement will succeed  
31 in the US.  
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## Introduction

Increasing concerns about our global food system have led to the development of a variety of alternative food networks (AFNs) or values-based food networks (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). AFNs are “new and rapidly mainstreaming spaces in the food economy defined by, among other things, the explosion of organic, Fair Trade, and local, quality, and premium specialty foods” (9). The degree to which these alternatives interact, complement, or compete with one another is not well understood. This study illuminates the interactions between two stakeholders in AFNs: Consumer food co-operatives (hereafter called co-ops) and Fair Trade (specifically Domestic Fair Trade or DFT).

Co-ops in the United States have been viewed as a political and economic alternative to conventional supermarkets since the 1960s (10). The very nature of consumer food co-ops lends itself to being a complimentary avenue for alternative movements. Food co-ops operate according to a common set of seven principles that are agreed upon by the international co-operative community: voluntary and open membership, democratic control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, co-operation among co-operatives, and concern for community (11, 12, and 13). There are currently 394 food co-ops in the United States (Figure 1). Many of these stores focus primarily on natural foods, but some offer a full line of grocery items (14).

The Fair Trade movement has brought issues of social justice to the food production conversation and now factors such as social equality, fair trading relationships, labor rights, etc. (15) have a place along with environmental and human health concerns. Fair Trade products are produced and traded in accordance with these principles - wherever possible verified by credible, independent assurance systems. Indeed, the World Fair Trade Organization, a global network of

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4 Fair Trade groups note that: “Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency  
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6 and respect, that seek greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable  
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8 development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized  
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10 producers and workers—especially in the South.” (16) Further noted by the Fairtrade  
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12 Foundation in the UK: “Fairtrade is a strategy for poverty alleviation and sustainable  
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14 development. Its purpose is to create opportunities for producers and workers who have been  
15  
16 economically disadvantaged or marginalized by the conventional trading system.” (17)  
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21 While some consider social justice problems to be an issue exclusive to marginalized  
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23 economies, recent campaigns have exposed injustices and devastating impacts of globalization  
24  
25 on rural communities in the US (18). There has been a growing movement within the United  
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27 States (and other countries within the global north<sup>1</sup>) focused on situating the principles of  
28  
29 international Fair Trade within a domestic context. In 2007, the Domestic Fair Trade  
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31 Association (DFTA) was formed to find solutions to the issues facing farms in the US. Their  
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33 main goals are “to support family-scale farming, to reinforce farmer-led initiatives such as  
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35 farmer co-operatives, and to bring these groups together with mission-based traders, retailers and  
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37 concerned consumers to contribute to the movement for sustainable agriculture in North  
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39 America.” (1).  
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58 <sup>1</sup> Use of the terms “global north” and “global south” provide a broader and more open definition of global  
59 difference in “an attempt to correct the use of other economically based terms, such as First World and Third World  
60 and developed world and developing world, as well as core and periphery” (19).  
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## Movements within Alternative Food Networks

Alternative food networks (AFNs) generally act in opposition to the global, industrial, and environmentally degrading conventional food system (20). They seek to redistribute value through food networks in the opposite direction of the bulk commodity system and re-instill trust between the producer and consumer as articulated by new forms of governance and political association (21). Typical AFNs in the United States come in the form of farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, organics, Fair Trade, and local food campaigns (3 and 22).

“Buy local” food campaigns have been prominent in recent years and it is now common to see a local label on produce in retail food stores. Nutritional, economic, and environmental benefits are associated with buying local foods, but there is ongoing debate as to how local scale impacts natural resource use and crop seasonality, if local farmers receive sufficient benefits, and whether local foods are accessible to lower income consumers (23, 20, 24, and 9) point out that the ontology of local is taken as a given, not as a category that is socially constructed. While it is easy to support the local food movement as inherently good, when assessing an AFN, there is still a need for a mechanism to ensure the social and ecological benefits of these alternative food systems (25).

Jarosz (26) explores AFNs in particular locations in order to understand relationships of trust and cooperation. Instead of focusing on the “local,” she looks at regional food networks embedded in rural landscapes that are nested within globalized agro-industrial commodity and capital flows. When it comes to the pursuit of progressive local scale development, there is a need to emphasize the formation and mobilization of a consciousness of justice and a multi-scale understanding of place that can then be linked with other local scale ventures and/or larger scale actors (27).

