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By

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“BETTING” ON VANILLA: RURAL PRODUCERS AND DEVELOPMENT IN PAPANTLA, VERACRUZ MEXICO

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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For Mark Griffin
We may be even
But I wouldn't have wanted to do it without you.

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Chapter 1 Betting on Development: Complexity of Contemporary Commodity Production

In 2000, the government of the Mexican state of Veracruz responded to a grassroots initiative in the town of Papantla by setting up an extension program to revive vanilla production. Reviving the industry would be difficult, since production had been decimated over the course of the 20th Century; where there had been around 30,000 producers in the early 1900s, there were now in the neighborhood of 3,000. Galvanized into action, government agents and grassroots organizers founded an agricultural extension agency called the Consejo de Vainilla Veracruzano (COVER). Given the state of Mexican vanilla production, they charged COVER with organizing Totonac vanilla farmers, providing them with technical support, and teaching them to intensify production.

One of the unfortunate outcomes of the program is that small producers (like the Totonac farmers) would come to view COVER as one more self-serving government program, ill-attuned to their needs to balance vanilla production with subsistence farming. The members of the grassroots movement that had called for its creation had taken the interest of the small producers to heart –in contrast to the state agronomists in Jalapa (the capital) who were driven by the idea of large-scale intensification. As I would came to learn through my interactions with them, most small-scale vanilla producers do not expect to make a living off of the crop. The cornerstone of their livelihood is subsistence farming and diversified entrepreneurial endeavors. COVER originally represented an alternative to previous development projects, primarily because the founding of COVER was initiated at the local level

and proposed a development agenda with concern for small producer interests and needs.

I went to Mexico in the fall of 2005 to study this effort to help vanilla farmers increase their production. I started out interviewing members of the COVER, and then moved on to the small farmers themselves. Fieldwork with both the agents of the program and many of the farmers led to a first-hand knowledge of the role of government programs in building commodity production. But it also led to an understanding of the role of economic diversity and household strategies in maintaining sustainable communities --in the face of changing global markets, price fluctuations and the incomprehension of those pushing the idea of a more large-scale cash crop. My fieldwork led to an understanding of the pragmatic economic strategies that small-scale producers adopt –with or without government help.

Farmers have managed to maintain subsistence-based agriculture alongside commodity crops for three hundred years --in spite of centuries of government corruption, local exploitation and environmental degradation. Farmers involved in the government initiative to increase vanilla production have traditionally been Totonac families. Although their current lifestyle is not as traditionally-indigenous as in the past, they nevertheless remain in the traditional sense small-scale subsistence producers. These farmers may drive to town in a pickup truck, watch soap operas on a television set at night and dress in store-bought clothes, but they also grow most of the corn their extended families eat, grow many of the beans and vegetables they consume, gather their water from a communal well, wash their clothes by hand, and maintain important community ties through political and religious institutions.

In this dissertation I argue that COVER, though initially founded to reflect the interests of the small-scale producer/subsistence farmer as an alternative to traditional development scheme had failed due to long-established political structures that ultimately corrupted the agency. Conventional development projects (of which COVER has become one more example) have shown a preference for large-scale production and expensive agricultural techniques –at the expense of local culture and knowledge. In light of this shift in COVER's mission, I argue that these small producers have become the new protagonists of a newer alternative development, one that looks to the global economy for support. I will describe the response of small-scale producers and their pragmatic approach to the situation: how they maintain economic diversification, and participate in government-sponsored vanilla projects, without becoming over-dependent on the crop. Their pragmatism (leavened with mistrust) is indicative of the fact that the program is no longer designed around their interests. I describe how they balance the need to produce and distribute cash crops with subsistence production, entrepreneurship, and community obligations, and how their ability to maintain this balance enables them to weather economic difficulties faced by urban residents. At the same time that they remain skeptical of COVER programs, they are hopeful that intensifying their production of vanilla while creating new markets and more direct access to those markets will provide them a consistent source of cash income to support one more generation in the countryside. These producers and their families are "betting" on vanilla to be that crop that provides their families and communities with sustainability.

Fieldwork

When I began my doctoral studies, I had worked in the United States for many years with non-profit organizations dealing with homelessness and poverty. Given this interest in poverty and development projects, I wanted to do research that would incorporate economic issues, especially those pertinent to global markets and small farmers. A professor I worked with previously had mentioned to me that no one had done any work on vanilla and that I should look into a project in Papantla. When I looked into the literature on vanilla production, I found that to some extent he was right. In the U.S. literature about the vanilla industry is limited to an excellent recent history of the impact of vanilla on land tenure (Kouri 2004), to a journalistic account of the contemporary vanilla industry (Ecott 2004) and to a cultural history of vanilla (Rain 2004). But there were no contemporary ethnographic studies of this region.

Among Mexican academics, studies on vanilla are primarily focused on issues of agricultural inputs and techniques. When I asked about previous studies at COVER, employees told me that there are many students that have done studies but that none of the students has returned to report on their findings or sent final reports. Most of this work was focused on technical issues and had been done by students at the National Autonomous University (UNAM) in Mexico City. A local agronomist compared different production systems (Sanchez 1997). In this study and in my conversations with him, Mr. Sanchez was critical of the emphasis on shadehouse production at that point in time. There are also two Mexican anthropologists that have worked with historical data and documents about Totonac families. They

provide a look at Totonac social, political and economic systems during the 20th century (Chenaut 1995, Ramirez 2002).

In contrast to the more technical studies --and to update the cultural studies-- I set out a more comprehensive approach: one that took the experience of government agents and small-scale producers as its starting point. Given that COVER was relatively new, I was able to talk to government workers and producers involved from the beginning of the initiative, and came to understand how the institution's approach has changed since its inception. I was interested in the fact that the case of vanilla is one of industry-revitalization rather than introduction of a new cash crop. I was interested in the dynamics behind the decline in production. I assumed that given compelling rationales to stop production, producers would require equally rational incentives to take up production again.

Though it was officially a government organization, COVER was the result of a grassroots effort of local producers and businessmen to get government support for the vanilla industry. Nevertheless, in the short time that the agency had been working with producers, it had begun to lose a certain amount of local autonomy. Some of its founding members would complain that orders were being taken from the state government bureaucrats in the capital city of Jalapa, not producers themselves. After several initial interviews, I received permission to travel with the extension workers into the field. I told the workers that I wanted to see what the agency did, how they worked with producers, and how their time was spent. The goal was to travel with them to as many different projects as possible, to better understand the goals of the agency and the structure of the vanilla industry.

Several of the chapters of this dissertation begin with a bus journey. This is in keeping with the nature of multi-sited ethnographic research, and the need to access a wide variety of producers and institutions. The first morning I met an agency worker at the bus stop before the sun had risen. The air was humid, sticky but not yet stifling, as we climbed onto a bus that would take us to a larger town to make connections. This became our mode of operation most days for the next six months. As we traveled further into the countryside, we might find ourselves switching to a variety of smaller vehicles, or walking. I used this travel time with the agency workers to learn more about the projects we were visiting, to ask questions about larger goals and to share information about how our lives differed. They were interested in learning about American holidays and curious about our political system. I arrived during the U.S. hurricane Katrina and fielded questions about the ways in which Americans build houses and help victims. They thought it was a bit strange that I wanted to watch them work and ask questions. They often asked about my goals for the project and what I would do with all the notes and interviews. I was impressed with their resolve to stay in the countryside, and their belief that rural workers just needed access to programs and to make a viable living. When I asked them about their desire to migrate in the future, they were adamant that there was too much work to be done for them to think about leaving.

Once we arrived at a project, I would be introduced as someone interested in vanilla, and the agency workers would quickly get involved in the projects for the day --whether they were marking off a new orchard/shade house, talking about problems with an existing crop, discussing details on the next step of a project, or reporting on

the progress of a group. I followed the groups and listened in on conversations. Usually, toward the end of the visit, I would have time to talk with several of the group members. At this point, I often found out that they were a bit confused about my presence; they wondered if I was from the university in Mexico City or from the government in Jalapa. I would explain that I was an anthropologist from the United States, interested in rural economy. Often, when they found out I was from the U.S., they would tell me about their experience as a migrant. And, more times than not, their response to my question about whether they would return to the U.S. in the future was "No, as long as this project with vanilla works out."

One of my earliest trips with a field agent led to a humorous ice-breaking situation that created rapport and an unofficial acceptance in the group. The scene was a remote community to which we had arrived early, to meet with a group that was ready to begin setting out the posts for their shadehouse (a vanilla-producing greenhouse that uses a dark fabric to filter sunlight). Eight of the group members showed up in the empty field that had been donated by one of the families for the project. The sun had reached the top of the trees at the end of the field and everyone was anxious to get the measurements made and the stakes pounded into rows, before returning to their other jobs of the day. After I was introduced, I joined in helping to find straight sticks to use as stakes, measuring and counting rows. After several hours, the grid for their shadehouse was laid out.

One of the members jumped over the fence of the orange grove next to the field and came back with his satchel full of large, green oranges. Most of the men had machetes attached to their belts, and began to peel the oranges and hand them around

for everyone to eat. We all stood back and enjoyed the juicy oranges, which were well-deserved and much-needed. I was on my second orange, enjoying the unreal taste and sublime experience of eating fruit ten minutes from harvest, when I choked. In the midst of a long-drawn-out-air-sucking fit, I looked out at the circle of men that were now watching me with intense interest and horror. What would these poor men do if this *gringa* died in their field from orange exposure? Fortunately, for myself and the group, I eventually stopped choking. I told the men that oranges where I come from are not as juicy. They were relieved that I was standing upright again and breathing normally. When it was time to go, we said our goodbyes and they handed me a large bag of oranges to take to my family.

This experience had two results: first, it made me grateful to the people that allowed me to look into their lives. This situation was symbolic of the potential danger in which anthropologists place their informants. I imagine those men worried about my safety but also worried about their community if a stranger choked to death in their fields. What kind of a liability would that imply for them? The second result was that it solidified my acceptance by COVER workers. It was the topic of conversation at the office for some time after. They would tease me and I brought orange flavored treats for the workers in the office. When I met these men in town or at meetings, they all teased me. The choking in the field made an odd anthropologist look normal.

On the days that the workers stayed in the office, I spent time observing visiting individuals and groups, the operation of programs, meetings and informal interviews. It was by traveling with workers to different projects and communities

that I began to formulate a picture of the industry as a whole and to understand the variation in the types of producers that the agency was helping. My goal was to not only understand the objectives of the government program but to understand the lives of the households involved in the programs. I began to visit several different families in order to develop a more focused investigation. After six months with the agency, I began to visit these families on a regular basis. One day a week I continued to spend time at the agency office, and the other days I traveled out into the countryside to work with two families involved with agency projects.

When the agency first began working with producers in 2001, it estimated that 90 percent of the producers in the area were small-scale indigenous producers (those owning less than 5 hectares). These households most likely integrated vanilla into stands of rainforest that were left to fallow according to their agricultural cycle. These traditional orchards were attended to by household members usually at the end of a day, so the labor was always taken up within the family and were fairly low yield. These households maintained a variety of subsistence crops --balancing their economy with other cash crop production and at times wage-labor. The first projects initiated by the agency were directed towards these producers, at times providing plants and compost or helping with the installation of irrigation systems.

In 2005, COVER's projects were evenly divided between irrigation systems and relatively-expensive shadehouses, and in 2006 all projects selected for funding were shadehouses. Given this trend, I decided to focus my research on two families: one that was adopting the agency's shadehouse technique, and a more traditional one that had chosen to receive assistance only with irrigation techniques. The differences

between these families, I surmised, would be representative of the general differences between producers in the industry. I hoped to get a concrete picture of the different types of economic strategies adopted by different types of producers. Making this more focused case study of small farmers and their households is important because my overall goal with this research was to make connections between micro level experiences and macro level structures, whether at the level of state programs or global markets. The everyday experience of these farmers is important for the purpose of creating development projects that best serve their needs.

Differences aside, both families that I chose have much in common: they see vanilla as an ingredient (though not the sole ingredient) of their economic strategies. Both also have a keen awareness of the history of the vanilla industry and understand that their success is dependent on creating direct access to the market. One of the families lives in a more or less traditional community an hour's bus ride from Papantla. They have an extended household, produce all the corn their family eats and work with vanilla both in a traditional orchard and in their orange groves. The second family is part of a group that has been organized to build a shadehouse to grow vanilla. This household consists of one nuclear family and is oriented toward capitalist production.

For six months, I spent my days between these COVER-affiliated families, walking with them in the fields and talking to them in their homes. I collected the life histories of the male and female heads of households and made formal and informal interviews with each member of the family about daily life and their involvement with vanilla production. At first, my presence was hard for them to understand. One

family planned interesting outings, wanting me to see every aspect of their community and experience their life fully, while the other family was worried that they were too busy to entertain me and had a hard time understanding that I wanted to watch them work. With both families, I was able to settle into a pattern of participant observation, though I am sure it was never easy for them to have me asking questions.

In the final months of my fieldwork (May 2006), I conducted two surveys at the First International Vanilla Producers Conference, held in Papantla. Though COVER had conducted a census during the first year, this survey would provide a look into those producers that were attempting to access COVER programs. The first survey drew on a random sample of 100 conference participants and collected demographic information --along with information about the role of household labor, migration experiences and the overall plans each family has made in regard to vanilla production. The second survey was much more open-ended and was conducted with an equal number of male and female producers. The goal of this survey was to ask more questions focused on the perceptions of producers, especially in regard to the government agency and re-vitalization of production. After compiling the surveys and analyzing the data in general terms, I presented a synopsis to the agency. The response to this was positive and resulted in the agency calling a meeting with their board of directors. They used this report as a stepping- off point for the following years strategic planning. They were interested in the cultural descriptions of these farmers, though they did not seem to have the power to formulate programs in the best interests of these farmers.

An important outcome of this conference was a new movement to organize vanilla farmers, the International Tropical Farmer's Network (ITFN). This internet group was organized by Patricia Rain, one of the most important advocates for these farmers. Given the problems experienced with COVER and in response to complaints by farmers concerning corruption, Ms. Rain created the ITFN to organize vanilla farmers outside of Mexico. The goal of this group is to create a network among farmers internationally, to develop long-term goals for the vanilla industry and to create more equitable markets for small-scale farmers. At present, this group is organizing a meeting for the fall of 2007 to develop a strategy. I have been invited to attend and will use data from this study to help Ms. Rain to apply for funding to implement the strategy developed by the group.

Vanilla's History: A Brief Overview

The pre-conquest history of vanilla trade has not been documented at this point. However, it is known that when Cortez was given a chocolate in the palace of Montezuma, vanilla was one of the flavorings added to the cold frothy gruel. It is assumed that vanilla was a tribute item, a product that the conquered tribes were required to provide to the empire each year. (Ecott 2004, Rain 2004) There is also evidence that Montezuma grew vanilla vines along with cacao plants in his gardens in Huaxtepec, though there is no mention of whether he was successful at harvesting vanilla pods. (Nuttall 1923) Vanilla must have been gathered in the wild at that point, somewhere along the Gulf Coast. Though vanilla does not self-pollinate, there was a wild bee in abundance that served the plant. The pod was collected after it had

ripened and fermented on the vine. (Rain 2004) This process made the vanilla pod scarce and may have contributed to it being an elite trading item. There is not a great deal of folklore about the vanilla pod, but it may have had medicinal use and there is evidence it was used as a fragrance on copal incense. (Bruman 1948)

There was a decline in the use of vanilla during the early colonial period because of its relationship to chocolate. During this time, chocolate was used as a currency, closely guarded by elite and government alike. Once chocolate was imported to Europe as a commodity the demand for vanilla increased. By the late 1600s, chocolate houses were popular throughout Europe. (Coe 1996) There is not a great deal of historiography concerning the production or cultivation of vanilla, but the increase in demand for chocolate likely created a need to control vanilla. In 1697, William Dampier wrote about "beans drying in the sun in Copalita and Huatulco" on the Atlantic coast. (Sauer 1993) This seems to imply the recognition of the importance of the crop and the need to control the process in some manner. At first, this may have been accomplished by planting the vines close together in the forest to control the proximity of the crop to households and facilitate tending and harvesting the crop. Initially in the state of Veracruz, the towns of Misantla and Colipa were the first to capitalize on the new trend and were the first producers to provide a steady source of vanilla for export. (Kouri 2004)

From the beginning of contact, vanilla vines were sent back to the Old World in an attempt to understand the plant more fully. However, it was not until the mid 1800s that anyone outside of Mexico was successful in producing the pod. Until that time, Mexico (and some parts of Central America) was the only source of vanilla.

Once the French were successful in cultivating the vine and producing fruit, they introduced the crop to Comoros, Madagascar and the Reunion Islands off the coast of Africa. In 1850, all of the world's vanilla came from the New World. By 1920, over 60% of the world's vanilla came from these French colonies. While this figure may imply a downturn in the Mexican vanilla economy, this time period also corresponds to a steady increase in Mexican production and the development of a robust industry. At that point in history, it was not a problem that Madagascar out produced Mexico in sheer number, as vanilla was a valuable commodity, with no substitute. (Bruman 1948, Kouri 2004, Rain 2004)

While competition from other growers may not have effected Mexican production initially, the invention of artificial vanilla had significant results. Artificial vanilla, a by-product of the wood pulp industry, today holds about 95% of the market. (Menz and Fleming 1989) Mexico has to compete for a smaller market and since the late 1900s, has not been able to keep up with Madagascar and Indonesia. Today, this continues to be true. Mexico will never be able to compete with the amount of vanilla produced in Madagascar and Indonesia, where labor is even cheaper. However, producers are beginning to look for smaller niche markets for high quality Mexican vanilla.

Papantla Vanilla

During the colonial period, the region in which I did my fieldwork (around Papantla, Veracruz, the region known as the Tecolutla Basin) was relatively autonomous since it did not lend itself to the formation of large haciendas. But with the growth of vanilla as a cash crop around the time of independence, layers of social

stratification emerged. These occurred not along the lines of land ownership, but through the division of labor and access to international markets. The traditional division of labor was that Totonacs produced the green vanilla beans and non-indigenous merchants processed and marketed the product. This differentiation sharpened as merchants began to acquire land, both high in quality and quantity, and monopolize the market from production to distribution (Kouri 2004).

By the early 1900s, the basin had been reorganized both economically and socially. The relationship between Totonac farmers and the land had changed drastically. In less than a hundred years, the basin had moved from a subsistence oriented economy to a market economy. Farmers that maintained right/ownership of land were caught in a dependency cycle of debt. Privatization of land had created new obligations to the state, especially in terms of capital and taxes. Farmers were faced with the need to intensify to pay for consumer goods and taxes. Intensification required capital, which created new debt obligations and obstacles to subsistence. Many Totonacs had lost the right to land and inherited instead a new relationship to wage labor (Kouri 2004).

After the Revolution (1910-1920), the area experienced several cycles of economic growth and government support and abandonment. Ejidos (communal landholdings) organized under the Cardenas era (1934-40) provided land for many landless Totonacs. However, this initiative was under-funded once classically-liberal economic policies were implemented in the 1940s. Another cycle of state investment in infrastructure (1970-1982) revived the industry until a repeat of neo-liberal policy led to the abandonment of government support of smallholder producers. This shift

led to a reduction of producers, from 30,000 smallholders to 3,000 producers today (Cano 1997).

These historic shifts (from subsistence to a cash-crop market economy, from the re-establishment of communal landholdings to waves of neo-liberal privatization) have forced small farmers to be flexible and make use of diversified economic strategies. The balancing of cash-cropping, subsistence farming and entrepreneurship is nothing new. To account for the various ways in which this balancing act occurs, I realized that I would need a multi-sited ethnographic approach –one that would allow me to compare at least two different producer households. And making contact with the farmers through COVER would also allow me to see how a government extension program dealt with different types of clients.

Dissertation Organization

In Chapter 2, I introduce the debate within anthropology concerning development. This debate is important for creating a more critically engaged study of contemporary development projects, but must be integrated into larger debates about the role of globalization in local economic development. I use a political economy framework to examine the goals of producers in regard to economic development.

In Chapter 3, I situate the movement to revitalize vanilla production within its historical, political and social context, in order to show how small producers in the region have long been active and well-informed protagonists. Their active and pragmatic response to their disappointment with COVER, therefore, has strong historical precedent. For the last three hundred years, they have challenged the traditional division of labor that privileges curers and industrialists over small-scale

producers. Through it all, these farmers survived as a culture with autonomous household networks, and today struggle to preserve a subsistence oriented system against large-scale cash cropping schemes. Though vanilla had provided an important income that allowed them to balance subsistence production with cash needs, by the end of the 1990s --given low prices, environmental changes, exploitation and corruption-- producers were willing to move into other crops. Understanding the tension between producers and local elites explains why COVER's founders hoped to address these injustices. In order to get producers to bet on vanilla again, COVER had to provide some kind of incentive. Development needed to be on their terms.

