# Limitations of ethical trading: a case study of the avocado market in North America

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Recibido el 22/09/2024
Aprobado el 07/11/2024

Cómo citar este artículo:
Pérez Yee-Palacios, P. (2025). Limitations of ethical trading: a case study of the avocado market in North America. Trans-pasando Fronteras, (22). https://doi.org/10.19846/retf.i22.7140

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**Resumen**

El mercado global del aguacate ha proliferado debido al aumento de la demanda, especialmente en América del Norte. Sin embargo, este auge en el comercio de aguacates ha llevado a importantes preocupaciones ambientales, particularmente la pérdida de hábitat. El cultivo de aguacate a gran escala está asociado con la deforestación y la interrupción de ecosistemas, lo que conlleva a la degradación de hábitats naturales. Estos problemas son más evidentes en regiones donde la producción de aguacate está concentrada, como México, el principal exportador a América del Norte. Ecosistemas críticos, como el del bosque de Oyamel, hogar de la mariposa Monarca en su fase de invernación, están siendo alterados negativamente para satisfacer la demanda de este producto. A medida que el comercio de aguacates continúa expandiéndose, las prácticas de comercio ético han surgido como un medio vital para equilibrar los beneficios económicos con métodos de agricultura sostenible. Este enfoque es crucial para mitigar daños ambientales adicionales y preservar la biodiversidad. Sin embargo, es esencial analizar críticamente las limitaciones del comercio ético, particularmente en lo que respecta a los estándares que rigen su implementación.

**Palabras clave:** Pérdida de hábitat – Comercio ético – Mercado del aguacate – Sustentabilidad – México

**Abstract**

The global avocado market has proliferated due to increased demand, especially in North America. However, this surge in avocado trade has led to significant environmental concerns, particularly habitat loss. Large-scale avocado farming is associated with deforestation and the disruption of ecosystems, leading to the degradation of natural habitats. These issues are most evident in regions where avocado production is concentrated, such as the state of Michoacan, Mexico, a leading exporter to North America. Critical ecosystems such as that of the Oyamel forest, home of the Monarch butterfly in its overwinter phase, are being negatively altered to meet demand. In addition, the avocado industry is also plagued by other critical issues, such as the impact of criminal activity on the local economy, which exacerbates these environmental concerns, and the limited effectiveness of Fairtrade, which has failed to significantly benefit both the Mexican avocado market and its US counterpart. As the avocado trade expands, ethical trading practices have emerged as a vital means of balancing economic benefits with sustainable farming methods. This approach is crucial for mitigating further environmental damage and preserving biodiversity. However, it is essential to critically analyze the limitations of ethical trading, particularly regarding the standards that govern its implementation.

**Keywords:** Habitat loss – Ethical trading – Avocado market – Sustainability – Mexico

## Introduction

Mass-scale agricultural production represents one of the contemporary ecological problems in the global agenda. This essay will evaluate the impacts driven by the mass production of avocado (Persea americana) in the state of Michoacan, Mexico. Focusing on the Avocado Hass variant, a product whose demand has increased over the past two decades finding its way into more and more markets around the world. This case study will use data collected from Mexico and the United States, where the former is categorized as producer and exporter, and the latter as importer and consumer to assess the reasons behind growing avocado demand. Firstly, there is a detailed introduction around the origins of Avocado Hass and its entry into the market (Williams, Capps. and Hanselka, 2017; ), explaining its positioning as a combination of both inherited traits of the bred, and favorable commercial legislative standards. There is a brief evaluation of the role of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in exponentiating agricultural production in Mexico, accompanied by the support of product positioning in the market through its advertising in social events like the Superbowl, and the discard of other hypotheses of increased demands such as increased plant-based diets (Cramer et al., 2017). After this section, the consequences of satisfying such demand are appraised, initially explaining negative ecological impacts that result from the expansion of Avocado Hass plantations in the state of Michoacan, Mexico (Cho, et al., 2021; Vargas-Canales, et al., 2020;).