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4 Addressing initiatives such as community-supported agriculture, farmers' markets, local  
5  
6 food campaigns, and certain organic communities, Allen (28) points out the gap between the  
7  
8 intent and the outcome in these networks. Indeed, social justice (or democracy or sustainability),  
9  
10 not localization or globalization, should be the focus for changing the structure of the current  
11  
12 food system (25). Organic initiatives are an example where social justice needs to be addressed  
13  
14 and a convergence of movements may bring about equitable change in the food system. As  
15  
16 organic sales have grown, the distance between producer and consumer has increased, causing  
17  
18 some organic agriculture to look quite similar to conventional production (29). One indication of  
19  
20 this conventionalization of organic agriculture is the employment of migrant wage labor and the  
21  
22 abandonment of many sustainable agronomic practices (30).  
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28 Integrity of any alternative agricultural system should cultivate competition among  
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30 producers for the highest possible standards instead of one that pushes practices toward the  
31  
32 lowest common denominator (31). Raynolds (29) discusses a convergence of the Fair Trade and  
33  
34 organic movements in order to re-assert the organic movement's founding concepts, and DuPuis  
35  
36 (32) introduces Fair Trade markets as potential alternatives for smaller organic farmers to gain  
37  
38 access to mainstream buyers. Overall, there needs to be further empirical research and analysis in  
39  
40 the places and space of production and there is a need for research to connect Fair Trade  
41  
42 production and markets at all scales (e.g., global, national, regional, local, household) (33).  
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48 International Fair Trade is intended to provide an alternative to the conventional market  
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50 where the masses are excluded from active participation, the degradation of the environment is  
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52 tolerated, and where labor becomes another commodity through the objectification of human  
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54 relationships (34). Fair Trade exists because international commodity chains lack transparency  
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56 and this creates distrust in global food systems (35). Consumers in the global north perceive  
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4 unfairness in the structure of conventional food trade and consumer research has focused on the  
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6 socio-psychological aspects that motivate purchases (36). Indeed, some research goes so far as to  
7  
8 state that a Fair Trade purchase “is essentially a bundle of a base product and a donation to the  
9  
10 supplier” (37). Fair Trade is bolstered by the fact that unfair economic relationships are the  
11  
12 direct result of trade priorities and criteria set by the global north, but impacting producers in the  
13  
14 global south (38). Thus “Fair Trade seeks to transform North/South relations by fostering ethical  
15  
16 consumption, producer empowerment, and certified commodity sales” (39).  
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21           Some voice concern about adopting an international term for a domestic movement (40),  
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23 but others would argue that there is potential for Domestic Fair Trade (DFT) to develop links  
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25 with other values-based consumer campaigns and to expand consumers’ conceptualization of  
26  
27 Fair Trade (1). These links have the potential to broaden the understanding and applicability of  
28  
29 the Fair Trade principles that are focused on restructuring markets at home (41 and 42).  
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33           DFT can help resolve some of these issues and create more of a civic coordination among  
34  
35 participants in the food network (38). Many of these local food systems have developed in  
36  
37 uneven patterns and in idiosyncratic ways and could benefit from a set of standards that might  
38  
39 bring a more systematic and cohesive approach to alternative food systems (41). Alternative  
40  
41 systems in the US could benefit from local autonomy through DFT. This local autonomy as  
42  
43 described by Bellows and Hamm (43) is not an isolated process of self-sufficiency, but rather the  
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45 ability to negotiate power and needs from a local starting point across geographic space and  
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47 across barriers of social constructs.  
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52           A co-operative model of food and agriculture has developed as a social and economic  
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54 movement, through which consumers have personal relationships with co-operative members  
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56 who in turn have direct links to southern partners through International Fair Trade (44). Co-ops  
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4 typically have a place in the International Fair Trade market, so introducing and integrating DFT  
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6 could have the potential to provide more support for the Fair Trade movement and bring more  
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8 consumer and producer education to the workings of fair trade in the north and the south. “By  
9  
10 utilizing ‘Fair Trade’ as a universal term to describe a broader range of alternative market  
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12 initiatives, consumers might be better educated to make the links between the processes driving  
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14 small farmers in both north and south to economic collapse and off the land.” (42).  
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19 In a study conducted by Howard and Allen (45), consumer willingness to pay for DFT  
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21 points to co-operative food stores and buying clubs as promising outlets for establishing DFT.  
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23 Their study suggests efforts to establish DFT should begin by targeting retail outlets frequented  
24  
25 by these types of alternative consumers, namely consumer food co-operatives. Incorporation of  
26  
27 DFT into co-ops can set the stage for empowerment where contractual mechanisms exist  
28  
29 between consumers and producers on the construction of collective choices (46). Through this  
30  
31 type of mechanism and co-operation, DFT networks can link regional consumers and producers.  
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36 Because the DFT movement is so young, there is very little information on how it  
37  
38 actually intersects with different groups of stakeholders within AFNs and whether it is a  
39  
40 movement capable of creating ethical linkages across social and physical space. Indeed,  
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42 interaction between DFT and co-ops seems particularly logical because of their common  
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44 principles, and the fact that both are propelled by stakeholders with similar goals for equity in  
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46 food production and consumption. In light of all of the emerging AFN players, the question  
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48 arises: do co-ops and DFT goals overlap and work in unison to promote social and political  
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50 change throughout alternative food systems?  
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## Methods

