

NEWS RELEASE

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UAlbany Researchers Receive National Science Foundation Grant to Give Consumers more Information about NAFTA Products

Data Interoperability Framework to provide consumers with a wide range of information about how, where, and by whom products are manufactured and brought to market

Albany, NY -- In today's global market, it is increasingly difficult for consumers to know exactly how, where, and by whom the products they want to buy are being manufactured and brought to market. Researchers at the University at Albany, SUNY, recently received a \$710,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to develop a framework for providing that kind of information in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) region. The data interoperability framework will be developed in collaboration with a network of international researchers and practitioners from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, who have been working together since 2007 as the North American Digital Government Working Group (NADGWG).

"Most products consumed within the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) are produced and distributed through low-cost supply chains that typically do not reveal certain types of information to end consumers," said project leader Theresa Pardo, director of the Center for Technology in Government at UAlbany and co-chair of NADGWG. "This information asymmetry makes it difficult for consumers to assess the quality of the products they buy or exercise their preferences for safe, environmentally sustainable, and economically just products and services."

In order to create this new data interoperability framework for consumers, named *I-Choose*, researchers from the fields of information science, public administration, political science, computer science, and information technology management will work with stakeholder communities involved in the growth of coffee in Mexico that is distributed, brewed, and consumed in Canada and the United States. This data will include information about "green" supply chains or production methods, wages paid to producers or workers in the supply chain, working conditions, environmental impact, and a wide range of other information about the products.

"The producers, supply chain operators, and third party certifiers will all need to agree on a data architecture that can facilitate exchange and sharing of information that comes from product production systems, supply chain distribution systems, as well as systems used to determine compliance with voluntary and government-mandated product standards," said Giri Tayi, a professor of management science and information systems, School of Business.

"The I-Choose data interoperability network, involving consumers, producers, and government regulatory agencies across multiple domains and countries, is unprecedented in nature," said Holly Jarman, an assistant professor of political science and public administration in UAlbany's Rockefeller College. "It will allow more information into market transactions so that consumers can make decisions that truly reflect their values, while stakeholders will be encouraged to work together to build new fair trade markets rather than focusing their energy on defining narrow regulatory standards."

While the focus of this grant is on the North American coffee network, the results will also be relevant for a wide range of players who are already experimenting with new forms of collaboration such as relevant labor, environment, and agriculture departments and agencies in the NAFTA region, interested legislators, businesses, trade unions, environmental NGOs, consumer groups, and agricultural associations. The knowledge gained through constructing and expanding I-Choose will inform a wide range of future collaborations in terms of how to create a trusted environment where incentives for collaboration and competition are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

The U.S. members of the research team include:

Theresa Pardo (principal investigator), Center for Technology in Government and Rockefeller College, University at Albany; Giri Tayi (co-principal investigator), School of Business, UAlbany; Holly Jarman (co-principal investigator), Rockefeller College, UAlbany; and Jing Zhang (co-principal investigator), Graduate School of Management, Clark University. Distinguished Service Professor David Andersen, Rockefeller College, and

Associate Professor of Informatics Deborah Andersen, College of Computing and Information, UAlbany, are serving as senior personnel on the project.

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This project is the outgrowth of a larger multi-year NSF-funded project of the Center for Technology in Government, through which several international working groups focused on various aspects of international digital government. Theresa Pardo is the co-chair of one of these groups, the North American Digital Government Working Group (NADGWG), with UAlbany alumnus Luis Luna Reyes of the Universidad de las Americas in Mexico. The group was formed in early 2007 by researchers and practitioners from a variety of institutions and disciplines in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The goal of NADGWG is to advance electronic government research across geographic and political boundaries in the region, including research about the roles of government policy, trust, and information and communication technologies in the promotion of emerging distribution networks of goods such as organic and fair trade as well as their impact in promoting economic development in the NAFTA trading region.

The mission of the Center for Technology in Government at the University at Albany is to foster public sector innovation, enhance capability, generate public value, and support good governance. We carry out this mission through applied research, knowledge sharing, and collaboration at the intersection of policy, management, and technology. For more information visit www.ctg.albany.edu.

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