Further, socioeconomic consequences, such as the increased participation of organized crime and unresolved inequality, are also studied around the case of Michoacan, which is accountable for 70% of the avocado consumed in the U.S., as well as over 30% exported worldwide. These substantial percentages heightened the pressure imposed on Michoacan´s natural environment. An assessment of changes and problems that arose from the production augmentation will follow, linking deforestation and biodiversity lost in Michoacan with agricultural production (De la Vega-Rivera, and Merino-Pérez, 2021; Gonzalez-Duarte, 2021), more drastically seen in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO natural area of immense importance for biodiversity. The Biosphere Reserve is constituted by Oyamel forests, ecosystems that serve as hibernation locations for Monarch butterflies (Danaus plexippus). These butterflies are insects of great beauty that embark every year on one of the most amazing migratory phenomena. They travel a distance of above 4 500 kilometers from the North of the United States and the South of Canada to the forests in central Mexico until temperatures are favorable enough to return north for spring and summer. Their existence, however, is threatened, and they are considered a species in danger of extinction due to habitat loss (Advani, 2015). In response to this scenario, as well as growing concerns on the

consumer side for organic foods (Hattam, Lacombe, and Holloway, 2012) ethical label ´Fairtrade´ enter the market. The final two sections of this essay focus on the operation of agency and inclinations of market-driven ethical trading.

For the analysis of Fairtrade, this essay relies on a literature review that includes scholars such as Goodman (2004), Fridell (2006), Blowfield and Dolan (2010), and Barrientos (2000). Adding to the critique of this trading mechanism in the context of the avocado market between Mexico and the United States, that Fairtrade´s most noticeable contribution is confined to its capacity to provide branding and know-how for facilitating the introduction of farmers to the international avocado export market. This last, by making them capable of meeting regulatory standards dictated by current trade policy. However, further comments on the motivations for the introduction of a product to Fairtrade are made, questioning if market-driven ethical trading schemes can serve as integrated approaches capable of addressing the ecological, social, and economic aspects of the production of agricultural goods. Lastly, the questioning of the criteria for accessing ethical consumption and commodities that are sustainably sourced and produced is made, observing that international retailers only apply ethical trading standards in the context where their profit depends on it.

## The history of avocado and its entry into the market

In less than 20 years, avocado consumption in the United States (U.S.) tripled. As cited in Cho et. al (2021), where the Avocado Annual report published by the USDA Global Agricultural Service (2018) is summarized, between the years 2001 and the year 2017, the per-capita acquisition of avocado went from 1 kg. to 3.6 kg. on average. The afore, translates to a total of around 2 million metric tons of exports of avocado. However, the consumption inclines towards one variant of the fruit commonly known as Avocado Hass. It is important to understand the origins of the avocado as we know it today, as well as having knowledge that there are avocado breeds because they resulted in the fruit we eat today in the everyday life; This variant of avocado, out of dozens of varieties, is the most consumed worldwide. Its ´creation´ is attributed to Rudolph Hass, a postman from California who experimented with different avocado trees until he managed to grow a new breed (The California Avocado Commission, 2013). Since the late 1920s, when Avocado Hass started being distributed, it rapidly overcame the California market. The success was such that Hass even acquired a patent for his breed. However, he had little control over seed distribution, and eventually,

production of this breed which has an unclear biological background expanded beyond California´s borders. Rudolph Hass was not a pioneer in the domestication of avocados, however, this breed benefitted from providing a longer sense of ´freshness´, a trait that is present as a popular demand in food markets constantly (Williams, Capps, and Hanselka, 2017).