This research explores the experiences and practices of co-ops to understand how DFT influences the AFN movement in the United States. This research sought to identify reasons for co-ops' involvement with the DFTA and the methods of integrating DFT principles into their organizational practices. Further, the research illuminates how the institutional goals of DFT are practiced within day to day operations of co-ops in the US. In order to investigate these relationships, we answer two specific questions: First, how do co-op managers describe their co-op's experiences with the integration of DFT? Second, what are the key focus points for DFT at the organizational level and how do those compare with what food co-operatives are actually implementing? Through the exploration and analysis of these questions, this study illuminates the extent to which the DFT movement is present within co-ops.

The National Co-operative Grocer's Association (NCGA) acts to unify business services for natural food co-ops in the United States. They "represent 128 food co-ops operating 165 stores in 35 states with combined annual sales of over \$1.4 billion and over 1.3 million consumer-owners." (47). The NCGA is an organizational member of the DFTA, which means that all co-ops are loosely affiliated with this organization. For this study, however, we specifically focus on co-ops that are individual members of the DFTA, which is beyond the umbrella affiliation that co-ops have through the NCGA umbrella.

Co-ops with specific interest in the DFT movement were selected for participation in this study in order to best understand the fledgling nature of these inter-relationships within the broader context AFNs in the US. In total, there are six consumer food co-ops that are independent members of the DFTA, and five agreed to participate in this research. Thus, a manager at five co-ops participated in an interview and these texts were transcribed. Qualitative

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4 analysis (constant comparative method) was conducted on the interview transcript data (48, 49,  
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6 and 50). The participating co-ops are located across the US: Massachusetts (2), New York (1),  
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8 Minnesota (2). While each of these co-ops has a similar structure and organization, some  
9  
10 characteristics vary which makes each of their experiences with the integration of DFTA into  
11  
12 their business unique (Table 1).  
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16 This study also included a document analysis of key documents from four years of DFTA  
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18 annual meetings (2007-2010). Specifically, this textural analysis included: meeting minutes,  
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20 program outlines, meeting schedules, topics of presentations, and discussion topics. Content  
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22 analysis was used to determine the key focus points of DFT at the organizational level (51).  
23  
24 Finally, the qualitative cross-case comparison analysis was used to combine findings from the  
25  
26 interview data and document data (48 and 50). This provides an assessment of how co-op  
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28 experiences parallel or diverge from DFT organizational goals.  
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## 36 **FINDINGS**

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39 Based on the results from the interviews with co-op managers, two common themes  
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41 emerged: 1) DFT concepts are inherent within co-op activities and 2) many challenges exist for  
42  
43 incorporating DFT into co-op business practices (Table 2).  
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49 *DFT inherent in Co-op.* The consensus among all co-op managers was that DFT was an  
50  
51 extension of their existing values and beliefs. Yet, co-ops reported placing a low priority on  
52  
53 specific DFT work. In fact, several noted inactivity (*Finding 1*) related to DFT. Indeed,  
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55 becoming paying members of the DFTA and supporting the organization are the two primary  
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57 activities that co-ops noted when asked to describe their DFT activities. They have time for little  
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4 else, according to Co-op Manager 4, DFT is “on the back burner, so to speak.” Multiple times  
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6 during the interviews, the managers noted that becoming a member of the DFTA takes a  
7  
8 considerable amount of time and money. Busy co-op managers say they simply do not have  
9  
10 additional time to specifically address DFT issues “separate” from other topics of relevance to  
11  
12 their members and consumers. They feel that their co-ops already integrate fair trade principles  
13  
14 into their business practices, so devoting additional time and resources to the DFTA was not  
15  
16 necessary. “Food co-ops can do very well by using FT principles and DFT principles... with or  
17  
18 without the [DFTA] organization.”(Co-op Manager 3).  
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24 Co-op managers say they promote DFT through educating consumers (*Finding 2*) in the  
25  
26 form of store demos, articles in monthly newsletters, and in-store bulletin boards. Through this  
27  
28 education, other stakeholders within the food chain are also becoming more aware of Fair Trade  
29  
30 issues. Another aspect of the DFT movement is increased communication and partnerships  
31  
32 (*Finding 3*) among AFNs. Co-op managers mentioned that the issues of DFT was sometimes a  
33  
34 topic for discussion with other co-operatives and with local farmers. “Fair trade is a topic that  
35  
36 comes up, but I wouldn’t say it is a reason for the communication...more that there’s been more  
37  
38 communication about that because of enhanced communication between co-ops overall” (Co-op  
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67 On the other hand, Co-op Manager 3 said that the concept of DFT opened up  
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69 communication which had a positive impact: better business opportunities for them and their  
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71 producers (*Finding 4*). “We’ve literally been able to write fair trade agreements with producers  
72  
73 and it’s helped them grow their business and it’s helped us get the right product. And we’re  
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75 doing that even when those farms aren’t certified [organic] because it just makes sense. I mean  
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77 they’re principles that make sense both financially and ethically.” In this case, the co-op is using  
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4 fair trade principles to build collaboration with local farmers rather than using “certified organic”  
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6 as a criteria for identifying farmers.  
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11 *Challenges for Incorporating DFT in co-ops.* Co-op managers said that despite the various  
12 opportunities for supporting and getting involved in the DFTA, they are often unable to  
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14 participate or promote DFT in significant ways. The organization solicits participation in  
15  
16 committees, but the co-ops are mostly inactive, as members and staff do not have time to build  
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18 interactions.  
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24 In their interviews, co-op managers were asked to estimate the percent of items in their  
25 store that they considered DFT products. Three of the interviewees indicated that most of the  
26 domestic products they carry embody the principles of DFT but they are not labeled as such.  
27  
28 Indeed, there is currently no certification or labeling (*Finding 5*) for DFT, so no tracking  
29  
30 mechanism is in place. Unless an organization is a member of the DFTA and the co-op  
31  
32 investigates a producer’s DFTA membership, they cannot technically consider a product DFT.  
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38 Few co-ops spend time to conduct this verification.  
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40