In Chapter 4, I describe COVER's beginnings as a grassroots social movement and the tenure of its first president, Victor Vallejo. Before it came under the control of the state government, and before the curers and industrialists gained a controlling interest, COVER had the interests of small producers at its core. I describe how Vallejo set out to tackle problems in the interests of small producers by addressing their concrete problems (like theft and corruption), and introducing innovative but sustainable and appropriate techniques of vanilla production.

In Chapter 5, I present the critiques of local anthropologists, program directors and business owners. The interviewees express a range of views (on the role of culture in vanilla production and the role of government in development), but all are in some sense COVER's detractors. Like critics of development in general, these individuals point out the need for development programs that take the social organization of participants into account, rather than implementing top-down

programs. Their critique provides insight into why COVER fails to provide an alternative program and has reverted to a development apparatus with governmental and local corruption.

This chapter also describes a survey, which I conducted at the producers' conference in May 2005. I use this data to talk about how strong traditions in social organization and production organization define the role of government programs for these farmers. For generations these farmers have had a clear sense of justice in regard to their production and they continue to show this clarity in regard to the worth of their cash crops. The farmers came to the conference seeking information from the government, but also with the intent of the government "seeing" their numbers, recognizing their role in the economy and helping them to create more direct access to the market. They are willing to work with the government and in some cases believe the government can help them, but they do not depend on the government. The survey data confirm that the two families I studied in depth are typical of small-scale vanilla producers.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I present data from case studies with two vanilla-producing families, whose diversified economic strategies drive the program of alternative development. The Lopez family occupies the "traditional" end of the production spectrum. In a departure from strict traditionalism, they willingly incorporate new experimental techniques and have given daughters an equal share of the inheritance. In making these changes, they negotiate between subsistence production and production for the market, between traditional and modern agricultural techniques. At the same time, they invest household labor in their

subsistence and cash production and maintain an extended household with strong social and political ties to the community.

The Ramirez family is less traditional in their production and household structure. They live in a single family home, with the nuclear family providing the primary labor in their cash crop production. Vanilla is only one of the enterprises they are involved in, one piece of an economic strategy that will allow them to remain in the Mexican countryside, rather than return to foreign migration.

These families illustrate the way producers manage economy in contrast to many stereotypes of the 'poor'. Though they have been accused of being bad capitalists since the 1700s, these stories show that they are adept at balancing between subsistence and market production. They are not adverse to capitalism or market exchange, but must maintain much more diverse strategies to maintain their households. Understanding the sophistication with which many of these producers organize their production is important to create a more complete picture of the relationship between development, globalization and movements to improve farmers' access to both.

In Chapter 8, I describe the proceedings of the conference and some of the social movements represented there. COVER had organized the conference in response to growing demands from producers and pressure from businesses and state government; the conference was to bring together producers, industrialists and foreign businesses to develop the industry. In the latter part of Chapter 8, I look at the strategies developed by both COVER and the International Farmers Network (a group organized after the conference) as a response to its proceedings. Both groups

agree that new markets must be created but they have key differences. For COVER, these new markets would be developed through government initiatives and production would be revitalized through grants and (primarily) shade house projects. For the ITFN, these new markets would be created through a vanilla market that would regulate quality and price and ultimately provide more direct relationships between producers and international buyers. Today the main protagonist of alternative development is no longer COVER, but the small producers themselves.

This work is an ethnographically informed analysis of development and globalization. This study describes development at the local level that is orchestrated by grassroots movements, the critiques of these movements and how these groups alter their development plans to address problems of political corruption. The lives of individuals in these groups are described so that the variation of individuals in development organizations is understood. There are reasons development projects fail, whether these projects are imposed from the outside or the result of grassroots efforts from the inside. The use of a political economy framework is used to show how understanding the structures of power, within the community, the development agency and the global market shapes but does not limit producers options. Producers respond to the failed development project by reorganizing on global terms, continuing to "bet" on vanilla as a good option in diversification of risk, especially in light of new social movements in global trade.

Chapter 2 Framework: Commodity production in global development

> "Indigenous people don't have contacts with the international market. These producers are fighting to achieve this. We hope that someday, they can market directly instead of through the intermediaries here who monopolize business. Producers have faith in vanilla. It is a matter of betting on vanilla that it will provide an income. Producers are not against technology or new ways, they are against monopolies." Luis Luna, State Anthropologist

Vanilla farmers in the state of Veracruz, who have a long history working with state development agencies, are requesting a new kind of development project. Lately, these producers have articulated the need to create projects that bridge local production and global markets. The projects that they are demanding illustrate the fact that they challenge the economic hierarchy well established in the vanilla business for over two hundred years: that of indigenous producers selling green vanilla at low prices to businessmen in the town of Papantla.

These farmers have produced vanilla as a commodity for distribution around the globe and are thus keenly aware of the need to balance local economic development with changes in global markets. Their message has not changed much in the last two centuries (they want access to the market and they want a fair price), but what has changed is their approach to development. These farmers' access to buyers on the global market is changing. It turns out that globalization may provide the fair trade they have desired all along; leaving development projects that fail to provide equitable relationships for growers behind. As Luis Luna pointed out,

producers are working to create contacts with international markets and break century- old monopolies at the local level.

Development

What is development? Edelman and Haugerud point out that the term is unstable. Development is an imagined ideal, a destructive myth, opportunities and improvements in the well-being of individuals. Development is also a discourse (Edelman and Haugerud 2005:1). In the past, development has been taken for granted as the natural progression for underdeveloped nations. Traditionally, development has been a matter of state-led investment and coordination (Kalb 2004). Today development is a matter of multilateral and bi-lateral agencies, non-profit non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private consulting firms (Nolan 2002).

In the case of vanilla farmers in Papantla, Mexico, development has run the gamut of all these definitions. These producers have participated in state led initiatives, worked with NGOs from the United States and Canada and sought information from private industry to build their businesses. Development in this study is used to define all the activities, whether associated directly with government organizations or grassroots groups, that can be describe as an "effort to eradicate poverty" (Nolan 2002:32).

Development around the world has been "a practice and discourse (that) embodies the European enlightenment's implicit project of making specific local worldviews and values…into universals" (Blaser et al 2004:28). This project often failed because governments were in the business of increasing production in rural

areas, rather than improving the standard of living. Development was seen as a neocolonial discourse that reinvigorated dynamics of power in developing countries, rather than improving the lives of rural citizens. Arturo Escobar, an anthropologist who is highly critical of conventional development programs, has a simple explanation for the dissatisfaction small producers have experienced up to this point, and for their need to keep pressing demands. According to Escobar, it is in the very nature of development programs to favor local elites and international corporations, and in general to favor a "neocolonial" agenda (Escobar 2005; Escobar 1995). It would come as no surprise to him in this case that decades of government-sponsored development had done little to improve the lot of small-scale vanilla producers.

Of course, Escobar and like-minded critics of conventional development programs, like J. Ferguson (1997) and M. Hobart (1993), have their detractors. Olivier de Sardan, for example, faults them for being too ideologically-driven (not empirical enough) and for holding a monolithic and unfair image of the development enterprise as a whole (Olivier de Sardan 2005:5). Sardan believes these critics are excessively *discursive* – in that they provide a needed critique of development, but create an unfortunate gap between discourse and practice. He argues that these critics' "deconstruction" of the development agenda does not yield a productive, comprehensive strategy for achieving economic goals. Escobar's typology and critique are valuable, but ultimately incomplete.

Some critics of development are ideological and methodological *populists,* valuing local knowledge over technical knowledge. Sardan argues that ideological

populism often errs when a romantic view of local knowledge overshadows the need for outside innovation. However, he argues that a methodological populism can be useful when the approach allows for inclusion of "groups and social actors that have knowledge and strategies that should be explored, without commenting on their value or validity" (Olivier de Sardan 2005:9). This latter approach to local knowledge refrains from valuing one source of knowledge over the other and posits a "multiplicity of norms" (Olivier de Sardan 2005:16).

Critics like Escobar argue that change must be based on community and indigenous knowledge (Esteva 1998, Sachs 1992, Seligson 1998). I accept their stance, but also argue that it is not enough to argue that development should be bottom-up or based on 'local social logic'; local knowledge must be pragmatically applied to the shifting landscape of political and economic power. Recent anthropologists, with more nuanced approaches to the development issue, (Nolan 2002, Crew and Harrison 1998, Lawson and Little 1995) argue for a critically-engaged anthropology that is involved in both the implementation and critique of development projects. If development, as Escobar argues, depends on the "object of development, controlling the terms of encounter," then anthropology must play a role in the developing models and implementing new programs that make that practical.

Gardner and Lewis have also brought nuance to the discussion, proposing that development must be understood as a dynamic construct. They argue that we should take development aid as a given and work to develop ways to use anthropological studies to critique, improve and suggest alternatives to traditional development projects: "both by those working within them (who can help to challenge and unpick

central assumptions and practice) and by those working outside (by revealing alternative understanding of the world and alternative processes of change)" (1996:24). For Gardner and Lewis, development studies are essentially about poverty, which they define as "a social relationship, the result of inequality, marginalization and disempowerment" (1996:25). They encourage anthropologists not to give up on development.

Other promising research in the field of development has tried to connect issues of poverty and economic power to modernity's obsession with "progress" (Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Arce and Long 2000; Kalb 2004). Kalb, for example, looks at recent research on development and argues that neoliberal assumptions about development must be replaced with a situational understanding: that instead of assuming all peoples are on a similar development scheme of 'progress,' researchers should look at people's situated agency in time and space. Such an understanding, he argues, must take into account the structure of poverty: the ways in which local economic and social systems developed in relation to internal and external influences. Once researchers can describe the structural constraints within which people make a living, they are then in a position to understand the agency of these individuals and communities and design appropriate development plans with local input and resources.

Given contemporary global markets, anthropology is needed more than ever to point out the "significance of complex, often hidden relationships." (Kalb 2004:152) For researchers like Kalb, anthropology should get involved in development because poverty is not culturally relative. By this, they mean that understanding poverty and

development sheds light on the relationships between people and systems that create poverty: "Anthropology promotes an attitude and an outlook: a stance which encourages those working in development to listen to other people's stories, to pay attention to alternative points of view and to new ways of seeing and doing" (Kalb 2004:167).

In response to the critiques of Escobar and others, Nolan calls for a new paradigm that would produce a "kind of 'cosmopolitan localism': where local problems could be addressed in ways compatible with the solution of more global issues." (Nolan 2002: 270). In this new paradigm, development projects are to create sensitive models and processes that use local resources and people to carry them out. This process is to involve people in the decisions that affect their lives and connect them to others across the planet. These new projects, because they are based on local decisions, needs and resources, would be sustainable --both environmentally and institutionally. Finally, these new projects would be considered learning models, with everyone involved understanding the results of each stage of the project and collaborate to improve future projects (Nolan 2002). Applied to the case of vanilla producers, this new paradigm incorporates the ideals of COVER (equity for producers) while building direct relationships between producers and the market, overcoming the problems of local power dynamics.

In contrast to Escobar and his critics (and in keeping with Nolan's paradigm), I will be advocating a pragmatic alternative: one that goes beyond a simple embrace or rejection of development and globalization.

Founding Alternative Development: COVER and Producer's Needs

In this study, the agents who work for COVER, along with the producers it serves and even its critics, exemplify the different groups that Arturo Escobar has described in his article "Anthropology and Development" (2001). Escobar is a strong critic of the development schemes that have been carried out by agencies (and some anthropologists) in the latter half of the 20th Century, and he refers to them collectively as the "development apparatus." The anthropologists who serve these Western development agencies he refers to as the "social technicians" of the apparatus, or *development anthropologists*. I will argue that COVER under its past two directors (though not in its foundational phase) fit this description of a development apparatus.

It is interesting to note that while Escobar is critical of anthropologists working in development, it is n fact Mexican anthropologists that articulate a critique of COVER that resonates with Escobar. None of the Mexican anthropologists that I encountered, though, could be described as "development anthropologists." In fact, none of the ones I spoke to had ever worked for COVER, and all of them are critics of state-sponsored development schemes like it. They exemplify Escobar's second category: that of the *anthropologists* of *development,* where the preposition *of* suggests a critical distance from development schemes that those working within the institutions do not have. Significantly, these anthropologists have experience working with indigenous vanilla producers, but have not been included in COVER programs. They see the current administration of the agency and its programs as corrupt. They argue that COVER fails to support the "true" producers of vanilla,

indigenous farmers, since it implements programs that are inaccessible and not easily adaptable to rural lifestyles. However, these individuals were not included as part of the implementation of COVER. Many of the problems they predicted came true.

Escobar's third category pertains to what he calls a *post-development* ethos. I prefer the phrase *alternative development*, which Gardner and Lewis use (1996: ix) to suggest the same process of moving beyond the "econocentric" and "technocentric" ideals that have all too often guided state-sponsored development projects: economic growth at the expense of sustainability; and the promotion of expensive, untested techniques. Such a grassroots ideal spurred the founding of the agency, but subsequently faded from the agenda. Though COVER failed to provide an alternative development, it is important to recognize that this was the intent of the founders. That it failed points to the problems of development critiques, namely a lack of a practical scheme to guide alternative development.

In the last seven years, COVER has had three different administrations, which can be distinguished from each other in terms of the development goals. The first director saw development in populist terms and believed the role of COVER was to make the intensification process available to as many campesinos[1] as possible. He was adamantly opposed to government corruption and worked to create programs that were accessible and fair. Because of his populist preference for local and small-producer interests, his administration deserves to be considered an attempt at

[1] Campesino is the term now used by most people to refer to rural peasants, whether they are indigenous or not. Though many townspeople consider rural residents to all be indios, and use the term in a derogatory manner, they themselves distinguish between campesinos and indios. Many of these campesinos no longer speak Totonac or wear the traditional clothing and refer to themselves as campesinos.

"alternative development" in the sense that Gardner and Lewis use the phrase. It was during the administrations of the following two directors, who were unable to hold on to local control over the agency's decision-making, that a shift of COVER programs became evident to both producers and local agronomists and anthropologists.

Globalization

Key to the critical engagement that these researchers call for is an understanding of how the issue of development is embedded within that of globalization. What is missing in Escobar and Olivier's critique is an engagement with globalization. They are right that development to be successful must be planned with local knowledge but development can no longer be understood in local terms. Development is embedded in a global system of economies, politics, technology and social and cultural systems. According to Edelman and Haugerud, development debates have fused with globalization debates. It is impossible to critically engage with the issue of development without engaging the over-arching issue of globalization. And the same nuance that recent anthropologists are applying to the issue of development carries over: a simple rejection or embrace of globalization is as untenable as a simple embrace or rejection of development projects.

It is a matter of public record that until the 1970s, development was about state-led investment and policy coordination (Kalb 2004). But with the economic crises of the 1980s, development became more of a matter of global regulation --as nation states became more indebted. It was at that point that the IMF and World Bank became debt collections agencies. With large debts accumulating in developing

countries, policies within the IMF and the World Bank changed, given that "refinancing was meant to turn countries into competitive recipients of foreign finance and investments, turn them into profitable exporters and re-shape the state and welfare institutions into efficient service providers, for market-oriented 'employable states' primary function of servicing external debts" (Kalb 2004: 2). Edelman and Haugerud state that:

> Development in the recent decades has come to overlap with globalization in the following sense: institutional changes in the global economy and the financial system accompanied a gradual redefinition of "development' itself in the 1970s, with large institutions such as the World Bank shifting their forces from economic specialization within a national framework to specialization in a world economy, thus for the Bank, development became 'participation' in the world market." (2005:17)

When these states were unable to keep up with their debt, their economies stalled and their governments became obsessed with how to manage their economy in terms of global markets, rather than national needs. This was a troubling change, given that development became less about local needs and more about a nation's ability to maneuver within a larger system. It is at this point that "development had become a sub-theme to the practice of ideology of globalization" (Kalb 2004: 2). McMichael argues that national governments "still pursue development goals, but these goals have more to do with global positioning then with management of the national 'household'" (2000:150). In Mexico, this is reflected in trade treaties, such as NAFTA, that focus on international trade sometimes at the expense of local enterprise and trade. Farmers in Mexico since the opening of borders have found it hard to compete with U.S. farmers, especially in staple crops such as corn. While development projects are still implemented in the countryside, such as the case of COVER, these projects are not a part of a comprehensive project to globalize

Mexican farmers. Mexican economic policy embraces neoliberal economic sentiment, leaving small farmers on their own to compete, sometimes with large agribusiness from both within the nation and outside the borders.

The debate on globalization: Globalization is not a new phenomenon, but the pace at which economies interact (and the impact of the interaction between these various economies and state systems) has increased. While this study is not about globalization but about development, it is important to understand the debate between globalization opponents and proponents. Many of the same arguments that have been made within anthropology concerning development are also made in reference to globalization. Both development and globalization as economic phenomenon were seen as positive economic stimulators that would improve standards of living by making resources and communication accessible to developing nations. Globalization was understood as the great equalizer, with everyone having equal access to the 'free market' (Wells et al 2001). It has not worked out his way. Even though globalization has made materials, ideas and technology more accessible throughout the world, it has not proven to be an equalizer; there is now more hierarchy both between and within states (Kalb 2004). Development was conceived of similarly: through the process of development, post World War II countries and undeveloped countries would progress along similar lines as the developed, industrial West. As the critique of Escobar et al shows, this was a problematic assumption.

Opponents of globalization argued that it promoted hegemony on a larger scale. Given the pace of globalization, rapid change created subordination of local economies to global trade and investments. And it is true that human rights,

environmental rights, democracy and culture have been victims of progress and instability. Countries that attempt to compete on the global market have entered "a race to the bottom" (Wells 2001:36), as employment, wages, working conditions are altered to make companies more competitive. Concurrently, developing countries have suffered from environmental and health degradation, as corporations focus on competition (Wells et al 2001).

On the other hand, proponents of globalization argue that it is not possible to stop the influence of global markets and competition --and that protectionism is not only harmful to an economy, but ultimately impossible to enforce. They argue, therefore, that globalization should be embraced as an opportunity to create more choice for consumers across the globe. They also see in globalization the most effective means for pressuring governments to change; a chance to create international procedures, make trade more transparent, and encourage more democratic methods (Wells et al 2001).

There are, of course, alternative visions of what globalization can be. Sandbrook, for example, offers a vision of globalization quite different from the unregulated global market. He argues that a global economy should be regulated in the same way that Europeans regulate national economies --with alliances between social movements, labor unions, NGOs, and U.N. institutions to push for democratization of global markets (Sandbrook 2003). His vision is consonant with those who argue for a "globalization from below," with collaboration among participants. But the debate is still a polarized one. Some define globalization is the shrinking world where national borders are becoming less important to trade, where

interdependence is accelerated as interregional power relations are reordered and intensified (Held 2000). For them, it is "an expression of deeper structural changes in the scale of modern social organization" (Held 2002:5). Opponents, meanwhile, see these structural relationships as further expanded by a system that is distributed and accessed unevenly (Held 2002)

I take globalization to be an important window for understanding the local –not something that stands in opposition to it. Globalization is "social, economic, cultural and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them, such that attention limited to local processes, identities and units of analysis yields incomplete understanding of the local" (Kearney 1995:548). It does not replace national economic and political planning, in spite of the changing focus of national governments from national development to an alignment within larger economic forces. Gilpin argues that although the pace of globalization has increased in recent years, it is not globalization that determines the strength and direction of the economy. He argues that domestic economies and national policies still remain key determinants of economic affairs, and uses the term "political economy" to encompass the interaction of the market with powerful actors: national governments, nation-states, financial firms and international organizations. In order to understand the political economy, one must understand two issues. First, one must consider that the interests and policies of the state are determined by governing political elites and powerful groups. Secondly, one must remember that the economic foreign policies of a nation are defined by the interests of the dominant elite of the state. Gilpin suggests that the concept of "globalization" becomes a scapegoat of sorts, to deflect blame for

social inequities away from the feet of national governments. The fact is that national governments are powerful players, and globalization is about their interaction with the global market.

Development Embedded Within Globalization: Political Economic Framework

In this study, I take political economy to be the best framework for investigating the intersection of local and global economies. Ethnographic studies of production are important for understanding the ways that rapid globalization is experienced in specific locations, and how projects designed to alleviate poverty are implemented and perceived. Whether we are participants in a "post-development" era or responsible for reforms in the anthropology of development, political economy provides a powerful "analytical tool for integration culture, power, history and economy into an analytical framework (Edelman and Haugerud 2005:20). In this case, political economy provides the tool for critically engaging with both development and globalization issues, something missing in earlier discussions of development.