Avocado Hass is characterized by its black hard peel and its soft pulp free from coarse fibers. For the U.S. and other international markets, Avocado Hass is the most consumed variant, and sometimes even the only one. Discarding the fact that the domestication of avocado dates to the year 4000-2800 B.C.E.. (Piñero Dolman, 2012), having found seeds in the Valley of Oaxaca and Tehuacan, this fruit has had an ongoing domestication practice that continued, either naturally or artificially, for centuries resulting in over 400 variants of the fruit (SEECO, 2016). All of them are traced back to one main species taxonomically classified under the accepted name of Persea americana (Piñero Dolman, 2012; WWO, 2023). All variants fluctuate in shape, color, and even texture, finding some with trades so diverse that even have edible peels. However, Avocado Hass excels for its more outstanding trait, which is having a longer shelf life (Flores, 2018). Avocado Hass attributes are not the sole reason for the bred taking over so many others. The expansion of the Avocado Hass market is constantly accompanied by commerce legislation standards that have to be fulfilled by the producing country, in this case, Mexico, to retain its place in the target market, the U.S. market. The main legislative driver in this context is the North American Free Trade Agreement, now reformed and renamed as United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. In both cases, Mexico becomes the main supplier of agricultural goods, an economic sector that responds and adapts to market demand. Thereupon finding that globalization´s trading conditions, where supply chains are derived from, change food systems (Vargas-Canales, et al., 2020), and landscapes where mass production occurs.

The avocado supply chain is composed of growers, packers, exporters, importers, and retailers (Cho, et al., 2021). However, the very end of these supply chains is consumers. Their necessities, either inherited or formulated by external factors, are what demand resembles. The considerable increase in avocado market demand in developed countries such as the U.S. can be linked to the allegation of higher socioeconomic development resulting in populations who demand foods for diets richer in nutrients (Kastner, t. et al., 2012). Avocado becomes a highly qualified nourisher. Alone in 100 gr. of avocado one is consuming around 507 mg of potassium, 54 mg of phosphorus, magnesium (29 mg), calcium (13 mg), and 8 mg of sodium (SEMARNAT, 2021), as well as a high percentage of lipids, and monounsaturated fatty acids in comparison with other fruits and vegetables (CONABIO, 2020). These attributes have earned avocados the label of a ‘superfood,’ a term commonly used to describe

highly nutritious foods (Barsby, et al., 2023). In turn, this ´classification´ has positioned avocados in sight of diverse social trends, such as becoming one of the preferred snacks in events like the annual National Football League (NFL) season finale game known as the Superbowl.

Alone in 2021, it was reported that Mexico exported 100,000 tones of avocado in the Superbowl season, which was mainly consumed in the form of guacamole (SEMARNAT, 2021). Something that would not have been possible before 1974, when the Free Trade Agreement entered into force. In fact, there was a ban on the importation of Mexican avocados into the United States that was effective for more than 80 years and ended only with NAFTA. The industry of avocados has become so successful that avocados are constantly advertised at the annual event. Revenues from some companies are so high, that in 2023, the brand ´Avocados from Mexico´ paid around 7 million dollars for a 30-minute advertisement to air their avocado commercial at the Superbowl (Enriquez, 2023). The effective branding of the product in the NFL context has had a considerable impact on the avocado market expansion, partially discarding other factors, such as an incrementation of plant-based diets. Where findings show that contrary to the possible hypothesis of diet choice being a considerable factor for increased demand, only about 10% of the U.S. population follows a plant-based inclined diet, and less than 3% of the population follows some form of animal meat-free diet (Cramer, et al., 2017). However, there are limitations to this last argument since there is little data that allows figures to be assessed rigorously. Nevertheless, the avocado market has increased, and supply is being met by demand relying on several diverse actors. This does not mean that every actor in the supply chain has substantially benefited from the expansion, nor that they all can afford million-dollar advertising campaigns.

The avocado market, like many other industries relying on neoliberal economic principles, presents disadvantages for raw goods producers, as products like fruits and vegetables are traded for low prices. Avoiding referring to other materials with higher trading prices as finished goods or products, because after all, fruits and vegetables are in themselves the entirety of the product for their consumption. Despite the latter, agricultural goods are traded for reduced prices, retailers favored by such market conditions, both acquiring salable goods profiting from market prices, and satisfying consumer basic needs. Some of these retailers, in the case of avocados, are grocery store giants like Costco and Kroger (Cho, et al., 2021). These retailers have taken the opportunity to integrate into this new consumer demand trend, where, as seen before, consumers opt to buy high-nutrient foods. The retailer's capacity has made possible the purchase and mobilization of exhaustive quantities of avocados from their place of origin to every available location in the United States. With a full-scale logistical capacity of transportation, delivery, and storage, avocados are

made available to consumers for regular consumption. This availability encompasses much more behind it than solely commercial logistics. As globalization prevails and expands, consumer awareness broadens, sowing restlessness for understanding who materializes the goods that are purchased at local stores, as well as how and where they are produced. The Avocado Hass that leads the U.S. market, for instance, roots back to Michoacan, Mexico.