41 While the lack of labeling is an issue with DFT, the introduction of another label within  
42 the AFN marketplace is significant concern. Consumers must read and understand a lot of  
43  
44 information at a typical co-op and it may be too much to introduce one more label or term. There  
45  
46 is already oversaturation of labeling, criteria, and adjectives in the grocery marketplace; adding  
47  
48 another label would add to the confusion (Co-op Manager 4, 2010).  
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53 Managers often view their relationships within local food networks as an embodiment of  
54 DFT. Co-op Manager 3 went on to explain that they sell local foods, which they define as items  
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56 grown within 151 miles of the co-op:  
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4 We call it “Area 151” and the food products that we buy in that area are 17% of  
5 our total food purchases in a year. And so, while we strive to have open and fair  
6 relationships with all of those organizations (all those businesses) we can’t say  
7 that they’re fair trade.  
8  
9

10 While DFT overlaps with local food, it may also compete with international Fair Trade (*Finding*  
11 6), which is a fairly recognizable label that extends beyond co-ops and natural food stores into  
12 the mainstream marketplace (Co-op Manager 4). There is a lot attention going to local food  
13 initiatives right now and international FT is a largely accepted and recognized label, therefore  
14 trying to incorporate yet another movement or label is too much for consumers (Co-op Manager  
15 2, 2010).  
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24 Some Americans lack an understanding of the need for Fair Trade in the US context  
25 (*Finding 7*). Two co-op managers described this challenge:  
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30 I think as North Americans, it’s hard for people to conceive that there should be a  
31 justification for fair trade. They may look at that making the leap from looking at  
32 Central American or a South African country that have poor people and what fair  
33 trade can do for them (they can grasp that or think of that), but I think it’s a harder  
34 leap when you’re talking about that being in our same country (Co-op Manager  
35 2).  
36  
37

38 I think a lot of people in this country just assume that there’s no need for DFT  
39 rules and regulations because after all, this is the US and we don’t do terrible  
40 things like they do in “third world countries.” So, it’s more than education, it’s  
41 breaking perceptions. That will be tough...and to do that without admonishing  
42 will be a difficult task” (Co-op Manager 5, 2010).  
43  
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46 These co-op managers explained that there is a strong network for international Fair Trade issue,  
47 but a lack of consumer understanding when it comes to our domestic food system. For example,  
48 some consumers assume that organic certification includes social/economic concepts to help  
49 family farms.  
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54 Managers believe that their customers view fair trade as “somewhat important” (Figure  
55 2). But all interviewees said their ranking was an average and that there are definitely “core  
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4 customers” who care very deeply about the issue. On the other hand, some customers probably  
5  
6 do not think about DFT at all. Indeed, managers say that most shoppers do not care about DFT,  
7  
8 and would not pay more for a product just because it claimed to be DFT (*Finding 8* and 9).  
9  
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11 Manager 3 stated pointedly, “...there’s certainly a core group that would place it higher, but I  
12  
13 think right now, in this climate, they could take it or leave it.”  
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16 The findings from these interviews leads to a better understanding of each co-op’s  
17  
18 experience with integrating DFT into their business. Next, the analysis explores the  
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20 extent to which DFT goals at the organizational level are manifest in co-ops.  
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## 28 **DFTA Focus and Co-ops**