In this study, production provides a contemporary arena from which to observe the impact of the global market on the everyday lives of producers in developing countries. The production of goods, in this case vanilla, exemplifies larger social structures, "Commodities existed in precapitalist economies, are culturally defined and molded and are embedded in political and social systems which they both reflect and help to shape." (Haugerud 2000:9) Likewise, Appadurai's work on the social life of things raises the issue of the relationship between exchange of commodities and

social life --in particular, the relationship between value, economics and political power. Appadurai argues that is not the exchange that is important but what the exchange says about the political nature of social value. He states that "commodities have a social life" (1986:3). By this he means that exchange is reflective of the social and political relationships found within the economic system of production, distribution and consumption. By looking at the relationship between actors within each of these systems, one is able to better understand the hierarchy of power between actors (and/or institutions).

COVER was founded initially to address long held concerns about the inequity between producers and local businessmen. This study shows how producers worked to build an alternative development project to address these power dynamics, why the project failed and how producers are currently reorganizing to overcome powerful structural bias. The long history of vanilla production in this region and contemporary attempts to change exchange between producers and the market exemplify the economic "social life" these producers are attempting to overcome. The study of commodity production, distribution and consumption allows for an important mediation between the global and the local: commodities are embedded in local social, political and economic systems, and connect these systems to others.

I use this study of vanilla production to examine the mutually-embedded nature of development and globalization, as these issues play out in the lives of small-scale producers. In the case of the movement to intensify vanilla production, COVER started as an alternative development project that called for a bottom-up approach. COVER sought to address two important issues regarding production intensification:

corruption and environmental change. The fact that COVER has failed to deal with these problems in a long-term sustainable way is borne out in the voices of critics, producers and COVER founders, and is due to subsequent changes in the agency's policies. Producers participate in COVER projects while at the same time are openly critical of them and keep as many options open as possible. The shortcoming of this movement was its failure to create a stable lasting mechanism for addressing corruption and environmental changes once the charismatic leader was no longer in an administrative position. Though COVER was organized to address the inequity of the system (bottom-up), there was not enough support at higher levels to sustain this approach. Corruption has been endemic to those development programs that are headed up by state agencies and COVER's lack of infrastructure as a bottom-up development project meant that it was too weak a force to overcome this legacy.

Producers believe that both traditional systems and new innovation play a role in the vanilla industry. What these producers (and the critics of COVER) object to is corruption, whether it comes in the form of government nepotism or mishandling of funds or exploitation at the hands of local elites. They ask that the government and other actors in the industry deal them a fair hand. Given local structures of power and the government's lack of concern for local needs, COVER was easily dominated by local business elites. Given the power dynamics, in particular large companies' connections with government grants, producers were not able to maintain control over "the encounter". The state allowed local elites to co-opt the development process. The ability to access the market became a rallying point for a new movement. Globalization is a two-edged process: the need to compete on a global market makes

the state less aware of local needs, but it may offer access to a fair market that local elites have not been willing to participate in.

Given the mutually-embedded nature of development and globalization, and the need for nuance, I argue for a pragmatic approach. Within the framework of political economy, I am seeking to go beyond a simple rejection or embrace of the twin issues of development and globalization. My study will show how small-scale vanilla producers in the Mexican state of Veracruz are working out their own pragmatic, nuanced approach. These producers are aware of the dangers of an unregulated, corporation-dominated global marketplace, but they are also aware of the shortcomings of the traditional Mexican state and fed up with local development projects that do not serve their needs. In response, they are discovering the possibilities for new forms of grassroots organization and the positive developments within global markets themselves. As the local anthropologist Luis Luna puts it, small producers are willing to "bet on" vanilla. This bet is embedded in both development on their own terms and access to the global market.

Chapter 3 Situating Vanilla: Production in the "City the Perfumed the World."

> In the time of King Teniztli the III, ruler of the Totonacs, one of his wives gave birth to a girl, to whom was given the name TZACOPONTZIZA ("Morning Star"). Because of her singular beauty, she was consecrated to the worship of the goddess Totonacayohua, guardian of planting, bread and food. But a prince named ZTATAN-OXGA ("Young Deer") fell in love with her, even though he knew that such a sacrilege was punishable by death. One day, as Morning Star was leaving the temple, he kidnapped her, fleeing with her to the mountain. On the way, a monster covered them in waves of flame, causing them to retreat to where the priests were angrily waiting for them. Before ZKATAN was able to say a word, he was beheaded in one blow, and the princess suffered the same fate.
>
> Their hearts were then cast into the altar of the goddess. There the grass began to dry. From their blood, months later, a bush began to spring up, covered with dense foliage, giving birth to a climbing orchid with amazing speed and exuberance; perfuming the environment with its aroma.
>
> (Taken from a mural depicting the *leyenda de vainilla*, on the walls of the SuperAlan grocery store in Papantla)

The Legend of Vanilla:

Though the origins of this legend are not known, it is interesting to note how versions later than this one include an element of class conflict –the daughter of the king being off-limits to her more plebeian suitor. In the earlier version cited above, the suitor is presumably of the same class, though Morning Star has been elevated in stature by being dedicated to a goddess. The formula changes in more contemporary versions, where the relationship is portrayed as a mutual love interest developed

between the king's daughter and a commoner (Rain 2005, Ecott 2005). Regardless of the version, one element is constant. Vanilla forms from the blood of the slain lovers, from the scene of conflict.

Understanding the history of vanilla, and the ways in which vanilla producers have been willing to organize, reveals that there are precedents for the most recent movement to revitalize production. Totonac farmers in this region were the first producers to cultivate vanilla as a commodity. Vanilla was not an item used in the local medicinal or food traditions but formed one of the most important commodity crops, along with tobacco, that indigenous producers used to balance a subsistence oriented economy. When the livelihood of these producers, individually or collectively, was threatened by local elites or government interference, they were willing and able to organize. The myth of vanilla illustrates the role of conflict from the beginning.

I witnessed this conflict as recently as December 2005, shortly after the official cutting date. Producers began to meet to discuss low market prices. Newspaper articles, visitors to the extension program offices, and protestors at the *ayuntamiento* (town hall) decried the low prices being paid for green vanilla beans and demanded something be done about it. A few months later (in late May 2006) 2,000 producers, government agencies, private business gather at the First International Vanilla Producers Conference in Papantla Veracruz. The producers were eager to learn about techniques and government resources to improve their crops, learn about outside markets, voice their grievances about corruption and

middlemen, and show the government that there are a significant number of producers who are serious about this export crop.

The historical background of this region foreshadows the sentiments of a social movement that called on the government to support an alternative approach to development: one based on local autonomy. To understand the relationship between development projects and producers, it is important to take stock of the long history of these producers, and their role in shaping economic relationships around them.

Colonial Papantla: A Legacy of Uprisisng

Some say the history of Papantla is synonymous with the history of vanilla. But it is more complex than that. Papantla has been the center of commodity production, export markets and wage labor for three centuries. Tobacco, maize, wax, sugar and oil have all been important sources of income for small holders. Vanilla is undoubtedly an important cash crop in this region, but small-scale farmers have long diversified their production. To this day, farmers balance subsistence production with cash crop production in a sustainable manner. Vanilla, though important, is but one part of the equation act and vanilla was not the first cash crop these producers used to shore up their mixed economy.

These small-scale producers around Papantla (Totonacs for the most part) survived colonial New Spain as fairly autonomous households. A combination of low population density and rough landscapes prohibited the establishment of large

scale haciendas under the colonial government. For this reason, until independence most Totonac families were subsistence farmers with access to enough land to support their households (Ducey 1999, Kouri 2005), and on occasion challenged local class hierarchy and external imposition of market controls (Frederick 2005). Such was their response to the 1764 tobacco monopoly, which threatened autonomous farmers --and to which they responded immediately.

The subsequent 1767 uprising took place because smallholders at the time depended on tobacco for cash income. These households were headed by subsistence farmers who produced the food their families consumed, but needed cash to purchase items their families no longer produced (cloth, medicine). Tobacco was considered a "democratic crop" because it was easy for producers to grow and process with household labor (Frederick 2005:75). During the time of the Bourbon reforms, there were no trade organizations for tobacco growers, so it was difficult to organize against new laws established by the government. So the law passed that year in effect "criminalized a major means of native subsistence" (Frederick 2005:76).

The government of New Spain had initially failed to understand the economic significance of tobacco and did not regulate production until the passage of this monopoly law –at which time itcreated a quota system and restricted independent production, ordering the year's harvest to be gathered by local mayors and burned. In Papantla, the Totonac farmers followed the law and brought their crop into town and turned it over to the mayor. However, they returned to the building later and set it on fire. Although no records exist from the time, witnesses of the 1767 uprising describe the tobacco monopoly. The monopoly was successful for the Spanish crown

financially, but this marked a moment where producers lost their "tolerance for local threat to their autonomy and economic viability" (Frederick 2005:83). This was the beginning of a collective sense of justice that guided leaders and community members to question further encroachments on their independence. The tobacco monopoly was not the first time these farmers had seen their lands, labor and livelihood encroached upon.

The system of labor that local elites oversaw during the colonial period was called the *repartimiento:* a system that placed forced-labor demands on the native population, restricted their access to outside goods, and limited producers' ability to market outside the area. The system was officially banned by the crown but thrived in rural areas where local officials were law. In the 1700s, repartimientos in Papantla forced tobacco, vanilla and fruit producers to sell locally at prices set by the middlemen. On record are eight formal complaints about local repartimientos (Frederick 2005). People saw this system as unjust but it was the tobacco monopoly that provoked the most violent response and led to a period of social unrest. The burning of the monopoly building in 1764 was followed by uprisings in Papantla in 1767, 1787, 1813 and 1820-21. Each of these uprisings was set off by unique events, but ultimately it was a sense of injustice that fueled each event.

In addition the 1767 uprising, many Totonacs also responded to the monopoly law by establishing new communities and producing contraband crops. The leader of one of these groups was jailed in Papantla and , for unknown reasons, the authorities decided to move the rebel leader, Olmos, in the middle of the night to Mexico City. When locals found out about the plans, they responded with violence, surrounding the

houses of the *jefes reales* and threatening more violence if Olmos was not returned to them. In 1787, Totonacs took over the town and protested unjust rule. They cited both the tobacco monopoly and unequal relations with Spanish residents and leaders. This was an outbreak that had been building for many years, beginning with the loss of autonomy brought on by tobacco quotas, and to the division of labor created by the imposed repartimientos (Ducey 1999).

In a very general sense during the colonial period, conflict was a response to local abuse at the hands of non-indigenous elites. The crown was always dependent on the production of rural workers, and could therefore never push too hard. And it was abuse at the local level that led to protest and uprisings. Producers seemed willing to be incorporated into larger systems and markets, but had a communal understanding of justice. They understood the difference between incorporation as autonomous individuals into a market system and exploitation of their labor and resources by elites, local or otherwise.

As the colonial period was ending and independence was on the horizon, indigenous households were experiencing more limits and restrictions on their subsistence. They had survived the major part of colonial rule as autonomous producers with access to land. They shared a sense of justice and had a long history of organizing collectively to protect their rights. Complexities notwithstanding, citizens of Papantla supported independence from New Spain and saw the new constitution as legal protection from local inequity.

Cultivation of Vanilla during the Colonial Period

Though most or all of the vanilla in the world during colonial times came from New Spain, it was most likely not formally cultivated until the mid 18th century. Before this time, wild beans were collected in the forests from northern Veracruz to as far south as Oaxaca. But as demand increased, producers needed to insure guarantees of a more consistent fruit and harvest. The first plants were cultivated in the 1760s in the state of Veracruz when Totonacs started integrating it into their agricultural cycle. Alexander Von Humboldt, for example, wrote that the Indians wanted to reduce gathering time and planted in less space. Cultivation addressed the problems of relying on an uncertain wild crop but may have created a new problem in regard to land usage and tenure. Totonac farmers soon became the largest producers of vanilla beans. In the wild, vanilla is gathered off the vines after it has fermented and turned brown and fragrant. Once vanilla was cultivated, a technique to cure the beans in a manner that protected more of the essential oils and fragrance was developed (Kouri 2005).

The curing process became the art referred to as the *beneficio,* and its operations were owned by Spanish residents in Papantla: businessmen that marketed the beans for export. By the late 1700s, a clear division of labor had emerged. Totonacs grew vanilla and sold green vanilla beans to Spanish merchants in Papantla. These merchants cured the beans and exported them to Europe and eventually the U.S. The profit margin was not equally divided between the producer and the merchants. But vanilla did provide a good option in their already mixed economy, especially once the tobacco monopoly limited their production and sale of that important crop (Kouri 2005). As demand increased and production intensified, land

became more valuable. The push for privatization of vanilla lands threatened the autonomy of Totonac producers and touched off a new series of protests and violence. These households had maintained their autonomy and access to land throughout colonial times. They were successful subsistence farmers within a mixed economy and had balanced economic needs as individuals and communities. They had responded to unjust rule by local authorities through collective action and violence, had been forced to give up tobacco, and had established a successful cultivation of a wild plant. The popularity of vanilla created the real possibility that they might lose their land which would cripple their households and communities.

In the late 18th Century, most of Mexico's export of vanilla for Europe came from Misantla and Colipa further south. Wild vanilla was an unstable business. The producers, more aptly named "gatherers," were dependent on proper amounts of rain, humidity and heat, on the availability of vines in their forested areas and, at times, were victims of competition or outright theft. Merchants could never know what kind of crop might surface from the forest that year and they did not have reliable access to outside markets. Initially, profits in the vanilla market, while good, were variable. When demand from Europe increased, the logical move for producers and merchants alike was to attempt to control production.

Cultivation allowed for some measure of control over the process of producing vanilla. For farmers, they could bring the plants closer to home, making it easier to integrate care for the orchards into other agricultural activities and provide them with some measure of security over theft. For local merchants, cultivation meant a harvest they could count on and the ability to build relationships with

particular producers. But what cultivation did not do was to instantly create a huge export business. By and large, vanilla was a cash crop like many other crops, integrated into the agricultural cycle and used to supplement a largely subsistence oriented lifestyle. However, vanilla had advantages over other crops.

Vanilla was unique. Farmers in the Papantla basin survived colonization as fairly autonomous groups because of the difficulty in establishing large scale haciendas in the rough terrain of the dense tropical forests, and because of low population density. This same terrain also made trade more difficult for households. Vanilla was a good commodity to integrate into their agricultural cycles because it was both transportable and could be cultivated using household labor. This is what made vanilla the perfect cash crop for subsistence-oriented farmers. But vanilla had further potential too. Vanilla was so valuable that it was the first commodity that provided the opportunity to create capital for producers and merchants alike.

Emilio Kouri has argued that it is this potential that led to major changes in the social organization of Papantla, and the conflicts described in his work are a historical precedent for much of the conflict protagonized by contemporary producers. In the same way that producers in the 1700-1800s complained about unfair business practices of local elites, producers today call for justice in their dealings with descendants of many of the same elites. Producers are also looking for ways to forge more direct relationships with the market and by-pass local elite altogether. For this reason, I will use his work to outline the history of vanilla in Papantla, creating an historical skeleton. This skeleton not only explains how vanilla developed as a commodity and how social relations were forever altered, but also

explains why the industry functions as it does today and in more particular why local citizens have formulated particular discourse in regard to production and the market (Kouri 2005).

While vanilla during the late 1700s and early 1800s was not a big business in Papantla, "tiny was not the same as insignificant" (2005:82). Before vanilla, cash crops were traded locally and did not provide much opportunity for the accumulation of capital. For this reason, the Spanish population in the area was marginal. Totonac households were able to maintain their subsistence lifestyles. They had access to land. Vanilla changed all this. Cultivation of vanilla created a potential for great profits. The possibility of wealth meant that non-natives moved into the area to take advantage of business opportunities. As demand increased, production increased and businesses looked for ways to increase their profits, especially by creating more direct relationships to export. Initially, Papantla merchants were dependent on export business in the port of Veracruz for trade. This changed as the market in Europe grew.

For seven decades, vanilla produced in Papantla accounted for only ten percent of Mexico's export to Europe. After independence, Papantla began to increase production at the same time that production in Misanlta and Colipa began to decline. The violent transition in Misanlta may have crippled the business community to such an extent that they were not able to recover. As described previously, Papantla was not without 18th century conflict. The citizens, while willing to act collectively to protest against unjust public officials, were highly stratified among themselves (Ducey 1999, Frederick 2006). Social stratification and

tensions were not limited to native non-native struggles, but included a hierarchical stratification among Totonacs.

Other historians have pointed out that Totonac households survived colonial governance as autonomous farmers. But perhaps what is more significant is that they survived colonial rule without becoming victims of the colonial state. In areas where haciendas controlled large tracts of land, indigenous communities were organized by the colonial government into corporate communities. These collectivities were considered by the state to be cohesive units. The case of Totonac households provides evidence of what a culturally-inappropriate scheme this was. The assumption that indigenous communities could be easily organized into corporate units of likeminded individuals with common origins and common goals has been problematic since colonial rule; what is significant about Papantla is that it was spared colonial organization into a corporate community, a collective unit as defined by the rulers.

If we take it for granted that these producers are really individuals from households that belong to particular communities with varying histories, varying degrees of wealth, and varying degrees of resources, we begin to see how the development of vanilla as an industry and the changes in social relations are not surprising in the least. We can also see how the division of labor established early on in the industry persists to this day and why producers are willing to give up on the potential of vanilla if those relations remain unjust.

Between 1760 and 1790, the average export for all of Mexico was only 1,000 to 3,000 kilograms, of which Papantla produced only ten percent. However, between

1820 and 1870, vanilla production in Papantla began to increase steadily. During the decades following Independence, the town would produce over 6, 000 kilograms, thus contributing about fifty percent of Mexico's export.

Selling any amount of vanilla was a profitable business for Totonac farmers. It was a crop that was easy to add to their agricultural duties. Once established in an orchard it could be maintained with household labor. Though there was a lack of roads and basic infrastructure in this part of the state, it was easy enough to transport this lightweight product. Totonacs were subsistence farmers with access to land who produced most of the food and many of the other items their households needed. Vanilla was a useful crop that provided the cash they needed for consumer items, festivals or medical needs. Individuals were free to participate in the market at whatever level they deemed necessary. Kouri states it best; they "chose to remain first and foremost milpa farmers." (2004:101). This was hard for the Spanish merchants to understand.

Merchants complained that doing business with Indian producers was a waste of cash, as producers did not reinvest income. They were accused of burying their money, the implication being they did not understand the market economy. A good consumer made money so as to purchase more goods and keep money circulating. As far as these merchants were concerned, Indians didn't understand the larger dynamics. But what is more likely is that these households not only did understand, but had a pragmatic knowledge of the economy, both their subsistence economy and the new market one. They established a delicate balance between the two that lasts until today.

Area merchants may not have understood the producers, but they did understand the market. These Spanish-born businessmen knew that the business was chaotic and their success depended on more control. Though cultivation made harvesting vanilla somewhat more systematic, local merchants were not in control of export. And they were dependent on outside exporters for information about value. They also had to compete with speculators (both Indian and non-Indian), brokers and thieves. Vanilla was valuable and the business was hard to regulate. Even with these difficulties though, vanilla was worth the trouble. For subsistence oriented farmers, it provided cash for consumer needs. For non-native entrepreneurs, it was an opportunity to create capital and build an industry in an untapped market. Producers had to worry about protecting their crops and finding non-exploitative relationships with buyers. Businesses had to worry about securing cheap but quality products, creating high quality cured vanilla and controlling more of the export side of the business.

The 19th Century: Independence and Land-Ownership Concentration

Independence-era Mexico in general had economic problems, but Veracruz was an exceptional case –and vanilla is a good example of what accounted for the difference. The state had long been established as the key port for trade, and Independence did not alter this situation. Producers and merchants in Papantla had established trade with Europe, which had increased steadily. Nevertheless,

development continued to disproportionately benefit the middle class, and the town would be the stage for more uprisings.

Between 1812 and 1820, the whole region was known as "the crucible of guerrilla warfare" (Ducey 1999: 163). While local elites and the urban upper classes of central new Spain demanded home rule, rural communities revolted locally against exploitation at eh hands of non-indigenous elites. Indians in Papantla saw the national struggle against outside rule as consonant with their struggles, and adopted a nationalist discourse even before there was a new nation. They linked local tensions to the broader independence movement and demanded autonomy using the same terms. Indians and campesinos alike were not willing to accept threats to their autonomy and were willing to take up arms to protect what they felt was just.