**The cost behind a guacamole bowl**

The growing demand for avocados consequentially means a business expansion opportunity for farmers in Mexico, specifically, for those based around geographical areas that benefit from natural characteristics where avocado trees can be cultivated intensively. States like Jalisco, Guerrero, Estado de Mexico, and Michoacan present favorable conditions for avocado farming. Notwithstanding, up until 2016, Michoacan was the only state that exported the product to the United States (Williams, Capps, and Hanselka, 2017). These pre-existing conditions resulted in increased pressure on the natural environment of Michoacan. Michoacan de Ocampo is one of the 32 states of the United States of Mexico, situated in the central-west part of the country with a total area of 58 599 km2. It represents only 3% of the national territory (INEGI, 2016). Responsible for over 70% of the total national avocado production, which accounts for 34% of the global demand (De la Vega-Rivera, and Merino-Pérez, 2021). It is also the number one national producer of other agricultural goods such as raspberries, berries, peaches, and guavas because of its beneficial characteristics for agricultural practices, such as sandy and fertile soils, and advantageous weather conditions (Cho, et al., 2021); In the search to exploit Michoacan´s fertile soils, ideal for harvesting Avocado Hass, producers started and have continued to expand plantations, bypassing that avocado plantations are characterized as pesticide use (Cho, et al., 2021), both contributing to detrimental health issues for other living organisms. Avocado trees are also being used to supplant existing vegetation in the region (Gonzalez-Duarte, 2021).

It is estimated that 20% of deforestation in Michoacan between the years 2001 and 2007 is associated with the expansion of avocado plantations (Cho, et al., 2021). Deforestation is taking place in the Oyamel (Abies religiosa) forests. These forests are the only known ecosystem that can host Monarch butterflies in their overwintering phase. An animal species that entered the Red List of Threatened Species as Endangered of Extinction as published by the International Union for Conservation of Natura and Natural Resources (IUCN) (Epps, 2022). The forests serve as their



Trans-pasando Fronteras, Núm. 22, 2025. Cali-Colombia
ISSN 2248-7212 • ISSN-e 2322-9152

winter habitats after a migration of close to 4,500 kilometers beginning in the northern parts of the continent (CONABIO, 2021), where they hibernate until temperatures are high enough to return north. This ecosystem also hosts more than 70 endemic flora and fauna species (CONANP, 2022). Because of these singularities, the area is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. It has an extension of 56 260 ha (CONANP, 2022), and it is known as the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve (Gottfried, 2008). This Biosphere Reserve is administered by the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP) (National Commission for Natural Protected Areas) under federal law (Gonzalez-Duarte, 2021). It likewise hosts diverse Monarch butterfly Sanctuaries that expand across the state and up until Estado de Mexico. Due to this classification, human activities are highly restricted within the field of expansion. In areas considered as ´core´, trespassing during winter months is completely prohibited, affecting local inhabitants whose subsistence relies on the forest´s goods (Gonzalez-Duarte, 2021). Buffer areas have less restrictive management, allowing some ecotourism activities run by landowners known as ´ejidatarios´. This restriction, however, has failed when preventing natural degradation and biodiversity loss.