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31 The DFTA is a non-governmental organization that plays a key role in the Fair Trade  
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33 movement (40) as it seeks to “promote and protect the integrity of DFT principles through  
34  
35 education, marketing, advocacy and endorsement” (52). The DFTA upholds these diverse and  
36  
37 multi-faceted principles: “family scale farming, capacity building for producers and workers,  
38  
39 democratic & participatory ownership & control, rights of labor, equality & opportunity, direct  
40  
41 trade, fair & stable pricing, shared risk & affordable credit, long-term trade relationships,  
42  
43 sustainable agriculture, appropriate technology, indigenous peoples’ rights, transparency &  
44  
45 accountability, education & advocacy, responsible certification and marketing, and animal  
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47 welfare” (52).  
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53 The DFTA clearly recognizes the important position that co-ops play in building AFNs.  
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55 In fact, the DFTA adopted a resolution supporting the “2012: International Year of Co-  
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57 operatives,” which states that they “recognize and promote the vital role of co-ops in the food  
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4 system and in the economic and social well-being of communities from the global level to the  
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6 local; encourage stakeholders in the food system to consider how the values and principles of the  
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8 co-operative movement relate to those of Fair Trade and can contribute to health, justice and  
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10 sustainability” (53)  
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14 Indeed, co-ops fit into the DFTA membership structure as a retailer. The DFTA has four  
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16 different membership categories: 1) farmer organization, 2) farmworkers’ organization, 3)  
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18 retailer/processor/marketer/manufacture, and 4) non-governmental organization (54). All  
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20 members pay annual dues based on their sales or operating budget, and these vary from under  
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22 \$100 to several tens of thousands of dollars. Members are expected to formally endorse the  
23  
24 principles of DFT and constantly make progress toward the goal of full compliance (55).  
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28  
29 In addition to its informative website, the DFTA holds an annual meeting where members  
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31 participate in the decision-making process for the association and discuss issues and concerns.  
32  
33 Document content analysis was used to create a list of key topics from each DFTA annual  
34  
35 meetings, held in 2007-2010 and Figure 3 provides a comparison of the interview findings and  
36  
37 meeting focus point findings. This illuminates how the experiences conveyed by the co-op  
38  
39 managers relate to what occurs at the professional level. This cross case comparison further  
40  
41 explores the findings that emerged from the interview portion of this study.  
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46 The nine interview findings are listed across the top of the matrix and the DFTA key  
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48 focus points are listed in alphabetical order in the left-hand column. Interview findings that are  
49  
50 linked to one of the focus points are shown by an X in the corresponding box. The result of this  
51  
52 comparison is a visual representation of how the co-op findings merge or overlap with the  
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54 professional level goals of the group. Consequently, we are able to see which issues both the co-  
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56 op managers and the DFTA find important.  
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4 Results from this comparison indicate that more key points are applicable to findings two  
5 and eight than to the other findings. Thus the co-ops emphasis on education of consumers fits  
6 well with the goals of the DFTA. Further, the fact that co-ops work to help small scale farmers is  
7 in line with DFT goals. Finally, increasing awareness of DFT is a point where the co-ops and the  
8 professional organization are united. Interview findings one and five both related to four of the  
9 key points, thus DFT labeling is of interest to both the organization and the co-ops, but at the  
10 same time the co-ops lack time for promoting DFT issues. The remaining interview findings  
11 related to three or less of the key focus points, which indicates that co-ops do not intersect with a  
12 large number of DFTA goals.  
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## 32 **Recommendations**