Given Papantla's long-established division of labor (where Totonac households produced agricultural goods and non-natives acted as merchants and middlemen) continuing conflict was inevitable. So after independence, the energies that had gone into resisting the tobacco monopoly were channeled into equally violent protests against exploitation by village elite. And when the boom in the vanilla market came, land-ownership became more lucrative, Indian lands were divided and diminished, and new inequities emerged.

The first divisions began in 1875, the year Tejada was overthrown by Diaz. With Diaz came modernization at all costs, so it is fitting that this was the beginning of the end of much of the Totonac land autonomy. Economic progress was to be brought about through increasing the production capacity of rural workers and bringing them into the market economy as consumers. While local merchants may or

may not have cared about ideals like progress and modernity, the laws were on their side, and the time had come to divide land. At first, this was done by establishing *conduenazgo* (private landholding associations). These associations were made up of *conduenos* that each owned a share of land that could be bought or sold. Theoretically, these associations created a way for the state to recognize owners without appearing as threatening privatization. These shares were taxable.

Of course, this was a problematic system. Though the division was done by local elites and sanctioned by many Totonacs, it appears it did not provide for all rural producers equally, and it benefited non-Indians disproportionately. The fact that shares were taxable became a problem too. The majority of these households operated at the subsistence level and taxes increased their cash needs in such a manner that the balance they had long established was damaged. New cash needs meant they needed to produce more products for the market: not for consumer items, but for the state. Increasing production could also have an effect on their available household labor, and on land and environmental resources. The divisions disrupted a long-established economic and social system. For the first time, households were losing access to their most important resource, land. Some lost access when they were not assigned ownership in a conduenazgo, perhaps for political or social reasons. Others lost access when they were unable to pay the taxes. Non-natives for the first time had access to land and with so many landless producers, to a new labor pool.

By 1890, local leaders took up arms against federal surveyors that arrived in Papantla to mark more private lands. The governor called in the federal troops and

2,000 Totonacs were killed. Troops retreated but continued to prepare for another armed uprising. Dehesa, the state governor at this point, was sympathetic to the indigenous rights to the land but adamant that the privatization was key to modernity. He ordered that the subdivision continue and that great attention should be given so that land should only be given to Indians. The federal government wanted the land divided and did not really care much about who got the land, only that the land be used to increase production. The state government needed to maintain peace and did not think unfairly distributing land would accomplish this goal. Surveyors, who were awarded choice land as payment for work, wanted to get on with the project and reap the benefits of their contracts. Local businessmen and political leaders wanted access to the land and did not want to be limited by the state government (Koth 2002).

Historians note that Totonacs did not respond uniformly to the divisions. Some sided with the government, and others joined those calling for uprisings. This is of course not a surprising detail; one cannot assume that rural producers, who have maintained subsistence lifestyles in a vast and rough geographical terrain, would constitute a singular body. While they may have shared language and many other cultural traditions, they were by and large from independent households. They had survived colonization without being forced into the false constructs of corporate collectivities, primarily because of low population density and rough terrain. But it was also these characteristics that made vanilla such a good cash crop for these producers. And it was the success of vanilla that led to these producers losing access to that land that had sustained them for so long.

The division taking place in Papantla in the 1890s and the response was so complex that it was hard to know what lands were being divided and who was receiving those lands. In 1894, many indigenous people still protested the division and threatened uprisings. Diaz responded to continued protest in frustration and stated that if the Indians would not submit, they should be doomed to "live as they always have" and succumb "to slavery under the businessmen and Spaniards" (Koth 2002:35). Dehesa saw this response as dangerous, and had a greater interest in keeping peace. He investigated the situation and found that previous surveyors and subdividers had been unfair. At this point he ordered the division to continue but that only Indians should be given land --and that they must receive clear titles, good maps of the land and not be charged survey or legal fees (Koth 2002, Sanderson 1986). Subdivision continued, but slowly, as pressure by Totonacs remained constant.

In the spring of 1896, a group of producers drew up a complaint and demanded the right to retain land. They complained that "the ambition of a great part of capitalists of the village who are trying to appropriate our property" should be stopped by the government (Koth 2002:38). They also complained that the township was underserved and that they should be supplied with schools and roads. They made six specific requests. First, the government should suspend all division. Second, they wanted to know what crops they should invest in for the cash market. Third, they wanted all the share certificates that had been taken by non-Indians returned as communal property. Fourth, they wanted all the titles entered into the national registry to protect their property. Fifth, they wanted to be given possession of all the

larger lots. Finally, they wanted to be paid for their work and for stamp duties and other state fees they had previously paid (Sanderson 1998).

By summer, their requests unfulfilled, 900 Totonacs rebelled in Papantla. The targets of the attacks were the *jefe politico* that had promised they would not lose land and vanilla middlemen and merchants. The rebellion was suppressed by federal troops and division resumed with military surveyors and military guards (Kouri 2004). Land was divided into conduenazgos; and, as these dissolved and households failed to keep up with taxes on land, more households lost access to land. These producers had a long history of commodity production, so the loss of vanilla would not have been as harsh as the loss of access to land; they could have changed commodities as they had done before. But without land to produce the food their households subsisted on, they had lost the ability to sustain their way of life. They must now rely on the market for jobs, for food, and for their lifestyle. In 1810, these households had been autonomous farmers with access to enough land to sustain their lifestyle. By 1910, 65 families owned more than 10,000 hectares and 116,000 families had no access to land (Sanderson 1998).

The 20th Century: From Revolution to Neoliberal Reform

Land division had been accelerated during the Porfirio Diaz regime (1876-1910) and local producers had responded to this with uprisings and violent rebellion. Dehesa claimed these rebellions were not political in nature. Obviously, he had missed the point. These individuals and communities knew they had been exploited and knew they had lost their way of life. This had occurred because of politics, at the

local, state and national level. To claim otherwise was to be ignorant to the demands of the rebels. They knew what they had, and they knew why they had lost it. It was political. And their hopes may have been high when the ideals of the revolution promised renewal of communal landholding and access to land.

Following the Mexican Revolution, especially during the administration of Lazaro Cardenas (1934-40), communal land ownership rose to 47% of lands. During the three decades that followed his administration, however, governments favored a nationally-based program of industrialization at the expense of the rural sector. By the 1970s, agriculture was under-funded and the division of labor was prominent again. Though producers had access to land, they were in a new relationship to the market. They had become consumers and they were now more dependent on cash. They also had tax debt once again, which further strained their cash supply and led to problems with land and to problems with cash crops. They were unable to invest in vanilla.

The net effect of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath was to shift the locus of conflict from the issue of land ownership back to the issue of the division of labor. The land redistribution program gave back land to the small producers. But the issue of who controlled the curing and marketing process, re-emerged as the dominant problem.

The boom in vanilla was the key element for changes in the social relations of Papantla. While I agree that the boom created new relationships, I believe its relevance was more economic than social. Papantla does have a history of collective action when citizens see social relations as unjust, but the population was never homogenous. With the Mexican revolution had come new ideas about the rights of

rural people and urban workers. These ideas were wrapped up in the land. The Indian was to become a citizen and this would come about with the creation of small-landholders (Frye 1996). Liberal reform was reorganized in nationalist terms. The next seventy years in Papantla were a matter of cycles of government investment and abandonment.

While the markets changed a great deal during the 20th Century, the techniques and infrastructure of the industry in Mexico did not change. The cultivation of vanilla is not conducive to mechanization. Plants must be cared for daily, vines guided as they grow, diseased leaves discarded, compost moistened. During the six weeks where the flowers bloom, each bud must be hand pollinated early in the morning before the heat sets in. Crops must be irrigated during dry spells and weeds must be kept to a minimum to avoid pests and disease. This work is still done primarily by Totonac Indians or rural peasants. Most orchards are tended to by an extended household; parents, children, grandchildren. Though the curing process has been mechanized in other parts of the world, in Papantla the process is still a matter of human labor. The beans must first be killed, either in boiling water or in special ovens. Once the enzymes are stopped, the beans must undergo a process of steam, heat and drying that acts to ferment the beans and create the dark color and rich oils and fragrance. The beans are laid out in the sun on large black tarps during the morning hours. Once the beans are sufficiently hot, they are wrapped and put into barrels to create a sweat. The next day they are brought back out into the sun. This process can take up to two months and must be done with care, as the beans can

easily mold, dry too quickly or split open, all of which would seriously compromise the quality of the harvest.

The social organization of this process has not changed much in last two hundred years either. The beans are still produced by small holders. The curing process, until very recently, is mostly in the hands of non-Indian businesses. It is the maintenance of this division of labor that has been key to the most recent organization of producers and has provoked new changes in the way vanilla is grown, cured and marketed. If one does not know the history of this area and town, one might see recent developments and demands from producers as something unique and contemporary. I argue that these producers have always had a keen understanding of the situation. These households have been involved in a mixed economy for nearly 300 years, where they have balanced and maintained a subsistence strategy with cash crops. This has never been an easy task, but these households continue to do this delicate balancing act. Producers have been aware of the division of labor and filed official complaints as far back as the 18th Century, when they were forced into repartimientos with Spanish residents –limiting their access to outside markets and commercial goods. This is because they realized that this system impeded their ability to maintain their mixed economy. They had a sense of justice, and were willing to organize collectively and violently if need be to fight for their right to autonomy. These actions by producers foreshadow the most recent developments aimed at increasing production of vanilla in Mexico.

As the 20th Century drew to a close, vanilla production had been decimated to the extent that export was almost negligible and a generation of growers had been lost. Before COVER was founded, a group of local anthropologists and agronomists organized a program to both document vanilla production and provide training for young men in communities traditionally involved in vanilla. Though these young men likely descended from fathers and grandfathers that produced vanilla, they were primarily engaged in the production of newer commodities (oranges, lichees) and wage labor. One community, Ejido Cinco de Mayo, organized and solicited the government for the resources to establish the first indigenously-controlled curing plant, or *beneficio*. This beneficio, ostensibly, would give local producers opportunities the earlier generations of growers had lost to elites: access to higher profits by curing their beans and selling more directly to the market. The citrus market had been significantly reduced by this time and the ability to reintroduce vanilla into their subsistence strategy enabled these producers to spend a bit more time in their community. It was clear to most of those involved that the primary reasons for the lack of production were threefold: the profit margin for Indians was too low, and they would need access to beneficios and the market to increase production and they needed some protection from theft to make it worth the labor. This is the immediate context that would give rise to both COVER and its critics.

The Legend and Progress

In 2005, just in time for the First International Vanilla Producers conference held in Papantla, the state-operated agricultural institution INIFAP produced an

instructional DVD to educate producers and the general public about vanilla. The legend of vanilla is retold with modern twists, as only a good telenovela (a TV soap opera) could be told. In this retelling, the beginning is similar but the characters change their social class. The King has a beautiful daughter that he dedicates to the gods. The daughter falls in love with a commoner, whom she is forbidden to see. Together they plan an escape. As they run through the forest, drums beat as they try to outrun the king's henchmen. They are unable to maintain their lead. The king arrives and watches as the hearts are cut out of his daughter and her lover's chest, as an offering to the gods. The bodies decompose and the delicate orchid springs from the mixture of earth and blood.

Conflict is a theme that predominates in the modernization of Papantla. But an equally important theme throughout its history is the sense of autonomy individuals and their extended families consider crucial to their economic survival. The economy of vanilla has changed through the years, as does the technique, infrastructure and government organization. But the social milieu associated with vanilla and the resulting division of labor, changed very little. Elites maintained control over the curing process, brokering and outside markets. Small producers stopped growing vanilla when they no longer saw it as the best option. By the late 1990s, they were less likely to bet on vanilla.

Papantla's history of resistance has been anything but passive. Nevertheless, armed uprisings are a less conceivable response to this new situation of World Bank structural adjustment and global communication; resistance now takes on subtler –if not passive—forms. Perhaps the reduction in production was a form of protest. Or

perhaps it was just a shift in response to changing markets. Regardless, their activism on behalf of their interests has a long tradition.

While we many not know the answer to why farmers stopped producing vanilla, we do know that the producers collectively acknowledged an unfair division of labor and moved into producing other cash crops. When the market for citrus (the major new cash crop) crashed, producers needed a new crop. Though many households and communities no longer cultivated vanilla, everyone still had parents, grandparents or close relatives that had cultivated it. Vanilla was a part of their history and remained a possibility in most producers' minds.

It was in this context that the grassroots founders of the Consejo Veracruzano de Vainilla (COVER) began to meet monthly to discuss the fate of vanilla. This group included individuals from both sides of the conflict. They petitioned the government to fund an extension program that would organize producers, businesses, industry and artisans to save the identity of Mexican vanilla. In 2001, COVER was decreed by the state governor and became a reality. Papantla was to be the center of the reorganization of vanilla production. Though production had declined, many farmers and even the government were still willing to bet on vanilla. And, just as important, they had a legacy –stretching back to colonial times—of taking matters into their own hands.

Chapter 4 Forming COVER: Grassroots organization and Alternative Development

In 2000, the Veracruz government charged the Consejo Veracruzano de Vainilla (COVER) with the task of increasing vanilla production for export. After many years of grassroots work, countless trips to the state capital in Jalapa and negotiations with several governors, the state of Veracruz established COVER in Papantla. On November 27, 2000 the state government published the charter for the new extension program.

> Given: That the cultivation of vanilla is of great importance (going back to the time of the Totonacs, who used it primarily to embellish chocolate), that Mexico is considered the original center of this cultivation, and Veracruz one of the principal producers of vanilla at the national level,
>
> That vanilla is an orchid whose fruit is considered a spice that presents traits that allow it to be widely commercialized in national and international markets –for the manufacture of liqueurs, as a base for perfumes, for crafts, for displays of a dried version of the product, and for vanilla extract, among others,
>
> That Veracruz's agro-climactic diversity, especially that of the region known as "Totonacapan," is considered well-suited to its cultivation, and that by enabling producers to apply adequate techniques, it is possible to improve the yield of the surface area currently cultivated, as well enlarging that surface area, in order to satisfy the demand for this product,
>
> That the establishment and development of this cultivation, by its very nature and especially in regards to pollination, requires special care, giving rise to a number of day-jobs and generating employment for the inhabitants of the vanilla-producing regions,
>
> That it is necessary to define a marketing scheme for natural vanilla, and its possible market niches, in order to compete robustly with synthetic products, so that the consumption of natural vanilla should increase, thus managing to directly raise the economic status of the producing region,
>
> That it is the state government's interest to promote the development of vanilla cultivation, through the impetus of producers' and marketers' organizations, integrating participants into its branches with a shared objective

(the promotion and support of said cultivation). (No. 236 November 27, 2000)

This charter established the infrastructure for COVER and outlined its mission. COVER would become an umbrella (*rector*) development organization that would create a plan for all of the state's producers, manufacturers and marketers. As the rector, organizer of all things vanilla-related, COVER would assist producers and producer organizations, push for technological advancement in production and manufacturing, develop markets within the country and in the global market, manage lands available to producers and maximize potential and rent ability and work with institutions to improve production. They were organized to represent all steps in the process, from production, manufacturing and marketing, a diverse group of interests. This was not an easy task, given both the history of conflict between producers and vanilla businesses, past grievances between the government and producers and environmental changes that make traditional production techniques hard to implement on a large scale basis. A revitalization of production had very different implications for a diverse group of producers, businessmen, industrialists and the government.

This chapter outlines the first phase of this development project that began as an alternative to previous development initiatives --primarily because it was the result of local initiatives. This new development agency had the potential to be an alternative to traditional development, because it explicitly addressed the problem of corruption in previous development projects and set out to rein it in. A core value articulated by the founders was to create an industry that would provide a fair income to vanilla producers and a development program that invested in rural producers rather than corporate welfare. This project was to put the developees in charge of

"the encounter" (Escobar 2005). Key to the first phase of revitalization was the tenure of the director of COVER, Victor Vallejo. Mr. Vallejo was a member of the group that solicited the government for support and directed COVER for eighteen months. Though he first came to Papantla from central Mexico over forty years ago to build a cattle business, Mr. Vallejo became an active member in this movement out of a sense loss and injustice. He was very concerned about the ability of local farmers to make a living, especially in the face of so many environmental changes (due to cattle grazing) and a history of exploitation. His first job as the director of COVER was to survey producers in the region and to develop a plan for increasing production. In his assessment, the most difficult problems for revitalization of the industry were the environmental changes that make traditional production nearly impossible and the historical problems of hierarchy and exploitation at the hands of businesses, industrialists and the government.

While they were given a good deal of autonomy in the beginning, they were not given a lot of resources in the form of money or technicians. Mr. Vallejo was aware of both the goals that needed to be attained and the limitations he would encounter. He was aware of historical exploitation of the small producer, and the traditional hierarchies he would be up against. He knew that COVER needed to spread production as widely as possible and with as much authority as possible before the state government got their hands on the project. And he had to work against new environmental challenges: changed weather patterns and poorer soils than in the past. Mr. Vallejo attempted in that first year to establish a better understanding for the role of vanilla production in the countryside and create a new system of production that

would revitalize production. And he faced, in short, two great challenges: a culture of exploitation, and the degradation of the environment.

COVER Responds to Exploitation: Corruption, Theft and Unfair Prices

Prior to this, government projects directed towards vanilla producers had amounted to gifts of money, usually to the savviest of community's leaders. Communities received money if they were fortunate to have leaders with the right connections. When the representatives of COVER first began to travel widely to advertise new projects, they often angered people when they announced that they would not provide help in the form of cash. While COVER was sensitive to the ways in which producers were exploited in the past, they were clear about their goals of revitalizing the industry. Revitalization would only be possible through systematically correcting past problems and establishing new systems. These systems had to promote not only the agricultural changes but political change as well. Mr. Vallejo wanted to create programs that would empower the producers, while at the same time reining in corruption and exploitation. One way they hoped to end corruption was by providing producers with materials, rather than having government funds arrive in cash payments that in the past did not make it to producers.

But Mr. Vallejo discovered that the agents sent to work for COVER from the state government were actually padding their costs for the materials. They were charging twice as much as the government paid for plants –thus robbing producers. Vallejo confronted the agents and immediately fired them. He knew that he would make people in the state government angry, as this practice was tolerated and wide-

spread, but he was adamant that COVER would only survive if it implemented a new program that ended the exploitation of the producers. He realized his actions were likely to have consequences for his tenure, but decided to try to push through as many changes while he was in office.

Vallejo was taking on the institutional *hierarchies* that were built into vanilla production, as well as the *corruption* that these hierarchies often bred. Early on, he became aware of money that had been made available to several businesses in the area, based on false claims; local industrialists had solicited monies claiming the investment was needed to support an industry that was barely producing. Vallejo tells how this money was given without any inspection of results. For this reason, during his tenure, he was very careful with money solicitation and implemented a program based on materials rather than money grants. Producers would solicit COVER for vines, irrigation and compost materials, but COVER did not hand out money. He took a big chance in changing the system because individuals used to exploiting government programs no longer had access to cash.

Producers are aware that while the government has in the past invested large sums in their industry, they and their neighbors have seen very little of that money. In the recent memory of many producers are images of dummy producers' groups that solicited monies but were in fact fronts for greedy businessmen. These small producers need concrete investment, but continue to see state monies given to businessmen and large organizations. This continues to be true today. In 2005, the government granted a local industrialist a large sum of money for new machinery. Producers were horrified. At the moment, there was already a sufficient amount of

machinery to process all of the vanilla produced in the region --so this investment was a case of corporate welfare. One producer commented, "He probably didn't even buy new machinery. His whole factory is fairly new. He probably painted the old machines and pocketed the money."

In addition to institutional corruption, exploitation could also take the form of crop theft or unfair prices offered by middlemen. For centuries, vanilla farmers have had to deal with the theft of vanilla from orchards. Given that many traditional orchards were located far from communities and households, it was hard to protect them. Even when families began to post members at the orchards day and night during the crucial final weeks of growth, many producers were robbed on the poorly maintained roads as they took their crops to market. Before oil companies became interested in the area during the early to mid 1900s, most communities were only accessible by foot paths. Roads were built by the petroleum industry as needed to reach wells, but not maintained once the well was abandoned. This lack of infrastructure made it more difficult to transport the year's harvest to buyers in Papantla.