Despite providing zones free from intensive urbanization, the legislation has far from avoided impacts caused by human activity. As presented by Gonzalez-Duarte (2021), turning previously communal forests into virtually human-free reserves has provided adequate conditions for an increased presence of organized crime, which may also benefit from agricultural exports to the United States, by relying on their already existent and successful supply chains (e.g. cross border drug exportation). Similarly, illicit activities like logging continue to occur in spaces that are later utilized as avocado plantations, a shift supported by the local context where avocado is one of the main economic pillars (De la Vega-Rivera, and Merino-Pérez, 2021). Nevertheless, this has not meant equally distributed benefits for all actors involved in the avocado supply chain. In fact, it translates into more extensive and intensive ecological degradation, as well as derogatory conditions for local populations that face rising insecurity problems in an already violent region with the presence of drug dealers who also benefit from advantageous conditions for their harvests. Not to mention that market expansion has created even greater ecological pressure on peripheric natural areas that are not part of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve delimitation, spaces that are also vital for flora and fauna conservation (Cho, K. et al., 2021). Something that has been overlooked for many years by authorities, relying on a discourse of socioeconomic development, and reduced ecological damage from harvesting native species, such as avocados. However, sprouting concerns from externals have allowed to strengthen direct efforts for solving the expanding issue of habitat loss.

**The introduction of a different market: Fairtrade**

As explained previously, the forests where the avocado harvest is expanding, represent critical areas for the conservation of species and are now being replaced with monocropping of Avocado Hass. Local resistance has achieved little in this scenario. Environmental degradation is one of the most violently suppressed forms of opposition in Mexico, and Michoacan is not the exception. In 2020, one of the most important environmental activists fighting for the conservation of Monarch butterfly forests, Homero Gómez Guzmán, who was also the director of the Reserve at the time, was killed (Gonzalez-Duarte, 2021). This tragedy was a major setback for local conservation efforts in the area, a rural space where inhabitants are mainly low-income families, some identifying as indigenous Purepecha, that rely on agriculture for subsistence (De la Vega-Rivera, and Merino-Pérez, 2021). Because of the afore socioeconomic conditions, most of them can only enter the avocado market by relying upon already established producers or by benefiting from holding the status of ejidatarios. As De la Vega-Rivera and Merino-Pérez (2021) explain

> *"Avocado cultivation is not available to all farmers, but only those few with enough economic capacity to finance the establishment and care of the orchards for at least 4 years prior to the first harvest. …This high initial financial demand has led to a high concentration of avocado production in the hands of large farmers and even criminal groups" (p.7)*

Likewise, the requirement of not only monetary resources but extensive land availability, and time, incentivizes producers to use agrochemicals and pesticides that accelerate avocado harvesting, and even ´enhance´ the trees to produce bigger and standardized-sized fruits.

In response, or as a consequence of this concerning scenario, the most recognized ethical trading label across the globe ´Fairtrade´ began certifying avocados in 2010 to "address labor rights and environmental challenges in the industry and offer consumers responsible produced avocados" (Fairtrade America, p. 1, 2021). Allying with what they denominate as small-scale avocado farms where organic avocados are produced, they have joined avocado exporting to ensure the sale of chemical-free avocados that are bought by U.S.-based retailers. As with other Fairtrade products, producers get paid a Fairtrade Minimum Price that helps ameliorate the impacts of price falls. Only certified producers can, however, operate under this scheme. Once they are certified, they also have access to a Fairtrade Premium, which is an additional monetary amount provided to be reinvested in business or community projects. These Premiums are funded by the consumer itself. Fairtrade

avocado buyers pay, the majority of the time, higher prices than those buying avocados that are sourced differently. Alone in 2020, 3 million pounds of Fairtrade avocados were sold, earning $200,000 (non-specified currency) (Fairtrade America, 2021) worth of Premium for farmers. In Mexico, Fairtrade works in association with Proveedores Agrícolas Orgánicos (PRAGOR), a rural organic production company formed by a group of small-scale farmers that individually own an average of 10 acres of land.