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35 These findings provide insight into co-ops' experiences and how DFTA goals have been  
36 realized in co-ops over the last five years. While several key goals do overlap between these two  
37 stakeholder groups, there is much room for increased collaboration. At this point, the overlap  
38 between co-ops and DFT exists at the conceptual level, as both share a common vision for a  
39 more equitable agricultural system. Unfortunately for the DFT movement, co-ops tend to  
40 promote these common goals without recognizing them as DFT. If the DFTA is to succeed in  
41 linking with co-ops to educate their consumers, several changes must occur. The following  
42 discussion is centered on key recommendations for the future of the DFT movement within food  
43 co-ops.  
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4 *Membership.* Because membership is a fairly lengthy, expensive, and time consuming process,  
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6 many co-ops do not currently see the need to join this professional organization. Certainly DFT  
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8 principles can be carried out by co-ops without them going through the paperwork and expense  
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10 of individual membership in the DFTA. But the fact is that co-ops do not recognize or advertise  
11  
12 their actions as DFT. If the DFTA seeks to be the unifying organization in the movement, it  
13  
14 must advertise the benefits of membership and provide incentives for expanding their member  
15  
16 base. To succeed, the DFTA must provide their members with a clearer picture of what DFT is  
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18 and what the future holds for the movement. This organization must create a network of  
19  
20 members who spread the word and motivate others to become involved in the growing  
21  
22 movement. Co-ops are the ideal venue for education about DFT issues, as this consumer base is  
23  
24 already informed about food issues and considers information a necessary component of food  
25  
26 shopping. Given that co-ops are places to promote DFT, it is surprising that very few co-ops are  
27  
28 actually involved with the movement’s pivotal organization. Increasing co-op membership  
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30 would be a valuable undertaking for the DFTA.  
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41 *Co-ops as DFT Zones.* The idea that food co-ops should be declared “DFTA zones”  
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43 initially came from the 2009 DFTA annual meeting. Clearly co-ops have a unique position in the  
44  
45 fair trade marketplace for a number of reasons. Co-ops have more personal relationships with  
46  
47 various stakeholders in the food network than other retail spaces might. They integrate the social  
48  
49 and political aspects of food consumption into their business model. They have access to other  
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51 AFNs in the country due to the strong co-op network. Finally, co-ops have an educated “foodie”  
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53 consumer base that could take the DFT movement to the next level of acceptance among the  
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55 general public. Our findings indicate that the co-ops are beginning to realize that DFT has the  
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4 potential to build new channels of communication among multiple stakeholders throughout the  
5  
6 alternative food network. Therefore, if the DFTA promotes co-ops as DFT zones, they may be  
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8 able to address their goal of uniting stakeholders. However, key barriers remain, especially  
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10 related to geographic variations across the food landscape.  
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16 *Local/Regional Fair Trade.* This is an issue of scale. Our findings suggest that the  
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18 national DFTA organization may be unable to accomplish the real-world goals of linking farmers  
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20 to consumers in the US. Indeed, the popularity and success of the local food movement indicates  
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22 that alternative networks are focusing on local scale relationships rather than national level  
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24 organizations. Creating regional chapters was discussed at the 2009 DFTA annual meeting.  
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26 This may also allow DFT goals to be promoted by locavores, who also seek to avoid large scale,  
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28 industrial food distribution. Grassroots local food initiatives would see little value in a national  
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30 organization of DFTA, but might be willing to promote the concept of local fair trade (as an off-  
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32 shoot of domestic fair trade).  
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38 Further complicating the issue of scale is how the organic agricultural movement has  
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40 evolved. DFT provides an opportunity to define a set of structures that could be used to help  
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42 consumers understand how their food is produced, which would build an educated consumer  
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44 base. This could help farmers earn a fair wage for their products. DFT could be developed into a  
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46 label which would provide consumers with confidence that their purchase is helping a family  
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48 farmer remain viable. As it now stands, the local food movement is coming to the forefront of  
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50 American society: consumers want to know their farmer. If we each go to a growers' farmers  
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52 market, we can meet the people whose hard work created our food. But this lacks viability at a  
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4 larger scale, as distant populations are unlikely to meet their farmers, even if s/he is a smaller  
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6 scale “family farm”.

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9 This research suggests that promoting DFT may be an effective way to educate and  
10  
11 involve locavores in the broader fair trade movement. But to do this effectively, more DFT  
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13 products must be labeled (and this implies a certification to verify the label). Regional chapters  
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15 of the DFTA could carry out the necessary regional evaluations and strive to determine criteria  
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17 for compliance with DFT principles at this geographic scale: Local/Regional Fair Trade.  
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21 While overarching DFT standards could be used to unify the movement and increase  
22  
23 awareness among stakeholders participating in various links of the food chain, regional  
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25 implementation would maintain local richness in these alternative food networks. Given the  
26  
27 controversies and dilemmas of industrial organic and the fact that certified organic only verifies  
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29 production methods/materials, DFT can fill the need of providing a valid, social certification for  
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31 small scale independent family farms.  
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## 38 **Conclusion**