In response to the fact that theft in the orchard is a difficult issue for farmers, COVER instituted an official cutting date in hopes of addressing the problem. Vallejo felt that by requiring communities to receive a certification from COVER before producers could cut and sell vanilla, he could protect producers from some theft --as it would be illegal to have green vanilla in one's possession before the official date and without a certificate from COVER. An added benefit of this was that allowing the vanilla to remain on the vine longer produces a higher quality

vanilla in the long run. The official date is now December 10th, over a month past one of the most important ritual days for many of these producers. Vallejo explains that he took into account that traditional indigenous producers and the small-scale producers today, are balancing the needs of a subsistence-communal oriented lifestyle with the production of cash crops. By showing this kind of concern for the culture of the small producers (alongside their economic well-being), he was promoting an alternative agenda of development. He was offering a different approach from that of the industrialists and their favored large-scale, large-investment projects.

Aside from theft, growers have historically had to contend with another type of exploitation: the unfair price offered by the middlemen. Until very recently, farmers did not have access to information about outside markets and were at the mercy of the buyers in Papantla. But today farmers are angry that they have to rely on these middlemen for transactions and are looking for a more direct access to the market. This concern was emphasized during the first phase of COVER, the implication of this new development project was that farmers would be able to break the monopoly held by businesses and gain access to buyers, thus reaping higher profits on their labor.

The curing houses, for their part, argue that they provide a service that is not easily substituted. They not only act as a rural outlet for selling green vanilla beans but as a banking service. They have historically provided small loans to the farmers, with the loans being due at harvest time. The curers treated these loans as insurance, expecting a certain amount of the year's harvest would be due to their curing house as repayment for loans. But the farmers felt this relationship was another form of price

exploitation and bound them to a particular buyer. They began to sell their crop elsewhere for higher prices and to repay loans with cash rather than crop. This satisfied the farmer's sense of justice but became a problem for the curing houses. A system that had seemed logical to the buyers (to lend money now and assure oneself a supply and control over prices) was no longer working in their favor. When farmers looked for better prices and repaid loans with cash rather than product, the curers were unable to fulfill contracts. They were angry with the farmers and accused them of being dishonest. But the farmers saw themselves as free agents, indebted to the curing houses for loans but free to repay those loans with money earned at the highest price.

Farmers today, not unlike the farmers of the 18th and 19th centuries, feel a sense of injustice in their dealings with Papantla buyers and curing houses. They may value the relationships they have with particular buyers, they may appreciate much-needed loans, but they also feel they are justified in looking for the best prices. Social obligations are important to these families, as evidenced in their response to extended family needs and communal reciprocity. But selling vanilla is a business and they understand the value of their product. They believe in the right to sell for a good price and they understand where the large profits are made. These farmers balance a subsistence oriented lifestyle with strategic participation in market economies with cash crops. If a cash crop becomes too much of a risk, they are willing and able to switch production to a different crop. This may provide another explanation for the decline in production; given the conflict between farmers and curing houses, it became easier to invest labor and resources in other commodities, especially given

the farmers limited access to information about foreign markets and buyers. As farmers have developed new relationships with global markets, they became interested in reviving the vanilla industry.

Given these conflicts and cultural misunderstandings between farmers and buyers, it is interesting to note that the grassroots development of COVER included not just producers but individuals and organizations involved in both aspects of the industry. The owner of one of the largest curing houses was one of the most involved individuals. COVER was formed through this alliance between producers and businesses. While the first efforts of COVER were concentrated on increasing production in order to have product to bring to market, they were also aware of the need to address the inequities in the local and global market. Producers saw COVER as an opportunity to get better prices locally while curing houses and buyers saw COVER as an opportunity to create more local product and obtain better access to global markets. This joining of two groups with very different goals may explain why COVER began to lose focus and influence when Vallejo left office. Under his leadership, due to his charismatic personality and tenacity, COVER was able to focus on an alternative development strategy that took into account the problems associated with past injustices. But subsequent COVER directors lost sight of producer's values and local elites began to assert more influence over the project.

During his tenure, Vallejo had to balance creating new initiatives to increase production while addressing long entrenched social and political cultural habits surrounding three hundred years of vanilla production. He was beginning to experiment with vanilla production on his private lands but was adamant that he

would not use public funds in his personal orchards. He felt that corruption was one of the biggest problems and that to partake of any government funding would make him suspect. He personally financed his orchard and shade house while building the infrastructure for COVER, being very careful to maintain the highest level of integrity. A major objective in this alternative to previous state development projects was to overcome institutional and cultural hierarchies and corruption. He would make strides against corruption and theft, but the privileged status of buyers vis-à-vis producers (a status that historically allowed them to pay unfair prices) would reassert itself after he was gone.

Environmental Challenges: COVER Responds to Ecological Change

Sadly, the natural environment of northern Veracruz has changed drastically. It is no longer possible to cultivate vanilla in the traditional system, without agricultural inputs. Given the other needs of a contemporary industry, especially the need to compete on a global scale and keep production costs down, contemporary intensification is a complex issue. Historically, many of these producers come from a long line of subsistence producers that used vanilla as an important supplement to their economy, integrating the crop into their land rotation schedule. Vallejo described this as a system in which a portion of each household's lands would be allowed to fallow and would grow back tree cover that provided the shade for the crop. But today, given problems with rainfall, soil erosion and soil nutrition, building a cost-effective industry is all the more difficult. New techniques need to be

developed that take into account these climate changes and the production methods of households.

Before introducing new techniques, COVER needed to conduct a census of producers. This entailed fieldworkers traveling into as many communities known to still produce and market vanilla. Besides basic demographic information, this census collected information about production techniques. At that time, most vanilla was grown with three techniques, based largely on traditional manners but with some modern variation.

For very small-scale producers, the traditional *acahual* was most common. In this system, vanilla is placed in the fallowed re-forested section of families' land. Communities cluster near water sources but each families land could be located an hour's walk, given population density and the tradition of rotating land use. The trees in these forests have been allowed to come back naturally, so they are not in orderly rows. The vine is placed at the base of appropriate trees, ones that have grown tall enough and have enough shade. The vines are usually allowed to grow high into the trees and can only be reached with ladders. These ladders, fashioned from thick bamboo, are used for pollination during the fertilization season and for harvesting when the beans have matured. Because of the arbitrary nature of the placement of trees and the fact that vines can grow up to forty feet high, the maintenance of the traditional accahual is highly intensive labor. However, the labor is not of a heavy nature so it is easily incorporated into the daily schedule and can be done by almost everyone in the household: man, woman and child. The labor is easily absorbed by the household in this case and the yield does not tend to be high in this type of

production. However, when prices were decent, vanilla was a good solid cash crop. For generations of subsistence focused farmers, vanilla was a reasonable investment of their time and resources. It worked because they did not have to invest much capital, they could use land that was not needed for food production and they could get the crop to a local market for sale. The key to reinvigorating production was to introduce new methods that allowed households to continue to balance commodity production within a broader economic strategy.

The Introduction of the **Pichoco** *as Tutor*

One of the first techniques introduced under Vallejo's tenure was the planting of *tutores* rather than using established forest. There are three different tree varieties that are used, but the most popular is the *pichoco* tree that has been imported to the region. This tree is sturdy enough to support the vine and the many activities associated with pollination and harvesting. It has a broad canopy of leaves at the very top of the trunk. The tree flowers in the spring, producing a bright red flower and edible green pod, that are both sold in the local market at a high price.

There were several communities that had already begun to experiment with pichoco orchards before COVER began. These orchards are relatively low cost and very space efficient and labor efficient. Vines must be tended to daily to ward off mold or infections and the neat rows of trees makes this task quick. During pollination and harvesting, the rows make work much faster than having to track vines throughout the forest and scale thin ladders to tall heights. Because it was cost effective and very labor effective, COVER concentrated their first projects on this technique. It was much easier to introduce irrigation systems into the pichoco

orchard and this became more and more important as COVER began to realize the significance of environmental changes in rain fall and subsequent impact on vanilla cultivation.

Integration with Citrus Orchards

One of the commodities local farmers invested in during the mid-1900s was citrus. Many families dedicated large portions of their land to orange orchards and made a steady living selling their produce to juice concentrate plants in Mexico. The market declined in the late 1990s and then a plague hit Central American citrus trees. Mexican citrus farmers were worried that once the plague hit trees in Mexico, they would no longer be able to compete with American farmers. Once the plague hit the U.S., farmers there would use pesticides. But the expense of pesticides for Mexican farmers would make it impossible to compete. In the interest of finding a use for well-established trees, several farmers began to integrate vanilla into their citrus orchards. This technique proved efficient. Farmers place the vine at the bottom of the orange tree, which provides the tutor and the shade needed to grow the vanilla.

Like the pichoco orchard, the orange orchard is space- and labor-efficient and provides a good yield. The investment is minimal, as this technique is only used in existing orchards. At most, farmers must purchase the plants and install irrigation systems. For most of the year, households can easily absorb the daily labor of tending to plants, cleaning up dead leaves, keeping the roots healthy, the soil loose and looking for signs of disease. Depending on the size of the household, families may look for day laborers during the fertilization period when a small orchard might

have up to 10,000 blooms in one day. Citrus growers actively sought the help of COVER in developing this new technique.

Shadehouse Production

The third system introduced during Vallejo's tenure was the shade house. Shade house production allows for a more intensive technique because both shade and humidity can be more precisely managed. Shade houses take up very little space and can be located within communities and near households. Tutors can be made of bamboo, pichoco trees or concrete posts. Polyester netting is strung over a larger frame to provide the necessary shade. Irrigation strung between support posts is fed from pools made to collect rain water or pumped from nearby streams or wells. Shade house production, while common in other vanilla-producing countries, is still fairly new to Mexico. It is a high-cost option and still in the experimental stage.

COVER Operations: Programs and Participants

The office of COVER is located in Papantla, something that the founders insisted on to maintain local autonomy. When the board of directors was first formed, the counselors elected to serve on the board reflected the diversity of this group. This is true today, with each group represented on the board by three members of each community (producers, curing businesses, industrialists). Funding for the operations of COVER and the implementation of programs comes from the state government department of agriculture.

COVER offers a limited number of programs and services to a diverse number of producers. While the board of directors is made up of the varied interests of the

vanilla industry, the programs were initially directed towards producers. There are at the moment a sufficient number of curing houses and processing plants to handle the current production levels. Besides the director, COVER employs three field agents, one events coordinator, a secretary and an accountant. The director oversees the implementation of programs, the work of the agents and works with the state agricultural department to solicit funding and build production and marketing initiatives. When Vallejo was the director, he focused on getting traditional producers to reinvest in production and worked to develop new techniques to address climate changes. While they were experimenting with shadehouse construction and encouraging groups to organize these projects, his directorship provided access to funding for plants and materials for other types of production. The drastic changes in climate meant that production would eventually need to move away from traditional production, but they were looking for the most cost efficient way to reintegrate vanilla into the agricultural and labor cycles. Producers were encouraged to plant pichoco orchards closer to their homes, to integrate vanilla into their citrus orchards if they already owned them and to organize into groups to construct shadehouses.

Projects are funded through several government agencies, both state and federal. I inquired early in my fieldwork about the funding and got different answers. At first, I was told that COVER does not handle any money. Vallejo was adamant that in order to curb corruption, COVER should manage distribution of materials for production rather than cash. For this reason, the first programs initiated provided plant material and irrigation equipment. These materials were purchased by state government officials and distributed through COVER programs. But this situation

became more complicated as COVER focused on shadehouse construction and expanded their services.

Shadehouses construction is costly, roughly $4,000 U.S., not including plants and the compost. For one family, this would be an unlikely investment given that one day's wage brings in $5 U.S. COVER organized communities into groups to build and fund the shadehouse, with the idea that both the financial obligation could be easier to meet and labor would be provided by this larger network. The groups must include at least ten individuals and tend to be a combination of family members and neighbors. The larger network is good for spreading out the financial burden but can be problematic in organizational terms. Often when we traveled out to meet with a group, we spent more time tracking down members than assisting them in their project. Vanilla is a side business for these farmers, so this may have accounted for much of the trouble locating members, but there was also some organizational trouble. These farmers work independently on their own lands for the most part, so maintaining cohesive goals within a group was difficult. For this reason, the timeline for completion of many projects often lagged behind the dates set by COVER. Ideally, field agents were set up to visit each project at the beginning of each building phase of a project and would direct them in the next step, and make arrangements to visit at completion. It was common to arrive at the site and find that construction had not begun or the next step had not been completed.

Organizing shadehouse projects around larger networks was useful for deferring capital risks, but the mere intensification of production had labor implications that at times outstripped labor sources. In the rainforest, production was

very small scale and easily integrated into the family labor pool. But modern methods intensified production in such a way that families were no longer able to handle all the labor needs. This began to be a problem during 2005 and producers looked to COVER to solve it. By funding new techniques that were necessary for production given the climate changes, they also created an intensive production method that made for labor shortages. The projects were funded and producers were able to share the capital risk with other households, but were then unable to handle the additional capital burden needed to hire wage laborers. Most recently, COVER counselors have initiated a government program to hire additional labor. This would create a new relationship between COVER and cash, which was purposely restricted in the initial phase of the movement. This change in access to funding is illustrative of larger changes that affected the overall governance of COVER and the attitudes of producers and critiques of the type of development project it had become after the tenure of Mr. Vallejo.

In a very short span of time, COVER has both increased overall numbers of producers, and has had to deal with the issues of production technology. As with any agricultural product, these farmers must control costs to stay competitive. Environmental changes make this difficult, as crops must be irrigated and soil must be amended. Gone are the days where producers could rely on the fertile soils of fallow rain forest and abundant consistent rains to nurture their crops to maturity.

COVER and Alternative Development

While all four production techniques are in use today throughout the region, most government programs are encouraging production in either pichoco orchards or shade houses. There have not been very many studies comparing the efficiency of the various techniques, but farmers, business men, anthropologists and agronomists have strong opinions. Among agronomists, there are camps that staunchly support and staunchly oppose the use of pichoco, citrus and shade house production. Opponents of pichoco and citrus production argue that the trees do not provide sufficient shade. Opponents of shade house production fear persistent pest problems in such an intensive production. In all three of these techniques, farmers must carefully weigh investment and cost of production with return, especially given the uncertain market in recent years.

Vanilla producers are a heterogeneous group. They are individuals and households and communities. They are subsistence farmers, wage laborers, landless and land owners. COVER took on the difficult task of building an industry among a diverse group of producers in an industry with centuries of cultural practices. The difficulty in organizing this industry was not only due to the differing interests of producers and businesses, but also to the diversity among producers. COVER was initiated by a diverse group of individuals and organizations, ostensibly as an alternative to past development projects.

Under the strong, focused leadership of Vallejo, COVER was able to initiate new programs and production systems, consonant with the producers' sense of justice. However, when Mr. Vallejo left, control shifted to government officials in the state capital. This loss of local autonomy and focus in regard to producer's rights

gave rise to many critics of COVER. COVER was conceived as an alternative to previous development projects, and faced the difficult challenge of outwitting corrupt government officials while developing new production techniques. So without consensus over the best technique to support, and weaker leadership, COVER was easily co-opted by government officials and local elites. It was under the two more recent administrations that COVER reverted to more traditional development strategies, where programs are established from the top-down. Local anthropologists and agronomists, in response, became critical of the program and called for a more populist approach to development.

The critics of COVER's current program express values similar to those expressed by the first phase of COVER. They hold that the most important goals are to stop corruption and to develop appropriate technologies. For these critics, corruption is possible because of the lack of organization in general and a lack of strong leadership. Because of this lack of leadership, COVER fails to see the importance of serving 'real producers' with appropriate technology and instead becomes a program for government payoffs and corporate welfare.

Development Co-opted

Vallejo was the director of COVER for the first eighteen months. During that time, he says, his goal was to organize as much as possible and change old systems of corruption in the process. It was no longer possible for farmers to produce in a traditional manner, and new techniques had to balance efficiency with cost-effectiveness. He wanted to direct intensification in such a manner that small-scale

farmers would still have access to the crop, and he knew this was dependent on dealing with environmental limitations in an economical manner. At the same time, he feLT that his time in office would be short, given his insistence on local autonomy in decision making and strict guidelines on financial allocation. He worked "like a dog," he said, because he knew it was only a matter of time until he angered the people in Jalapa and they got rid of him.

Vallejo felt like the state government was an antagonist that he had to work against, but COVER's own board of directors became a similar problem. The problem with the board is that it is not representative of the numbers involved in each group. In effect, it under-represents the producers and allows them to be out-voted by the common interests of curers and industrialists. There are presently close to 4,000 producers, four or five active curing businesses and only three industrialists in the region. But each group has three representatives on the board of directors.

The director after Vallejo was an agronomist named Rafael Damiron. He was in office for only one year and was a weak leader. Mr. Damiron was convinced that innovative techniques (like the use of citrus trees) were a mistake, so he stalled all of COVER's projects. Unfortunately, Vallejo feels, it was during this period of weak leadership that old systems of corruption resurfaced. COVER had a difficult task to accomplish and tried to build a coalition, but ultimately this coalition thwarted the chance of operating an alternative development project. In 2006, the state government made a large grant of $400,000 U.S., but the recipients were not primarily the producers. Of this grant, $300,000 U.S. went to one local curing house in what amounts to corporate welfare. Many producers, like Vallejo are both

disgusted but not surprised by the allocation of funding. It is during this period of time that the role of COVER began to shift in the mind of many producers and became a target for criticism not only for farmers but for other local development agencies.

During the harvest of 2005, producers were fed up with COVER. They blamed COVER for not protecting producers from the exploitation of local buyers and for not funding their projects. Producers protested in the streets, talked to journalists and visited the COVER office to complain. At this point COVER had lost so much authority that it began to operate at the same level as other agricultural organizations, and was now accused of promoting the system it had aimed to replace. Though COVER had attempted to implement a development agenda from the bottom-up, it had now become a project that disregarded the needs of the small producer, a system of corrupt disorder, and of costly, inappropriate technical investments. Their frustration was symptomatic of this central fact: that COVER had gone from being a grassroots organization that represented their interests, to being one more agency that served the interests of local elites.

Chapter 5: Conflict and Corruption: Local Critics and the Social Milieu of Production

Bright sun shone over the central park gazebo one morning. I sat in our favorite restaurant on the square and looked down just as a brown late model Ford pickup truck pulled up to the curb in front of the town hall. A middle aged man stepped out of the driver's door with a megaphone and jumped into the truckbed. He threw a handful of racemes, the stem on which vanilla pods grow, onto the street. He announced that something must be done about the low prices. He announced to all around him that the government was not doing enough to protect producers. Locals walked by, a few stopped to listen, several offered advice. After he finished making his announcement, he waved to the crowd, jumped to the ground and drove away from the square. When I talked to people sitting nearby, they said that they were not surprised by his frustration or by his public display. A man sitting on the square said that many people felt the same way. Others agreed that prices were too low and that the government should protect producers. This display seemed to be accepted as a logical reaction to local problems.

The scene on the square transpired just after the official cutting date. At that time, producer organizations travel into Papantla to receive an official statement from COVER to begin the cutting process. Soon after December 10th, when farmers are sanctioned to cut their beans, talk in town was focused on the low prices being offered by curing houses and buyers. Who was to blame for the record low prices? Some felt blame was with the curing houses that historically pay low prices and

exploit indigenous farmers. Others felt the blame should be with COVER, an organization that was created to protect the producer. Producers talked about what to do with their crops. If they cut them now, they risked low prices. But if they waited, they risked theft from their orchards. Every other day, the newspaper printed articles with accusations of poor management by COVER or exploitation by the businessmen.

The actions of the producer on the square and the frustration expressed by farmers are symptomatic of the debate between supporters of COVER and its detractors. The most difficult issue of the first phase of COVER was a need to protect against corruption (government and local elites) and to develop new technologies to address environmental change. Critics of COVER now argue that these values have been lost, due to organizational disorder which led to corruption. Local anthropologists argue that corruption has led COVER to ignore the social milieu that needs to be taken into account in order to develop useful programs that are accessible to the neediest producers. Local agronomists believe that the promotion of untested production systems is potentially costly and leads to more corruption. Though COVER was conceived as an alternative to traditional development projects, much of the criticism aimed at COVER are similar to the post development criticism of Escobar and Olivier. Founders of COVER were not able to maintain control over the development project in terms of the needs of small scale farmers. Though these local professionals were initially supportive of COVER as a unifying development scheme aimed at helping farmers benefit more directly from vanilla production, they were not included in the implementation of COVER programs. COVER lost control

over “the encounter” as it became co-opted by local elites and more focused on capital intensive production methods.

Organizational Disorder

One morning, I happened upon a crowd in the center of town, whose sign read, “National Vanilla Producers Meeting.” I was a bit perplexed that I had not known about the meeting, right there in Papantla. I sat down to listen to the presentations. A man at the podium said to much applause, “The problem in rural Mexico is that producers do not organize. The problem with vanilla producers is that they are not organized.”