PRAGOR has been working with Fairtrade certifications for 10 years, starting in 2013 when the farmers who make up this cooperative began formalizing their transition to organic cultivation methods. By leveraging their Fairtrade affiliation, they gained access to both the organic and Equal Exchange markets (Merrick, 2022). This strategic move has likely contributed to their annual sales of 3 million dollars, a success that can be attributed, in part, to the international recognition of the Fairtrade brand. Evidence, as presented in Hattam, Lacombe, and Holloway (2012), suggests that the organic avocado market, whose first certification occurred in 1993, has encountered difficulties in selling its products partly because of insufficient demand, and also because of its inability to meet size and ´quality ‘standards. By the year 2004, only 30% of organic avocados produced in Michoacan were sold (Hattam, Lacombe, and Holloway, 2012), and it was in the year 2006 when a new Organic Products Law that facilitates the exportation of organics entered into force. It is then possible that Fairtrade branding worked as a breakthrough for organic avocado sales. Additionally, this branding positioning could clarify PRAGOR products market penetration in a situation where exports to the United States were formerly solely controlled by the Packers and Exporters Association of Michoacan (APEAM by its acronym in Spanish) (Hattam, Lacombe, and Holloway, 2012). Then, Fairtrade´s most valuable input might be providing know-how rendered as the capacity for introducing to the market different exporters that meet regulatory standards dictated by current trade policy. Anyhow, Fairtrade and the positioning of their avocados as the supplier of a different sector of the market has broadened opportunities for formal exporters.

Additionally, it is important to understand that ethical trade emerges in the context of an already globalized society. Such, where consumers from developed countries demand corporate responsibility to cover labor conditions for suppliers in developing countries for trading ethically sourced products (Barrientos, 2000). Extending these requirements, without being reduced to sustainable and dignified practices surrounding the fetch, production, or harvest of a product. These characteristics are constricted in one small label carrying nothing but a logo, achieved through the medium of a stamp that attempts to reconnect consumers and producers economically and politically, as well as psychologically through the creation of a moral global economy (Goodman,

2004). This strategy, however, fails in the creation of a connection that is reciprocal in the opposite direction, meaning producer and consumer. This lack of correspondence in ethical trading ends up commodifying producers as low-income people in need, and therefore fails to project Premiums as ´trade´ and not ´aid´. More so, it separates local consumers from the idea of ethically sourced products, in a context where the same foreign retailers that commercialize the product in the United States also operate within Mexico but can do it with fewer restrictions, arguing here that this consumer-dependent movement (Goodman, 2004) only mobilizes ethics and morality, when the survival of a market in a specific geographical space depends on it.

## Criteria for ethical consumption

Efforts for implementing ethical trading are only enacted for commodities that are related to situations of detrimental life conditions, extensive exploitation, and vast ecological deterioration (Barrientos, 2000; Goodman, 2004). Ergo, it is difficult to distinguish if avocado ethical trading is promoted because of compelling social moral responsibilities, or if it is driven by commercial gain. The avocado market, as described before, has become a multimillion-dollar industry, whose presence is found in the most important events of the country that concentrates the greatest wealth share worldwide, making this good a highly demanded one. Satisfying this demand, as explained throughout this essay, bears not only social complications but also great ecological problems, like deforestation and biodiversity loss. However, ethical trading as enacted by Fairtrade´s scheme, far from solving issues from the root cause, transfers the responsibility for social justice and economic as well as ecologic well-being as the individual burden of consumers. It does it by adopting self-regulatory mechanisms, that seek the benefit of people at the beginning of the supply chain, while driven by the necessity of satisfying buyers´ demands to remain present in an already consolidated market (Barrientos, 2000). This trading zone guided by the fair trade model (Blowfield, and Dolan, 2010) paradoxically personifies the basic principles of neoliberal markets in its quest for sustainable and fair markets (Fridell, 2006).

It relies on free markets for the alleviation of poverty, while at the same time self-assigning the chore of regulating them. It depends on comparative advantage, pushing countries toward specialization in the production of goods they can produce at low cost, while simultaneously altering decision-making based on price signals by establishing a minimum set price. Then, ethical trading schemes, such as Fairtrade, do not seek substantial change. Nevertheless, they do provide potential

benefits for workers in the export sector (Barrientos, 2000). However, possessing other major challenges, such as its scope. Besides the exclusion of producers who cannot obtain certifications, Fairtrade products are only traded internationally, meaning that regulations do not apply to domestic suppliers. As Barrientos (2000) explains, it is easy to trace back fruits exported to the U.S. using barcodes that contain detailed information about their production and origins. However, local markets do not necessarily require stamps to be traded. Then, the question becomes: Why are local consumers left out when considering which groups should benefit from organic, sustainable, and ethical products? This emphasizes that, although there are local traders who use natural cultivation techniques, large transnational sellers rely on mass producers that turn to intensive and corrosive harvesting techniques (Cho, et al., 2021). In this context, Fairtrade competes with these very farmers, positioning its product by arguing that others are neither ethical nor organic.