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40 Findings from interviews and document analysis support the idea that DFT is a  
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42 “movement of movements.” Although the term may not always be used, Fair Trade principles  
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44 are being incorporated into co-ops through their relationships with local and regional producers.  
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46 Analysis of the DFTA meetings indicates that their key focus points involve integrating social  
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48 justice into organics, becoming a broader movement, and working to foster linkages among  
49  
50 different food stakeholder groups. Co-ops provide an ideal meeting place for these many AFN  
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52 players and DFTA must build stronger working relationships with co-ops if they are to reach  
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54 their common goal of eliminating inequalities in the US agricultural system.  
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4           Ultimately, this study points to the need for broader collaboration among AFN  
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6 stakeholders, specifically co-ops and Fair Trade within the US domestic setting. In order to  
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8 succeed, the DFT movement must educate consumers and producers about the need for a socially  
9  
10 equitable system of food production and sales in the global north. DFT, if it is to evolve  
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12 successfully, could include social concerns to balance the production-only criteria of certified  
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14 organic production. A DFT label could ensure a set of social standards that certified organic  
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16 does not address. Certified organic is a production standard in a codified system of “allowable”  
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18 substances in the field. Indeed, if stakeholders can be convinced of the efficacy of Fair Trade as  
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20 a unifying principle for AFNs, it could provide verification of the social sustainability that  
21  
22 industrial organic does not provide.  
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28           Whether DFT objectives will become a broader movement for social and political change  
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30 throughout conventional and alternative food systems is yet to be determined. The movement is  
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32 new and there are still many barriers to be overcome. Insights and findings from this study,  
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34 however, indicate that there is great potential to unify numerous stakeholders. Specifically,  
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36 linkages between locavores and organic farming could be realized through DFT principles and  
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38 articulated by co-ops.  
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43           In light of the various emerging stakeholders in AFNs, both co-ops and DFT could  
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45 promote a broader movement for social and political change throughout conventional and  
46  
47 alternative food systems. With the help of concerned co-op consumers, the DFT movement has  
48  
49 the potential to build an equitable alternative food system within the US domestic context that  
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51 supersedes social divides and physical space. If it is successful, co-ops and DFT could empower  
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53 farmers and consumers to create meaningful, fair relationships that succeed outside the  
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55 globalizing food economy.  
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Table 1. Structure of Sampled Food Co-ops

Co-op Location	Year EST.	Members / Owners	Staff	2010 Annual Sales	Retail Stores	Board	Mgmt Structure
MA 1	1981	Approx. 2,200	65-70	\$7.9 million	1	9	General manager & mgmt team
MA 2	1977	1,990	74	\$7.8 million	2	11	3-person mgmt team
MN 1	1972	950 households	25	Unknown	1	6	General manager & mgmt team
MN 2	1972	Approx. 7,500	185	\$21.3 million	1	9	General manager & mgmt team
NY	1976	6,778	75	\$13.5 million	1	8	Mgmt team: 11 managers

**Table 2. Domestic Fair Trade: Common Themes among Co-op Managers**

<b>Theme 1: DFT inherent in Co-ops</b>	
<b>Finding 1</b>	DFT activities are inactive and considered low priority by co-op managers.
<b>Finding 2</b>	Education of consumers and helping small farms grow are important accomplishments for co-ops (seen as promotion of DFT).
<b>Finding 3</b>	Co-ops create opportunities for open communication, partnerships, and fair relationships with other stakeholders in alternative food networks (seen as DFT).
<b>Finding 4</b>	Currently, interaction with the DFTA depends mostly on the individual co-ops seeking support.
<b>Theme 2: Challenges for incorporating DFT into co-op business practices</b>	
<b>Finding 5</b>	There is no DFT certification or labeling; no tracking mechanism to assess percentage of products that are DFT.
<b>Finding 6</b>	DFT is often interchanged with other alternative food network terms, also seen as competing with other AFNs.
<b>Finding 7</b>	DFT faces a perception that farmers/producers/laborers in North America do not face similar injustices as those in Global South nations.
<b>Theme 3: Co-op Consumer knowledge of DFT</b>	
<b>Finding 8</b>	Co-op managers say that stakeholders within their food network possess little awareness of the co-op's commitment to DFT.
<b>Finding 9</b>	Managers believe fair trade is important to a majority of their customers, but feel they are not willing to pay a higher price for it.