This statement was illustrated clearly when I found Vallejo among the crowd. I diplomatically inquired as to why I had not heard about the meeting. He apologetically explained that he had only heard the night before and rumors were that the Isabel Engler, director of COVER, had refused to attend and was not advertising the meeting to COVER board members. This was the second organization I encountered that used the name National Vanilla Producers Organization. Earlier in the year I had attended the National Producers of Vanilla’s strategic planning session. The problem in the countryside is that there are too many organizations working for common goals with no coordination. Though COVER was conceived to coordinate these groups, it had ceased to provide direction.

For this reason, I decided I needed to understand how producers are organized in broader terms. COVER was supposed to be the over seer of all programs, but now I had evidence that COVER was not involved with every vanilla producer’s

organization and was even antagonistic towards some groups. I interviewed the leaders of four agricultural organizations located in the area in an attempt to understand the role of COVER in the larger scheme. Not only had COVER lost the role of orchestrating all other producers' organizations, but leadership at COVER had become competitive with other producers' organizations, and groups were no longer cooperating on broad terms.

These groups ranged from private civic to local or federally funded organizations that each focused on a different constituency of producers --for many vanilla being but one of many projects they sponsored. For instance, the private Campesino Workers Union was working with producers to arrange funds to build the first rural extraction plant. They claimed that the majority of vanilla is produced in pichoco groves by campesinos that they alternatively addressed as non-Totonac and indigenous. They stressed that the most important impediment for producers was the monopoly of coyotes. An extraction plant located in the campo and run by campesinos would break this monopoly up, "Controlling a plant would mean controlling the market." Their goal in controlling the market would be to create a stable price where producers would be guaranteed eighty to one hundred pesos per kilo of green vanilla, much higher than the thirty pesos being offered during the 2005-2006 harvest seasons, but lower than the 400 pesos offered four years ago. A standard price would keep one more generation on the land and in their estimation would act as an environmental conservation mechanism as pichoco and other shade trees were planted.

Three other local groups worked with vanilla producers as a part of a larger system of rural development. These were all government-sponsored, two by the state government and one by the county government. These groups experienced similar disappointment at the manner in which COVER had organized production in general, and viewed COVER as competition rather than as a director. Anthropologist Luis Luna worked with a state organization that was established to stimulate economic projects among indigenous groups. He pinpointed the problem: with so many different groups working with vanilla production in isolation, the impact is diluted. In regard to the role of vanilla production in local indigenous communities, he felt that though the indigenous economic model was distinctive, it was not hard to integrate new techniques to intensify production while maintaining traditional social organization. Although prices have fallen in recent years, he believes that Totonac families "have faith in vanilla." He argues that indigenous producers are not against technology, against changes in production or more advanced curing systems. But, he believes, they will be willing to change their systems to produce intensively but not extensively. They will not be willing to produce vanilla at the expense of subsistence crops and do not have access to large tracts of land for expansion.

Mr. Luna believes that investing in vanilla production can be a stimulus for maintaining traditional social systems. They involve women in all their projects because they believe the strong matriarchal system of the Totonac will insure the "passing on of knowledge to the next generation." In the same way that many Totonacs are "betting on vanilla" as a crop to balance their cash needs in a

subsistence economy, this organization is "betting on women to pass along the cultural knowledge of vanilla production" to the next generation.

> People are willing to bet on vanilla because they have faith in it. It is a cultural thing, not a religious thing. Indigenous communities have always produced and are always willing to produce, they are not willing to give up during hard times. Because of this cultural identification with vanilla, even when it does not look economically advantageous, they take a chance. We need to work with these producers in groups and make it possible for them to work intensively, but not push them to produce vanilla extensively.

These sentiments were expressed likewise at the local county level. The county administration worked with state funding sources to organize various vanilla projects and likewise have begun to focus on women's groups. They pointed out that not only are there too many different groups working with vanilla producers without coordination, but that often these groups work simultaneously within the same community --creating a new source of conflict and tension. This group was particularly critical of COVER because of perceived injustices towards local leaders. Though COVER was located in the town center, municipal authorities were not given an active role in COVER projects. They argued that COVER offered a do-it-yourself model but that most producers needed more concrete tangible support and guidance. They had just finished soliciting the federal government for aid to establish a new association of producers that would be operated by the county government. The speaker at the conference I happened upon in the center of town received applause when he summed up the problem of producers as lacking central organization. Perhaps some of the problem lies with too many organizations without overarching infrastructure. What has historically been an advantage for rural producers, the

ability to organize and solicit the government for funding, has exponentially confounded the process.

These organizations had more things in common than not: much of the philosophy behind their projects, the target population they hoped to serve and their criticism of COVER. All the things these groups were trying to accomplish should come under the direction of one organization, what COVER was supposed to be. Ultimately, the work each was able to accomplish was "diluted" because of competition and lack of coordination. Further evidence of this lack of coordination occurred during these late spring interviews: all of these groups were unaware of the upcoming COVER sponsored conference. The First International Conference for Vanilla Producers was organized for all vanilla producers to help disseminate knowledge, make connections and build direct relationships between producers and the market. But when the conference was only weeks away, the leaders of these groups I interviewed were unaware of the event.

COVER lost the ability to orchestrate programs throughout the industry and lost credibility with leaders within these organizations. One of the counselors of the original board of directors is critical of the bureaucratic nature of COVER today. Mr. Herbierto Larios, the owner of one of the largest curing houses in town plays an ambiguous role in the operation of COVER programs. On the one hand, he is a business owner with vested interest in low cost, high quality green vanilla beans. He is one of the buyers that are often accused of acting like predatory coyotes, coercing producers into unfair sales. But, on the other hand, he has been very active in the formation of COVER and critical of corruption. He was instrumental in supporting

the election of a campesino to the presidency of the national producers' organization in an attempt to wrest control away from corrupt industrialists and government agencies.

Mr. Larios argues that the major problem in organizing producers and intensifying production is an "organizational confusion". He believes that COVER should have been the sole director, where all the technological know-how and funding would be consolidated. He explained that in Mexico, any civic organization can go to the government to solicit money and the government will respond to political pressure. This means that there is no organizational direction and no way to account for investments.

According to Mr. Larios, there should be only two state-sponsored producer organizations, COVER and the National Consejo, with separate governing bodies. All other organizations working with producers should be non-governmental, with the ability to work with the government agencies but without the right to petition the government for direct funding. This would allow for a consolidation of resources that would allow COVER to disperse appropriate technology and increase productivity.

Critics of COVER differed in how they perceived the role of COVER in the industry as a whole, but they agreed on the twin issues of disorganization and corruption. Because COVER was not able to maintain an authoritative position over production and commercialization of the vanilla industry, corrupt government officials and local elites were able to co-opt the funding mechanism and benefit from funds that would have been allocated to producers. A second set of critics feared that

COVER disorganization led to an erosion of local culture by pushing through programs based on expensive and inappropriate social programs and technology.

The Culture and Technology of Production

These critics of COVER's programs believe the government is addressing the needs of the industry at the expense of the diverse culture of traditional producers. COVER fails to take into account the social milieu that Sardan argued was critical. Rocio Aguilera, an anthropologist who works full time with the Culturas Populares (a government agency funded to promote cultural projects) argues that COVER is developing a program that is essentially inaccessible to indigenous producers. She explained that the new technical packages being offered by the government do not take into account traditional indigenous producers' social organization, and ultimately underwrite programs that require capital investments so high that indigenous farmers cannot access them. Because the programs do not take into account the needs of these small-scale producers, government funding that was meant to help indigenous farmers goes to mestizos who already have access to capital and political resources.

For most of these indigenous producers, vanilla has been an ideal cash crop to integrate into other subsistence and cash crops. Even if climate changes necessitate new technologies for vanilla production, Ms. Aguilera argues that vanilla production within traditional organizational schemes provides important secondary crops that would be lost if producers all became intensive vanilla producers. Indigenous producers integrate vanilla production into a larger system of crop rotation that is focused on maize production for household consumption. Within a maize field grow

important medicinal herbs and food products that would be lost if these crops were reduced. Likewise, if intensive production required the cutting of more forest, other subsistence items would be lost.

As COVER lost its original focus of serving small scale producers, the programs they developed and funded most were not as accessible to indigenous farmers. Vanilla orchards were seen in terms of hectares, numbers of plants, rows of tutors and harvest capacity rather than the role of the crop in a broader system of subsistence. This limited the ability of indigenous producers to get involved with official programs, because to get involved in an extensive production system would throw off their traditional production organization.

COVER was the result of a diverse groups of individuals, but critics argue that the programs being offered by COVER are limited. To Rocio, and others, COVER programs are directed only at those producers interested in intensive production. She points out that the production of vanilla has always been small-scale for Totonacs and has been the most important crop they have collectively used to maintain a subsistence lifestyle in the midst of an ever-encroaching market economy. The idea that both production systems, indigenous and intensive, could equally benefit from programs with COVER, was not acceptable to Rocio. She argued that so far, all programs are inaccessible to traditional farmers --a group that far outnumbers new producers. She sees this shift in policy as a result of corruption, where programs are designed by individuals that want to dedicate their efforts to the monocropping of vanilla.

The idea that these communities are trapped in the dilemmas posed by tradition and change, is important for understanding many of the criticism launched by local anthropologists. It's not that these anthropologists are beholden to a static notion of indigenous existence, but that they are concerned with the fragile dynamic of tradition and change. They object to government resources being given to those with easy access to resources, but they also object to poorly directed resources in indigenous communities. These modernizing programs have been responsible –at least in part- for the decline of rural, indigenous communities. Ms. Aguilera says that although the state of Veracruz has a lot of natural resources, it does not invest in manufacturing. Because of this, the countryside is becoming a nursery while able-bodied workers move to urban centers to find work. Investment is needed for the survival of these communities, but investment only comes to communities with political ties.

Ms. Aguilera makes the point that projects fail when they do not incorporate appropriate technology, do not tailor programs to available household labor, and do not reach out to the "have-nots" (the poorer producers). As a case in point, she cites a Culturas Populares project she was involved in to re-integrate vanilla plantations into rural communities that had experienced dramatic declines in production. She and her group targeted youth that would have traditionally learned cultivation techniques from their fathers. They were able to start a successful project involving young men that eventually resulted in the building of the only rural indigenous curing house. But the programs being offered most recently by COVER do not adequately take into

account household labor sources and propose techniques that are inappropriate for these communities.

Labor

Vanilla production is described as the second most labor-intensive commodity on the world market, but it does not require heavy labor. Families work together to maintain orchards and are able to accomplish the work with household labor. Women are seen as partners in agricultural work. In a subsistence-oriented economy, division of labor is observed and practiced along traditional lines. But ultimately, the work must be done and the family needs to accomplish work with available household members. Rocio points out that recent projects with farmers fail to take the labor pool into account. According to her, the size of the orchard should correspond to the labor force available. She says, "You can't have a one size fits all package." COVER programs today are offering a development project that is not representative of all vanilla producers but favors producers that already have access to capital and other resources. For producers with access to capital, hiring day laborers during pollination periods or harvest is doable. But for indigenous farmers, this causes cash problems.

She was skeptical of the conference COVER had planned for the spring of 2006 and was sure it would confirm her fears of government projects addressing only the needs of those with their feet firmly planted in the market economy. She felt sure that most of the producers that came to the conference would be from citrus farmers. In her mind, traditional producers do not have access to citrus orchards or shadehouses and this conference would focus on the needs of this limited group of producers. In

her experience, this happened with many government initiatives in the countryside. She argued that the government should not fund citrus growers in an industry that has historically belonged to indigenous communities. Government programs are designed to have social impact and should only be offered to those with the least means. This sentiment was repeated often as I traveled around to various projects.

Production Technology

At a practical level, many critics accused COVER of pushing production techniques that have not been proven to be efficient or advantageous. During 2005, COVER sponsored thirty vanilla groups –about half of them provided for irrigation systems and the other half shade-house projects. But all 31 of the 2006 projects funded were shade houses. For many, this signaled a policy change with several implications. Irrigation projects could be implemented by groups working in all four production processes, which are available to a wide range of communities. Shade house projects imply a certain level of resources. For an organization set up to represent all vanilla producers, this was problematic; it was a sign of favoritism. From a technical aspect, it was a problem because the technique is still considered new for Mexican producers and many agronomists were not convinced it was an appropriate means to produce vanilla. Erasmo Curti, a research agronomist who worked with Ms. Aguilera in the vanilla project, explained that focusing on shadehouse production is a mistake. Shadehouses are extremely costly for Mexican growers. He feels that it is more appropriate to integrate methods that allow for an intensification of plant numbers in pichoco, citrus or modified rainforest orchards.

Before the decline of vanilla production in the late 1900s, the industry was fairly straightforward: 30,000 indigenous producers harvested traditionally grown vanilla and sold the beans to a limited number of curing houses in the local market. Producers negotiated between subsistence production and commodity crops in order to satisfy needs within their households. They voiced dissatisfaction with the division of labor between producer and buyer, they sought better prices and were vocal about their dissatisfaction with this division of labor. The founders of COVER saw an opportunity to rebuild a dying industry built on new ideas about the role of producer, curer, and industry and market control. But the inability of COVER to maintain the position of director of these activities raises important questions about the role of government in development projects, especially in regard to variation among contemporary producers.

Erasmo Curti suggests an additional reason that COVER has not managed to garner the allegiance of producers as a whole (in addition to the issues of under representation and inaccessibility): its eagerness to push new, high-risk methods of vanilla production without thoroughly testing them first.

Given the confusion created by such a wide range of interests involved, it is no wonder COVER has seen its mandate diminish. In five short years, COVER has been at the center of huge change. An industry that has maintained a strict division of labor between producers and businesses was rapidly changing in every way. The industry is now very complex and COVER has trying to represent too many interests. All this variation is complicated further by the lack of cohesion in organization.

Alternative Development: Limiting Organization Goals

The current director of COVER, Isabel Engler, was keenly aware of the difficulties the organization faced in accomplishing the goal of intensifying production while protecting the producer. Obviously, the success of COVER relied on producers' willingness and ability to intensify production. But producers had made it clear that they would produce only on their terms. They knew that the greatest profits were to be made in the market and they were now unwilling to sell to local buyers for low prices. There producers, many with a long family history in vanilla production, knew well how to integrate cash crops into their agricultural cycle and how to use household labor. They also had a sense of the value of their product and were demanding fair trade. COVER was caught in the middle.

Engler was one of the first field agents for COVER under Vallejo. She knew the producers well and had a good understanding of their lives and livelihood. In her mind, COVER facilitates each process and makes the important contacts for the industry to grow. She acknowledges the main problem "that prevents us from taking off" is that the process of curing and marketing vanilla has been monopolized by four or five individuals. She explains that organizing producers into groups is an important first step to enable them to create access to a wider market, which the "government regards as a kind of business." For her, the success of this business is dependent on breaking the monopolies and "old ideas that persist." But she is an employee of the state government at this point and has very little leverage to change mandates given to her from above. She was in office in 2006 when the large allocation of funds was given to the curing house. She was angry but without any

power to stop the action. When COVER lost local autonomy, her position became a matter of implementing programs prescribed by the state officials and negotiating with local leaders on the small funds left for COVER projects.

For COVER, the issue at hand is creating an industry where the producer has access to the market. This is a political issue that takes a lot of time and energy for an organization that is also charged with creating a modern industry out of traditional production techniques, in an environment that has changed in the last forty years. COVER has lost its founding role as overseer of the chain of vanilla production-curing-marketing. And my conversations with leaders –both inside and outside COVER- have yielded two reasons that I can easily summarize: an organizational deficit that allows corruption to resurface and over-investment in untested systems that are inaccessible to poorer (indigenous) producers. Because of these deficits, COVER has failed to provide an alternative development agenda and instead reinforces the dynamics of power that allow for the exploitation of farmers.

In such a fragmented and confusing landscape, it is not surprising that producers would have low expectations of any government program. It is also not surprising that they should, for pragmatic reasons, choose to craft their own strategies that draw on available programs, but do not depend too much on them. They are willing to bet on vanilla but not willing to risk everything on government programs. To understand the significance of this move I needed to have information about the social organization of these producers and to understand their perception of development. I was able to travel to many communities over the course of my

fieldwork with COVER agents. At the conference, I was able to collect information about these ideas by conducting a survey of producers.

Development on Producer's Terms: The Social Organization of Rural Production.

Traveling with COVER fields agents was important for understanding the social and economic organization of producers in this region. The agents would make appointments for each week based on the needs of producers and the phase of various projects. They had to find balance between visiting well-established projects and visiting the newer projects at each building phase. We usually made it to three or four projects per day. One day we arrived at a project site after numerous buses, only to find the field empty. We walked through the field, which had been recently burned, measured its dimensions, and checked out the soil. After waiting an hour for the leader to arrive, the agent decided we should walk into the community, about two miles away.

We made the uphill journey on foot, as bus service was infrequent and there was no guarantee one would come along until the evening. We found the entire group at the leader's house, mixing concrete and filling wooden forms to build the posts for the shadehouse. The field agent inspected the posts they had made previously and calculated how many posts the house needed in total. They talked about what the next step would be, and when we would return. While the agent talked at length with the leader, I had the opportunity to talk to the other members.

They were surprised to learn that I was from the United States; they had assumed I was from the state government. Several of them offered that they had previously been in the United States as workers. One in particular wanted to talk about his time in California working in produce fields. He laughed when I asked him if he ever planned to return, "I'm too old to do that again. Plus, I'm going to be a vanilla producer." I asked if migration was a common practice for other families in the community. Of six hundred community members, they estimated that two hundred are working in the U.S. One hundred of these migrants were in California while eighty lived in Texas.

They invited us to a lunch which their wives were cooking in the main house of the complex. We sat around a table next to the kitchen and passed around large bowls of chicken cooked in a red chile sauce, rice, beans and hand-made tortillas. After the meal, I excused myself and asked the women if I could join them in the kitchen. They giggled when I asked them how to make the chicken sauce. I asked them about their involvement with the vanilla project, as the group had officially listed two women on the membership list. They said that once all the heavy labor was completed for the shadehouse, they planned to help their husbands in the vanilla business. They were aware that vanilla took a lot of care, and knew women were considered good guardians of vanilla orchards. They were excited about the project and anxious for the shadehouse to be completed so that the group could begin planting the vines.

The agent and group members finished up the timeline for the next stage of building and agreed on a meeting time six weeks later. One of the men had arranged

for a young man in the community to drive us back to the main road in his pickup truck. On the thirty minute ride, the driver mentioned that he had recently returned from working in San Francisco. He had made enough money working in a restaurant and car wash that he was able to build a house and start a family. He thinks about returning, but doesn't want to leave his small child behind and worries about crossing the border. He had not yet gotten involved in the vanilla project, but thought he might if it worked out for the others.

The time that I spent traveling with COVER field agents allowed me to observe the daily lives of producers and to develop an understanding of the role of social organization in the economic strategies of rural communities. It was an understanding of these various producers that helped me to formulate a picture of the range of households involved in vanilla and to seek out representative households to work with more closely.

When I learned about the international producers' conference COVER planned for the following spring, I knew this would be a good opportunity to test these impressions. COVER director Ms. Engler gave me permission to conduct a survey and I provided her with a copy of the survey for approval before the conference. I also showed the survey to Mr. Vallejo and Ms. Aguilera and visited with them about what might be accomplished with the survey. I hired two assistants to help me collect data during the morning sessions of the first two days of the three day conference.

My main purpose was to get a general portrait of the producers that COVER had been organized to serve. This opportunity proved to be an excellent moment to

speak to a large cross-section of producers and learn first-hand of their needs, hopes and plans. The general profile that emerged from the survey was that of producers who grew much of their own maize, employed household labor (and did not have the means to hire wage-laborers), and would stand to benefit most from low-tech investments and niche markets. In spite of the genuine enthusiasm for the shadehouse project that I had witnessed, most producers were wary of costly investments. They were much more concerned with simple matters like irrigation and fair prices.

To get a sense of the variation among producers, I conducted two surveys. Both were a random sample of the individuals attending. The first was a structured survey with 100 producers and concentrated on more quantifiable data, especially in regard to household structure, labor issues, economic resources and production technology. The second was an opened-ended survey with a more qualitative focus, especially in terms of how producers view vanilla production in their lives and their ideas about improving production. I conducted this survey with 40 individuals (20 female and 20 male), seeking to understand the relationship between production and investment decisions and the intensification process. What follows is an overview of the results. These results paint a picture of a pragmatic, forward-looking group of producers, for whom vanilla production is one source of income, but never the exclusive source.