Organic avocado production in Mexico, as explained in Hattam, Lacombe, and Hollaway (2012) is principally for export. Meaning that the organic market expansion has not had a further impact on the place where it is produced than benefits from Fairtrade´s Premiums. It is then plausible that Mexico´s national market requires more influential as well as larger groups of activists that, as Goodman says (2004), commit to the constitution of fair trade's political ecological imaginary, not overlooking a present scenario of repression, violence, corruption, and a consumer force experiencing and interacting in a non-contemporaneous socio-economical stage, in contrast to its counterparts from a country that is cataloged as a high-income country. Mexico, being a middle-income nation with a highly polarized market, such as other countries in Latin America, is evidently excluded from Fairtrade´s consumer benefits. Confining sustainable and pesticide-free foods sold in big retailer establishments only to their locations in high-income countries. The aforementioned reflects how market-driven ethical trading schemes lack characteristics for addressing the problems that arise from demand satisfaction of agricultural goods. Failing to provide a holistic approach that effectively responds to the ecological, social, and economic spheres.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay presents a case study of the avocado trade market that is exported from Michoacan, Mexico to the expanding market in the United States. Relying on the history of avocado breeds, that resulted in Avocado Hass, as the variant of the fruit that has proved more opportune for current market demands. The latter is fueled by almost three decades of trading



Trans-pasando Fronteras, Núm. 22, 2025. Cali-Colombia
ISSN 2248-7212 • ISSN-e 2322-9152

legislation where product standards are determined. The role of NAFTA and social trends introduced by marketing in events like the Superbowl are analyzed as the main mobilizers of the ongoing demand for avocados. The possible relationship between avocado´s growing demand and a substantial change in the population´s feeding habits is discarded. There should also be awareness that this essay fails to address the relevance of sociodemographic changes in the U.S. population, where the Hispanic population plays a significant role in avocado consumption (Williams, Capps, and Hanselka, 2017). Formerly, the consequences of satisfying the demand of the growing international avocado market are considered, focusing on negative ecological impacts that materialize in line with expanding avocado tree plantations. In this specific context, the negative impacts translate into circumstances such as deforestation of the Oyamel forests in Michoacan, which are home to the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a critical geographic area for the survival of the Monarch butterfly, as well as other 70 endemic species of flora and fauna. The relationship of conservation legislation in place, with insecurity and inequality is briefly discussed, to frame a clearer picture of why ethical trade emerged around avocado production.

The essay then turns to the evaluation of the role of Fairtrade in the matter, where market-driven fair trade models such as that of the Avocado Hass production in Michoacan provide a sensation for the consumer of a collapsing distance between them and the producer. But Fairtrade labels do not ameliorate the problems that satisfying demand is creating. For starters, deforestation percentages related to avocado plantation expansions are rising, and endangered species, such as the Monarch butterfly, are drastically dropping in numbers, finding that ethical trading catalysis is occasioned by market survival. For such reasons, the analysis concludes that Fairtrade´s most valuable input is its capacity to provide branding and know-how for facilitating the introduction of different actors capable of meeting regulatory standards dictated by current trade policy in the international avocado export market. This essay overlooks the critical role of brokers and middlemen as barriers to transparency in the supply chain, as well as the detrimental impact of dumping practices, which are often employed as a strategy to destabilize and undermine small farmers. It also only focuses on a specific importer country, excluding the growing market in other regions like Europe, where avocado imports have almost quadrupled (LNV, 2023). Lastly, the question of what the criteria for access to ethical consumption might be is constructed. As it stands, Fairtrade should be understood as an effort to enhance existing trading schemes, and not as an approach capable of delivering deeper structural changes.

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