Figure 1 Map Coop Locations

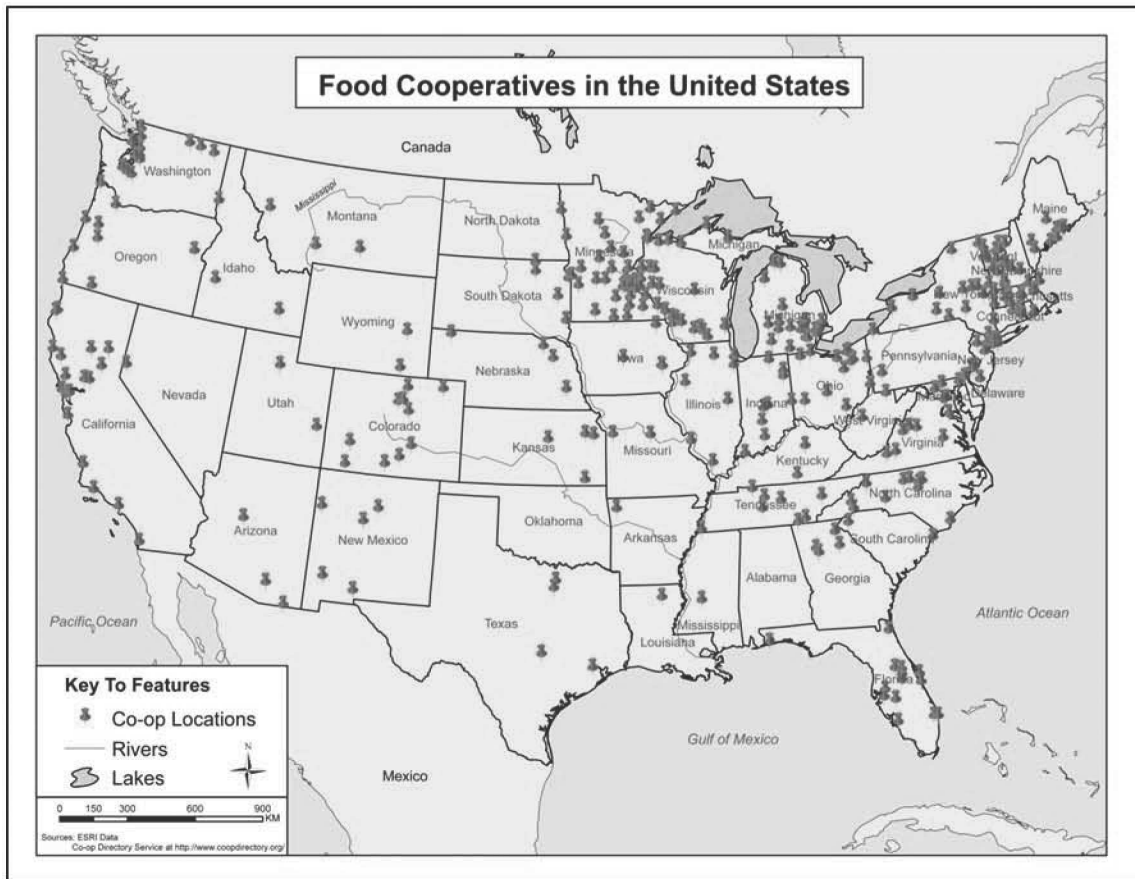


Figure 1. Locations of Food Co-ops in the United States

Figure 2 Manager Ranking DFT

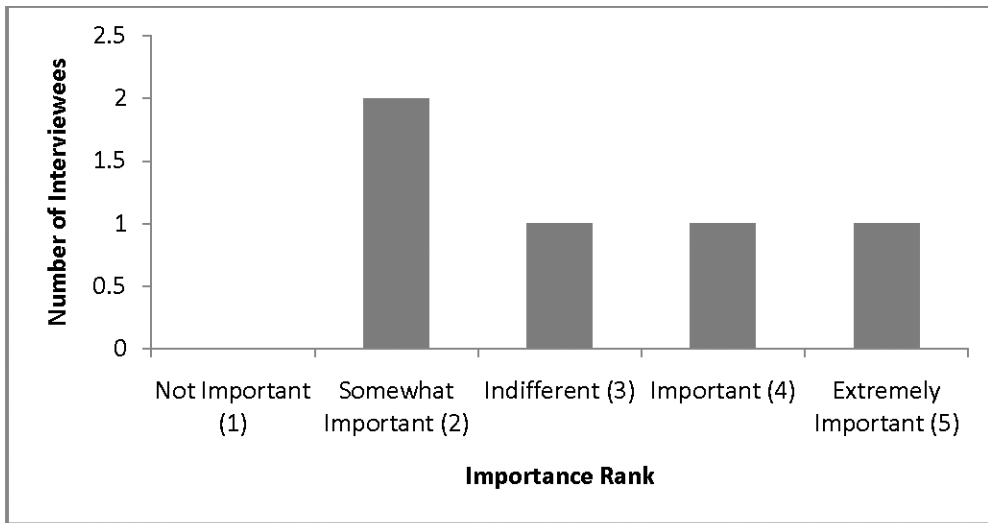


Figure 2. Co-op Manager Ranking: “How Important is Fair Trade to your Customers?”



Thank you.

I have the correct format for the References now.