Survey Results: Households and Vanilla Production

In the first survey, my goal was to develop a broad sense of the social and economic organization of producers that attended the conference. I gathered data on where participants were from, age, marriage status and household members. I asked

about use of household labor and data on the types of crops they planted and how they used the crops, how many hectares each family 'owned' and what kinds of agricultural inputs they used. I used this survey to collect data about participants' current vanilla production, use of development programs and the reasons they were attending the conference.

Economic and Social Organization of Producer Households

The majority of the producers at the conference were male (81%) and married (75%) and the median age was mid-fifties. Most of the producers live with their extended family and 90% responded that they work with their spouse to accomplish all the tasks that the family needs to complete to provide for household consumption needs. They saw their spouses as equal partners. Land tenancy was split fairly consistently between ejidal (communally owned) and private property. Most of the participants farmed small plots of land; 41% had less than 2 hectares to farm. Thirty-five percent of the producers speak an indigenous language and more than half are literate in Spanish.

Current Systems of Vanilla Production

About one third of those interviewed are very new to vanilla production, and many of those are only harvesting their first crop this year. Fourteen percent of these producers have already installed an irrigation system in their vanilla orchard and one hundred percent of those without irrigation plan to do so. Only thirteen percent use chemicals to control pests and fungus, the majority of the producers preferred to deal with these problems by removing effected leaves and keeping a clean orchard. The most common tutor system used by these producers was split between orange grove

and pichoco orchards. For most producers, vanilla accounts for a small percentage of their daily work. Outside of pollination and harvest periods, these producers are able to attend to their orchards at the end of their work day. They often responded that they work "a rato", a little here and a little there, several times a week. They expressed concerns over the recent drought and said that their inability to add irrigation to the orchards was detrimental to production.

The majority of these households produce all or most of the corn they consume. Only 21 of these vanilla producers do not grow maize. Of the 79% that do produce corn, only 28 actually buy any regularly. The rest of these producers maintain subsistence production of corn for their family's food needs. They also produce other cash crops such as coffee, beans, bananas, tropical fruits and at time sell corn.

They often said that they would like to hire laborers to help when they are unable to complete tasks but do not have the cash to do so. In these families, 43% have used migration as a strategy to bring in cash, but the majority of the respondents had sent sons as laborers rather than traveling themselves. Of these migrants, the majority found work in Mexico rather than internationally. When asked if they plan to migrate in the future, only 14% responded positively. Those that do not want to migrate added, "If God is willing, vanilla will work out and I won't have to leave my family."

Of those that have been producing vanilla for more than two years, 51% planned to sell that year's harvest as green beans to local buyers. But one hundred percent of all of the producers in this survey wanted to learn how to cure their

harvests and would do so as soon as possible. They expressed this as a primary incentive for attending the conference. They also expressed an interest in learning to produce value-added products with vanilla and to develop markets outside the region to sell these products. One of the most significant advantages that curing vanilla provided these producers is the ability to hold out for higher prices. Green vanilla has to be fermented right away or it will mold. So farmers that sell raw vanilla must sell immediately and cannot spend too much time looking for better prices. Properly cured vanilla has a long shelf life and those that have learned this skill are willing to store their vanilla for longer periods of time. This gives the producers more power in the market place.

Besides maintaining small vanilla orchards on family land, many of these producers also participate in group projects, especially shadehouse production. One hundred percent of the respondents said that they thought group projects were a good way to organize and would be willing to participate in projects, especially if it helped them to establish ties outside of Mexico and to develop new markets for their product. They understood implicitly the significance of establishing markets outside the region and wanted to do so with direct access to those markets. These producers are fed up with "coyotes", local elite buyers and curing houses, as is evidenced in their desire to cure their own vanilla and develop direct relationships to market for cured vanilla and value-added products.

The only individuals in this group that were not COVER members came from outside the state and everyone also named a local group to which they were affiliated. Less than half, 38%, of these producers had received assistance from COVER

through technical support and only 12% had participated in other forms of development programs, such as grants or loans to buy plants and compost, install irrigation or build a shadehouse.

Development Projects and Producer Expectations

The second survey I conducted was constructed for a more in-depth examination of the role of development in producers' lives, and to understand their expectations of programs. This survey included most of the same demographic data as the first survey, but allowed for longer discussions with participants about their goals in working with COVER and what they hoped to gain by producing vanilla.

When asked if they would like to increase their production, the majority of the producers responded positively. Those that did not plan to increase cited a lack of labor as the inhibiting factor. When asked what would encourage them to produce more, the majority responded that both access to finances for irrigation and fair prices would entice increased production. They said that they were more likely to invest more labor than capital to intensify production. They all worked to some extent with their extended family and felt they would increase everyone's work before seeking wage laborers. If they had access to cash to pay laborers, they said they would intensify more but they did not want to take on debt to accomplish this.

The obstacles for these producers lay in two variables with historic precedents: lack of water and lack of consistent fair prices. Producers argue that access to both these would spur an increase in production. Because this region had been so heavily de-forested, producers were wary of changes in rainfall. At the time

of this conference, they were experiencing a severe drought. Both producers with traditional orchards and new production systems were worried about their investments. Without rain, the vanilla vines would wither and they would lose not only the work and money they had already invested in the orchards, but it would take three years time to rebuild viable orchards.

Equally problematic for these producers is the issue of price. They were adamant that they planned to intensify production on the basis of developing more consistent market prices and being able to make more direct relationships with outside buyers and markets. They were aware of the history of tension between producers and local buyers and had come to the conference to learn about alternatives.

Producers were fairly consistent in expressing what they would like from government programs. First, they want COVER to provide them with direct aid. They expressed concern over past projects where government agencies make promises of aid but the funding or work never arrives. Many of them felt that their presence at the conference would be proof to the government that there are real producers in Veracruz and that they are ready to organize. They are happy to participate in projects that provided materials to build orchards and with the exception of cash needs for hiring laborers, do not expect to receive monetary aid. They want irrigation materials, plants, compost, tutors and the supplies to build shadehouses. The majority of these producers felt COVER should focus their efforts on irrigation systems. With the lack of water caused by environmental changes, lack of irrigation could be detrimental to their success.

The producers had the feeling that COVER should create a system that cut down on the corruption of former development projects. They also felt like COVER should play a role in protecting producers. Many expressed that they thought the government should play a major role in setting prices and building markets. They had specifically come to the conference to find out about possible markets. They felt that their presence at the conference conveyed a message to both the government and buyers: "We are here and we are looking for new ways to sell vanilla."

The majority of these producers see vanilla as an alternative business to supplement other subsistence and cash crops. They view vanilla as a good crop to integrate into their larger agricultural cycle for two reasons. Vanilla was easily integrated into their other subsistence and commodity crops because it is possible to intensify production in a small space but also because they felt an attachment to vanilla. For these producers, vanilla was attached to a way of life. They expressed a love of growing vanilla in spite of the inconsistent market in recent years and troubles with water. These individuals claim that vanilla is a part of a heritage and that through good times or bad, their commitment to it would keep them producing, at least on a small scale. But there would have to be some changes before they could be persuaded to invest more land or labor, as COVER was encouraging them to do. Those changes would have to come in the form of fair prices and more control over the market.

Producers attended this conference with great hopes of making connections with other producers, learning about available help and about markets. One producer said that they came because they wanted the governor to see that there really are

vanilla producers and that they are serious about production. The atmosphere was very positive and producers were attending the conference with hopes for the future, for their families and for vanilla.

The Social and Economic Organization of Production: Betting on Vanilla

This survey is useful for understanding what Olivier de Sardan describes as "actor's strategies and contextual constraints". First, it gives us a good picture of what the phrase "appropriate technology" means in this situation. Second, it creates a picture of the producer population and the optimal scale of their vanilla production. Finally, it shows consensus among producers regarding their plans for selling their harvests and points to a new direction in the industry. These ideas are consonant with the critiques made by local anthropologists and agronomists.

It is significant that none of the producers interviewed spoke of a need for shadehouses. Their needs were for irrigation and pest-control schemes that are much more modest and low-cost investments. Their use of citrus and pichocos as tutors was an indicator of their interest in modest innovations. In short, an alternative development scheme seeking to use an appropriate technology of vanilla production would do well to follow the investments and emphases of the first phase of COVER.

In terms of scale, the general reluctance to use hired labor suggests that the intensification of vanilla production should be such that all of the work can be done by available household labor. Otherwise, the families will have to hire paid laborers and run the risk of incurring debt, a risk that has been historically fatal to their

survival as small farmers. This is not a producer population that lends itself to large-scale projects.

The producers' strong desire to cure their own vanilla beans suggests that they would benefit more from an investment in curing technology than from shadehouse construction. Such an investment could be the basis for an alternative development strategy that would bring maximum benefit to the small producer instead of the middlemen and industrialists. Such a strategy might bring on the opposition of vested interests, since it would bypass the local elite and the state government bureaucracy.

These households need to have means of meeting cash needs that come with education and rites of passage. Without a cash-earning source, like vanilla, they will be forced to migrate in search of it. Many of them are betting on vanilla. Their needs are modest, but crucial to meet --if their rural lifestyle is to be sustained. The two chapters that follow provide an in-depth look at two different families that are representative of the producers I surveyed at the conference. They want to remain and raise their families in rural Veracruz, and to that end they have adopted vanilla as part of a diversified economic strategy. Development strategies will succeed to the extent that they are attuned to these modest but crucial needs.

Chapter 6 Betting on Tradition and Innovation: The Lopez Family

From the bus window, a uniform landscape yields to patches of distinct color. This patch is a freshly-plowed field, ready for the second crop of the year. That patch is drying corn, waiting for harvest. Next, we pass a fallowing field and on the other side of the bus, the forests have given way to cattle grazing. Looking down from the bus, I see the loading docks at the citrus cooperative, closed and empty more often than not. Thirty minutes out of town, we cross a river and drive through a banana plantation. We pass through small communities, slowing to pick up a passenger waiting at a crossroads or to wait for farm animals crossing the highway. This bus takes me out to a community one hour from Papantla to visit with a family of vanilla producers.

The second time I traveled out to work with the Lopez family, I missed the bus in Papantla. But this was no serious concern; I knew that I could jump a different bus that would pass by the road that leads away from the highway to their community. This alternate bus would mean a walk of four kilometers because I had missed the only morning bus to the community. As I walked through several communities on the way, individuals came out of their houses to assist me, sure that I was a lost tourist. They laughed when I told them I was not looking for the ruins of Tajin but for the community of Zapata. Once they found out I was visiting the family of Sergio Lopez they sent me on my way with directions to the family house. Occasionally I passed a PEMEX sign marking the way to a pump pad. Several fence

posts acted as billboards, advertising Coca Cola or petrochemical companies. Hand made signs offered public service announcements: "Violence in the home is not good", "Maternal health is a community asset" "Wash your vegetables with clean water" "Don't litter." The road cut through fields of corn: fields tilled, fields with new sprouted corn, fields with tall green sturdy stalks rustling in the wind. I walked around one more corner, around one more milpa, over one more hill, the road turned into the community of Emiliano Zapata.

I first met the patriarch of the Lopez family at the Vanilla Festival in Papantla in December. Sergio had just been elected the president of the national vanilla producer's organization. There was some controversy surrounding his election, as he was the first president of the organization that others considered to be a real producer, and a campesino at that. Shortly after his election, I had a meeting with a local broker who described the controversy. This broker was a long time friend of Sergio's and supported his election. His interpretation of the controversy was that having a peasant in a leadership role meant less opportunity for government officials to steal funds. This made these officials angry. It was at the vanilla festival that his position was to be unveiled to various government officials that had come to participate in the ceremonies.

The next time I met with Sergio was in the offices of COVER, where he had come to talk over some business with the director and to set up the office of the national organization for producers. Sergio had been a member of the original group that worked together to establish COVER. Once COVER was established, he had worked with board members to solicit producers and build the programs. His family

kept their traditional vanilla orchard in the forest and they had invested in vanilla for their orange orchards. They were waiting on a grant to add irrigation to their orange orchard. Sergio was involved with COVER programs and decision making, but once he was elected president of the National Vanilla Producers Organization, he spent most of his time traveling between Papantla, Mexico City and Puebla, working with government officials to raise money for projects and talking with the different regional vanilla organizations about their needs and projects. One of the chief complaints of farmers was a lack of organization for producers. Sergio traveled widely to meet with groups to discuss the best ways to organize and solicit the government. During the first six months that he held the position of president of the National Vanilla Producers Organization, his office was housed in the COVER office in Papantla. For this reason, when he was not traveling for national business, he was involved in COVER business, which usually amounted to his weighing in on new projects and calming the emotions of individuals and groups that came to COVER wanting to know why their projects had not been funded or they had not seen extension workers in over six months.

When I first met Maria, Sergio's wife, she was sitting in the plastic chair against the front wall of the COVER office. Sergio was in conference with the director. We talked over the sound of cars and buses on the street in front of us. Though we had just been introduced, she was an avid and enthusiastic conversationalist. Without much prompting from me, she told me about her five children and of her family's life in the community. She described the feast of the Three Kings in detail. In the community where her family lives, the three kings are

considered the guardians of the milpa. On the January seventh each year, they take freshly prepared tamales to the milpa as a gift to the kings. She told me about her children, now all grown adults and their dislike of gathering the family water at the well. They had recently told their mother that they should put running water in the family house. They did not see why they should continue to walk to the community well each day to haul buckets of water to the house. She laughed as she described their discontent. She told them there was no need for running water. They had a community well down the hill from the family house. Trips to the well provided opportunity to meet with relatives and neighbors, catch up on news, and talk about the weather, the crops, and the next community event. And besides, she laughed, "What else would they do with all their time?" This first meeting with the matriarch of the household was encouraging. My goal in establishing a closer relationship with working households was to understand the daily lives of producers and how specific systems of social organization led to economic strategy and implementation.

After I had been working in Papantla and with COVER for several months, I had begun to seek out households where I would conduct more long-term, focused studies of the daily lives and work of producers. Part of working with COVER was to understand the variation among producers and the production process. As I traveled with COVER agents into the field to work with individuals and groups, I found that producers had as much variation between them as they did similarities. When vanilla production declined in the end of the 1900s, the type of households producing vanilla was fairly homogenous. Until that time, most vanilla in Mexico was produced in the

rain forest on very small scale. Today, as I stated previously, there are four systems of production which are practiced by a wider range of households. Some traditional producers have diversified into pichoco orchards or have introduced vanilla into their citrus fields. Likewise, individuals and households not previously involved in vanilla production have constructed shade houses or pichoco orchards. For this reason, I needed to choose households that were representative of these similarities and the variation. I did not think of producers as representing a lineal progression from traditional to contemporary production. I think to divide producers along those lines would miss out some of the important ways these producers are able to strategize economically in a constantly changing market. But I did want to work with families that represented the spectrum of producers, both in the techniques they used to produce vanilla, in the ways they organized household labor and in how they viewed organizations' and producers' access to the market.

The household of Maria and Sergio was a good place to begin, since they have worked with vanilla their whole lives. They grew up working with their parents in traditional orchards and have integrated modern techniques into their household work. They now have a large crop of vanilla that they grow in their orange grove. They live in an extended family household and work with their grown children and their spouses. They produce all the corn that the household consumes together on their multiple plots of land and manage cash crops that they have integrated into the subsistence plots (oranges, beans, chilis, fish). Their experience bears out how COVER, at its best, has not fostered an over-reliance on vanilla production, and has encouraged modest innovations consistent with the producers' need to maintain

diversification. In short, Maria and Sergio are the beneficiaries of Vallejo's policy of preference for modest innovations (the use of citrus trees) and simple irrigation schemes. Even though these policies have been eclipsed by the more recent over-investment in shadehouses, the good investments that have been made continue to bear fruit.

I spent six months visiting with this family, in their home, in their vanilla orchards and at community events. They visited my family during Corpus Cristi, Papantla's big saint's day celebration. Early on, as I waited with the women from the Perez household for a truck to take us to a school event, my presence raised questions among community members. Pointing to me, a woman asked one of the small children of the household who I was. The little one responded, "My aunt." The crowd of women laughed and reported back to the matriarch about the rumors her granddaughter was starting. When we returned to the house later, they began to have a conversation about who I was in relation to the household. I had been impressed with the ease with which they had welcomed me into their daily lives. But now that we were seeing each other throughout the week, they decided they needed some way to understand my presence.

The matriarch encouraged the children to continue to call me Tia (Aunt), and the daughters discussed my becoming a godmother to one of the children. I suggested that one of the un-married daughters get married during the time I had left in Mexico as I was anxious to see a traditional wedding in a community. They all laughed but declined my offer to find an appropriate male. The un-married daughters

were very happy in the extended household. They enjoyed working with their sisters-in-law; they felt good about helping their parents in the house and fields. Their father had divided his land among his five children, male and female alike, though traditionally land would have only gone to the sons. These young women were not anxious to marry mostly because they would have to leave their parent's house and move to the house and community of their husband's family. Given that no wedding was in the future, they decided that I should become the godmother of the youngest grandchild during her third year presentation at the church. This meant I had an official relationship to the household, neighbors could be told that I was a comadre (co-mother, meaning godmother) and the children would continue to call me Auntie or godmother.

The Lopez family lives in a community an hour bus ride from Papantla. Their household is made up of three generations. Sergio is the eldest male and Maria is the eldest female, both in their mid-fifties. They have been married for thirty years. They have five children, two of whom are married. One married son lives with his wife and child in the household. The second married son was able to buy a house one plot away from the family house and lives there with his wife and two children. The family lives in the house that Sergio inherited from his father. The house is a traditional Totonac structure, modified with some modern materials: dirt floor, bamboo walls, tin roof. They have a stove constructed out of adobe in one end of the structure. Most of the household cooking is done at this stove. There is a long table where the women usually eat after having fed the men in the other structure. Behind cloth curtains is the sleeping bed. Beside this traditional house is a modern house

with cement floors, walls and tin roof. This house has bedrooms that belong to the unmarried sisters, the unmarried brother and one of the married couples. Each morning, the women make a small breakfast for the men before they head out to the fields. Maria instructs her daughters and daughter-in-law in the daily tasks. They divide up the day's work: corn must be ground for the day's tortillas, meals must be prepared and taken to the men in the field at mid day, children must be attended to, clothes must be washed at the river, vegetables must be harvested from the fields.

The Lopez family balances subsistence production with cash commodity production. Their lifestyle is representative of both traditional social organizational patterns and modern struggles with local, national and global markets. They are traditional in the sense that they live in extended households, utilize household labor to produce both subsistence and cash crops and maintain community relations through ritual and social obligations. They are modern in many of the subtle ways they have changed their production, investment and consumption patterns. An examination of their life stories illustrates this blend: maintenance of important traditional life ways makes modern production more efficient and sustainable. What follows is an account of this balance through their life histories. The accounts lay a framework for understanding the nature of social organization in a traditional community and how these families balance household needs through labor, management and social participation.

Maria's Story: Social Organization in Rural Communities

Maria, the matriarch of this extended family, was born in the community where they presently live. She is in her mid-fifties and runs the house with the help of her daughters-in-law and daughters, whom she supervises from a chair in the kitchen. She works in the orchards when there is need for extra hands during the spring, but her weak eye sight makes it hard to pollinate the flowers anymore. She spends her days organizing the work of the women of the household (two daughters and two daughter-in-laws) and visits with her sisters, sharing recent gossip.

She began telling me her life story by explaining the difficulties she experienced both as a child and as a young adult. She has spent her entire life being responsible for the care of her family: first as a child with poor parents and then as a young adult with a sick child. Because her parents did not have sons, she was expected to help the family in the fields. She said that when she was young, her father drank a lot and mis-treated her mother. He was often ill and so Maria was counted on to work in the fields and to take on extra jobs to earn money to help support her younger siblings. It was not until her siblings were grown that she felt able to leave home and marry.

Women generally marry men from nearby communities and are expected to take up residence in the man's father's house. Once Maria decided to marry Sergio and leave her family's house, she was faced with a new obstacle. As the new daughter-in-law, she would be expected to work for her mother-in-law in the household. Having spent so much of her childhood in the field and orchards helping her father (or replacing him), she was not used to domestic work and felt uncomfortable in her new role. Perhaps, in addition to not wanting to leave younger siblings at home with an

irresponsible father, she put off her marriage in order to avoid this situation. She was uncomfortable when she first arrived at her in-laws home, feeling like she belonged in the fields with a machete rather than in the house at the cooking fire.

