

SOCIOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF GROWING SUN VERSUS SHADE COFFEE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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Shade and sun coffee growing have different sociological and ecological costs and benefits. Within the Dominican Republic, both types of coffee are grown, providing an opportunity to compare and contrast how farmers determine which type of coffee to grow. Of the available methods for growing coffee, the literature indicates that shade coffee creates an environment that promotes greater biodiversity, protects the coffee plants from predators such as the coffee berry borer, and provides an “excellent peasant cash crop” (Philpott et al. 2008; Ambrecht and Gallego 2007; Brothers, Wilson, and Dwyer 2008). This study uses a qualitative method to explore how farmers in the Dominican Republic determine whether to grow sun or shade coffee and the environmental and sociological implications of those decisions. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight Dominican farmers and nongovernmental professionals. Questions regarding which type of coffee was grown, growing methods, and what factors influenced coffee growing methods were included. Results indicated that the type of coffee grown was influenced primarily by the type of seeds available, while growing methods depended on the scale of the farm and perceived market value of sun versus shade coffee. Small scale farmers emphasized that growing organic coffee using shade methods was better for the environment and provided them greater economic opportunities. These results indicate that the global organic niche market provides an opportunity for small scale Dominican farmers to be competitive; however, many small scale farmers find it challenging to afford organic certification.

Funding provided by the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) and The Gail M. and William M. Plater International Scholarship for Community Engagement.