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G.A.C.H.C. (lead editorial)

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EDITORIALS

UAlbany grant will encourage 'fair trade'

If you are reading this with your morning coffee, it could be "fair trade," meaning you are one of those people who cares not only about how coffee tastes, but about the environment, how workers are paid and treated in other countries, and how much farmers receive for their crops. One could even say it *should* be fair trade. Buying fair-trade coffee — and eventually other fair-trade products — will become easier, and more likely, thanks to a \$710,000 federal grant just awarded the University at Albany's Center for Technology in Government.

The grant is to develop a data network, which will be called I-CHOOSE, to provide consumers with detailed information about coffee that is grown in Mexico and distributed in the United States and Canada under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The effort will be in collaboration with international researchers and representatives of non-governmental organizations, who will work in Mexican communities to gather information on such matters as

wages, working conditions and environmental impact that are often not considered by consumers because they aren't known.

That's because, according to Theresa Pardo, project leader at UAlbany, "Most products consumed within NAFTA are produced and distributed through low-cost supply chains that typically do not reveal certain types of information to end consumers."

Free trade is important and low prices are nice, but fair trade is more important. Foreign workers shouldn't be exploited, the environment in developing countries shouldn't be ruined, to bring us cheap coffee, T-shirts, or whatever. And there are high costs and other problems that come with the low price, such as lost jobs to Third World countries as well as illegal immigration.

By discovering and providing information about products made elsewhere, this project could not only encourage consumers to consider and buy fair-trade products, but companies, organizations and policy makers to build fair-trade markets.