Maria lived with her parents-in-law after marriage until her first born experienced health problems. Given a lack of health care in the community, Maria had to take the baby to Papantla for medical care. At this time, her husband was working for the national petroleum company and was often away from home. She was able to stay with a friend in Papantla and attend to the baby's medical needs, but leaving the community was very difficult, both emotionally and financially. In town, she had to have cash to pay for her food and medical needs. In the community, Maria had taken care of her siblings and was adept at fieldwork. In Papantla, life was difficult especially given her illiteracy. She could not read signs or the forms given to her in the medical clinics. There were doctors that offered treatments but no cures and endless demands for cash. In addition to all that, she was separated from her support network in the community and her connection to the subsistence she had managed from childhood.

The community at that time practiced a system of communal land ownership called the ejido. This practice is important to understand because it is integral to the use patterns of households in this region. In an ejidal system, community members had access to unused parcels of land. Maria described how they could collect firewood and medicinal herbs anywhere. Now, each parcel is considered private property and individuals are limited in where they can gather useful items.

As mentioned earlier, households generally had access to enough land that they were able to divide the land into parcels for several purposes. Using swidden agricultural techniques, households would allocate one portion of their accessible land for milpa production. After clearing trees and underbrush, they would plant maize for household consumption. On the outskirts of these plots, they planted beans and squash. Though they planted these crops primarily for household consumption, they could barter or sell these crops as needed. At any one time, a portion of the land would be allowed to fallow. As trees and underbrush grew, these forests could be used to grow vanilla and as gathering space for wild vegetables, medicinal and culinary herbs and firewood.

If the household had access to a sufficient amount of land, they might keep a portion in original forest growth or rent out a parcel to neighbors or households from nearby communities. This rotating of crops and forest lands has been in practice for centuries and continues to be the preferred practice. However, due to the privatization of lands that left households with diminished access to lands, households have had to diversify economic activities. Families have now converted some parcels of land to commodity crops (orange, leeches, banana) and have begun to see a change in migration patterns. From an outsider's point of view, this household followed fairly traditional patterns of production, distribution and consumption, but Maria often commented during our visits on the changes she sees in her children's lives. During her childhood, food was almost exclusively produced by the family or gathered in the woods. She worried that her children didn't want to eat traditional foods and relied on store-bought products. But she is very proud that her children all

work with the family. The fact that they are able to keep their family together in the community is the result of careful balance between subsistence and commodity production. If they were unable to produce the majority of the food that their family consumes or unable to produce and market a cash crop they would have to diversify their economic strategy further. She and Sergio were able to purchase several large tracts of land over the last twenty years and now have enough land to keep all their children busy and the entire household fed. While she is adamant that her family stays together and counsels her children to stay in the community, she is keenly aware that there are pressures on her children. One of her daughters worked for a short time in Poza Rica, a large petroleum city. Sergio had been hurt in an auto accident and she wanted to help the family out by taking wage labor. After several months, her mother begged her to come home. She was happy to oblige and returned to the community.

Maria is reluctant to allow her children to migrate for wage work, but she is eager to adapt growing techniques to increase the family's commodity production. Increasing their profits in commodities will allow one more generation of her family to stay in the community. It will allow for her grandchildren to be educated and for her family to afford health care and improve their home and invest in more lands. Family stability is paramount. Balancing subsistence and market production perpetuates stability.

Vanilla has never been a part of the food tradition of this region. Before the conquest, vanilla was a tribute item collected in the wild and sent to the empire as payment. During the colonial period, it was integrated into traditional planting practices and became an important cash crop. It is important to note however, that

vanilla is not a common ingredient in food or anything medicinal in these communities. The production of vanilla was never intensified in this region. These farmers used vanilla as a tool. Much like the majority of producers today, vanilla production was integrated into a larger production system. Key to this production system was household labor and land use patterns.

Maria's father planted vanilla in the traditional manner during her childhood and she was involved in the care of the orchard from a young age. When she was ten, her father fell from ladder and was not able to care for the crop. She was sent to pollinate the orchard on her own. This technique of planting in the forest was common until the late 1900s. Traditionally producers would sell their beans green to buyers. Maria's family always sold their harvest green. At that time, crops were cut before Day of the Dead when families needed the cash to purchase consumer items for the festivities. Buyers traveled out into communities and paid cash. As prices world wide began to fall, producers in Mexico were not able to sell their vanilla at a price high enough to justify the labor. Farmers moved on to other cash crops.

Though prices remain low, this family is working to integrate vanilla into a diversified economic strategy. This is not something new, as Maria's stories about her childhood illustrate. While much has changed in the forty some odd years since she was a child, the practice of balancing subsistence agriculture with cash crops remains a significant economic strategy. For many of these producers, investing in vanilla today is a continuation of a century's old pattern that has enabled them to reproduce social patterns in a world where many must rely on market exchange for

subsistence. For Maria, success in the vanilla business would enable her to keep her children at home for one more generation.

Sergio's Story: From Landless Peasant to Landowning Producer

Sergio was not born in the community and only came to reside there as a young adult. He was the eldest son of a farmer in northern Veracruz and because his mother was the second wife, he was sent out to work for wages at an early age. The work he was able to attain at such a young age was low paid and involved heavy labor. He often described the working conditions as harsh. He moved around to various ranches in the county and was paid very little for a day's work. He slept in the fields and he ate whatever the bosses threw his way: tortillas and occasionally beans.

He eventually found work with the national petroleum company, PEMEX and was able to save some of the money he earned. It was at this time that he went to the community of Zapata, where his father had moved with his extended family and began to look for a wife. He met Maria and they entered into a marriage agreement. Maria wanted to put off their marriage for as long as possible to continue to care for her siblings, so Sergio continued with PEMEX. He was able to save enough from the petroleum job to return to Zapata and purchase land, which was for sale because of new privatization laws. As a relative outsider, he had to establish himself in the community. He tells a story about how his arrival in the community created suspicion among the elder men. He had been working all over the region for wages and they did not know what to make of him. He challenged them, "I know who I am. I will work hard in this community. If after five years, you do not think I should be

here, I will leave." Six months later, he was offered a position in the community cargo, an important religious-political position. He continued to work with PEMEX because he was able to use his wages to purchase more land. When PEMEX offered him a severance package after ten years of work, he invested the cash in more land and turned to full-time farming, with enough land to balance household subsistence and commodity production. Vanilla was one of the cash crops he integrated into this system. "I kept buying and I kept working the land. The first thing I did was to plant vanilla in the jungle, following the traditional system. Then I planted oranges. Before that, I planted a lot of beans and jalapenos to sell. After that, I bought another plot of land so that my children would not suffer as I did and have something to work."

The Lopez family has built their life on long held traditions but is creative in the manner in which they integrate new ideas and enterprises. They are adamant that the survival of their family relies on the passing on of traditional values of land management and subsistence work. Sergio is concerned that local families tend to sell off land and children are left with little options but low pay wage labor on other's land or migration. He feels that families do not value rural life. He said that his goal is to "give something to my children, so that one day they say, 'Good, my father was worried about us.'" Land provides an option for the next generation.

Social Organization of Labor: Household work

This integration of cash crops into the broader system of subsistence crop production has persisted for many generations. The way in which these households have organized household labor to accomplish this balance is important to the

survival of this lifestyle. When households are not able to meet the demands for labor within their own family, they are forced to hire labor which poses problems. First, hired labor requires access to cash which is almost always limited in these communities. Second, it is difficult to find individuals for hire, given that most families are involved in pooling household labor for their own subsistence and/or commodity production.

This household has seven adult workers that perform most of the labor in the house and fields, though occasionally they hire non-family members during peak periods (vanilla fertilization and orange harvest). Women tend to work in the domestic duties. They are responsible for the kitchen work, the house and house animals and the children. They rise early to begin preparing the morning tortillas and sweet coffee. In this extended household, once the men have headed to the fields, the five women talk about the day and decide who will be in charge of the main meal. The woman in charge of this meal will gather up ingredients, ask for money from Maria if there are items that must be purchased, and then begin the task. The others share the daily tasks of preparing the corn for tortillas (which will be made throughout the day for each meal or snack), washing clothes at the well, gathering firewood, hauling water to the house for drinking and cooking, watching over the children, tending to the animals, tending to customers in their house store, chatting with neighbors and the various other endless tasks of the home. I asked if there was a system for deciding who did what in the house each day. Were there ever disagreements or fights? They all laughed and said that Maria was easy to work with, she gave them the money they needed when they needed it and they could cook

whatever they decided. They knew there was conflict in other households, but in general, their household got along well and enjoyed working together.

The men, Sergio and his three adult sons, divide their time between various plots of land, depending on the cycle of each crop. They start each morning at the dining table in the main sleeping house. They discuss what needs to be done in the various orchards or fields and leave the house as soon as they have had a small hot meal of tortillas or bread and sweet coffee. The plots are mostly in walking distance but they drive the family truck if the day's job makes it necessary. Depending on the time of year, they work through the morning and return to the house in time for the largest meal of the day. I spent more time with the men in the orange orchards, where they produce the majority of the vanilla that they take to market than in the milpas. After the work in the corn and bean fields is completed in the mornings, they would walk through the orange groves weeding between trees, checking the vanilla vines for pests and assessing the general health of plants. They used this time to tend to the fish ponds they integrated into the orchards. Vanilla must be tended consistently. It is important to note that while it is intensive, it is not exhaustive at this level. They integrate the crops into their land use patterns and labor force so that in general their family is able to easily tend to the crop. During times when the men must focus their workday in the corn field, the women of the household walk through the orchard cleaning the aisles and picking off dying leaves. The whole family works together during the most intensive periods of fertilization and harvest.

Division of labor based on gender is a strong tradition in rural communities and yet they are aware of other patterns and able to deviate from this norm. Often my

oldest son would travel with me to Zapata. His favorite part of the day was preparing the masa and making tortillas. I wondered if they thought it was a problem that he took over the fires. They were happy to teach him and take a seat when his enthusiasm left no room for other cooks. They mentioned that they had heard that men in the States do kitchen work, but they didn't seem particularly impressed or envious.

One day, we were returning to the house from the river where we had been swimming with the children. My daughter picked up a branch of seed pods that popped when you squeezed them. The five year old granddaughter gasped in horror and explained to my daughter that girls should not play with the pods. I was a bit confused because just the week before, the women had delighted in teaching my son to pop the seed pods. Everyone laughed and explained to that yes, girls in the community should not play with the pods lest they become clumsy with the dishes, but that my daughter could play with the plant. For some of us, making distinctions between our own traditions and a wider world is often a complex problem. We have a hard time holding on to our own traditions without imposing them on others. But the Lopez family was able to see the value of their own traditions without needing the outside world to look the same.

For subsistence level producers this is an important trait. Had gender roles in the community been inflexible, Maria's family would have had no recourse when her father had been unable to work. This flexibility is ideal in an industry where cost of production is a crucial factor. The success of vanilla production in Mexico hinges on the ability of families to use household labor rather than hiring day laborers that must

be paid in cash. This ability of families to absorb labor within the household keeps investment needs low. For the most part, field labor with subsistence crops is handled by the men of the household. But vanilla demands the work of the whole family.

Traditional Methods, Contemporary Production and Balance

The land that the Lopez family owns is dispersed throughout the community. The largest orchard is just down the hill from the household, about a five minutes walk. This orchard has approximately 300 orange trees and is planted in vanilla. They have also built two breeding ponds for tilapia fish, which they sell in the community for extra income. Alongside the orchard, they plant a bean field twice a year, enough for the family and at times a bit to sell or trade. A walk through the orchard provides other staples, such as small tomatoes, chiles, pumpkins and herbs growing wild. We always returned to the house with enough vegetables to make a salsa and usually a side dish of nopales (cactus) or sweet potato.

The second orchard is further from the house and takes thirty minutes to travel to by foot. At times they use the family truck, but most days the men walk or ride a mountain bike out to this section of land. This orchard has 100 orange trees and is also planted in vanilla. It is located near the lands that are rotated between planting and fallowing. The family plants and harvests all the maize that their household consumes in these fields. They rotate the fields between maize and bean production and once the production begins to fall they allow the land to reforest. On my first visit, Sergio showed me the land that was planted in corn five years ago but has a significant re-growth of trees and undergrowth.

He pointed out a virgin stand of trees that he has instructed his children never to cultivate. He saved the land so that his children would know what the virgin forest looks like and wants them to always preserve it. They still have a traditional vanilla orchard in this stand of forest and attend to the vines, though they do not depend on this production for sale. The price of maize has fallen consistently for the past five years, so they do not sell it, but they have begun to sell the husks. They were a bit perplexed by this new enterprise but given that the husks sell for twice the price of the maize, they entered this new business. The price has also fallen for oranges. In the beginning of the harvest period, it did not pay to harvest the oranges so they left them on the trees. Towards the end of the season, the price picked up and they began to harvest on an as needed basis. In the two different orchards, they grow at least three different varieties of orange trees. These different varieties are selected because of the variability in harvest seasons (one is early; another is ripe later in the season). At times when prices are low, they allow the fruit to remain on the trees. This allows them to use labor in other endeavors and wait for prices to increase.

With the fall in citrus prices ten years ago, farmers in the area were at a loss. They had invested heavily in trees but were faced with both the fall in prices and the possibility of a new crop of pests moving into the region. Given the low price of oranges and the possibility of losing their trees, farmers in this area began to talk about new crops. Several began to plant vanilla along the trunks of the trees and experiment with this dual planting. While many were skeptical, and still are, the farmers felt like they had nothing to lose. Everyone acknowledges that no one would plant an orange tree to grow vanilla, but if you already have orange trees, it may be

worth the risk. There are plenty of critics, but more and more orange farmers are adding vanilla to their orchards. Sergio's family had always maintained a traditional orchard in the rain forest, so experimenting with the orange groves made sense. It has been a profitable endeavor. Vanilla has proven to be a good alternative crop and inputs into the orchard (compost and irrigation) benefit both oranges and vanilla.

Given the success they have had with the orange groves, they are working with a program (not COVER-related) on a project to integrate pichoco trees into the forest. This would make the traditional setting for orchards easier to adapt to contemporary environmental needs. Traditional planting is inefficient, given that trees and vines are interspersed haphazardly. Modifying traditional techniques might provide a sustainable technique that would be more cost effective and have environmental benefits. Planting trees in the forest would make a more uniform orchard and make pollinating, cleaning and harvesting more efficient. The forest would provide better shade, addressing one of the criticisms of the pichoco technique.

The family is also planning to build a shade house, which would make all these tasks even more efficient, though the cost will be high for construction. The family is hesitant to begin this new project not only because of the cost of construction but also because they find it difficult to pollinate their present orchard and have a hard time hiring enough labor to accomplish the task.

The Politics of Vanilla: "If you know about politics, even if you don't work, they'll give you resources."

Sergio balances the tasks of holding his family together and providing for his children's future while working with state and federal agencies to improve the lives of other producers. He began in politics with community cargo positions and moved on to working with local agricultural unions for vanilla producers. He said his approach was to raise awareness in the communities that rural people have rights and the government should help. "If we are already working the earth without the government's help, then good. Well, the little that the government could help with, we could do more, right?" He worked with this group for ten years and then became the president of an ejido union. He worked with them to organize rural people to develop land. After he finished his work with the union, he began to attend meetings in Papantla that would eventually form the basis for COVER. In these meetings, the group established that COVER should act as a director of all other organization to provide cohesion. He argues that it is a lack of organization and direction that allows the government to remain corrupt, therefore community leaders should organize to impede corruption.

As an individual, Sergio has accomplished a great deal. But his politics are focused on the rights of rural people as a group. He feels organizations are important because economic development is dependent on political connections, without regard to the real needs of the people. He sees the need to continue to organize as a group.

Though politicians promise resources for groups, much of the corruption that most producers refer to involves unethical individuals. Of all the interviews I conducted and meetings I attended, never was there an accusation made against legitimate producers' organizations, whether they be civic organizations or unions.

Stories about corruption were very consistent, whether they were told by producers or buyers. Allegations of corruption always involved bureaucrats at the state level or local industrialists, or individuals that solicited funds from the government for ghost organizations. Sergio's solution to this corruption is twofold. First, he agrees with other COVER participants that producers must make up a larger percentage of the counselors on the board of directors. His becoming the president of the National Consejo is representative of this move. Secondly, he is sure that the next step producers must make is to learn to cure their own vanilla and market directly to international buyers, "People in the campo, we are obligated to stay and we have to work. If you have oranges and vanilla, you have diversity."

COVER inherited a complex situation. On the one hand, most farmers in this region produce vanilla on very small scale in traditional ways. COVER was initiated to increase vanilla production, both in terms of how many farmers bring vanilla to market and how much each of those farmers produce. COVER inherited the old patterns of production. But the goal of increasing production is difficult on such small scale and traditional production methods are limited due to environmental changes. Even if environmental changes did not make it impossible to produce in this manner, traditional production would not provide a consistent quality or quantity of vanilla to allow producers to establish themselves in a competitive market.

It is a new era for vanilla and it is difficult to know what will become of the industry with such diverse techniques and interests. But for families like Sergio and Maria's, vanilla is another option for staying on the land for one more generation. At

this point, they are not dependent on government programs to succeed. The programs are one more option that they integrate into a larger diversified strategy.

The story of the Lopez family illustrates the role of diversity in economic strategy in rural Mexico. At the same time that rural producers are accused of not understanding the economy, they are involved in a delicate balancing act: negotiation between subsistence production and market forces of distribution and consumption. The Lopez family reminds us that there is not one economy that is limited to capitalist exchange, but that economy must be understood in complex terms. Economy is "what people do to make a living" and the Lopez family reminds us that most of us, even in a market driven economy, do that through diversity.

In his role as president for the national Consejo, Sergio is often away from the community visiting with producers' organizations around the region. At a meeting in the neighboring state of Puebla in the spring, a producer attempted to agitate the crowd at Sergio's expense. Sergio was at the meeting to announce COVER's conference. This producer complained that the government should not be spending money on conferences but should be putting money into the fields. Other producers in the room agreed and gave a hearty applause. Sergio defended COVER and said that the producers should see the conference as an opportunity to learn the best way to intensify production. He said, "We send our children to school, it costs us money, but we pay the money because we believe on the other end, we'll have new ideas and be able to improve. The conference is an investment in new ideas and an improved way of doing things."

This quieted the crowd for a bit, until the agitator's son, a lawyer, redirected the conversation. He wanted to know why the government was funding vanilla production when it was not a good investment. He said that vanilla was not a business because if he invested today, he would not see any profit for five years and only then if prices were high enough. Sergio explained to me that this guy was thinking about vanilla in the wrong way. He said, "If you clean the forest, put in the vanilla, care for it with your own labor, then you will see a profit in the third year when you have your first harvest. But if you hire the labor, it will take much longer to realize a profit. Vanilla is that kind of business." Vanilla farmers need manage cash needs carefully to remain competitive.

For the Lopez family, investment is not only a matter of money, but also a matter of labor. Not only do producers such as this family understand the economy, they understand that economy is much broader than capitalist modes of exchange. They also understand that as their consumption patterns change with each new generation, they need to intensify production. Traditional production is no longer possible given environmental changes. Changing production techniques is a part of an economic strategy that thrives on diversity

The Lopez family is a success story and they serve as a model for other families like them. Sergio is active with development projects, previously with COVER and presently with the national organization working to help families to diversify into vanilla or intensify their current production. They often host producers' groups on their land and go out of their way to support growers in their area. But the fact that COVER has shifted the emphasis of their projects and that the administration

of these projects is no longer local, makes it harder for families like Lopez' to participate. The projects now supported require investment of larger amounts of capital and, more importantly, labor. These families for the most part must continue to balance subsistence and commodity production in such a way that does not increase their cash needs. Intensifying to such an extent that the household labor pool is over-extended creates new cash restraints when the family is forced to hire wage laborers or lose their crops. Like the producers in the conference survey, the Lopez family is very efficient at balancing these systems. The move within COVER to change the emphasis of programs, especially towards capital and labor-intensive shadehouse production, ignores this social milieu.

On January 1, 2007 during a phone call to wish the family a happy New Year, Sergio mentioned that the harvest is almost in and the beans are healthy. The bad news is that the price is below forty pesos for green vanilla beans, so they will dry this year's harvest and wait until they can make contact with a foreign buyer. The good news is that his youngest son and daughter are studying computers in Papantla. As he relates the news, I hear the family in the background preparing for the New Year feast.

This is the sound of innovation and tradition in the *campo*. It is the lifestyle of a household that maintains it affiliation with COVER, has even helped to lead the organization, but also maintains a pragmatic distance from its new agenda. Maria and Sergio select from COVER what best suits their own agenda of a diversified economic strategy, their own selective blend of tradition and innovation. In doing so they are modeling, if not articulating, an alternative development.

Chapter 7 Betting on Contemporary Production: The Ramirez Family

Dust kicks up as the bus eases off the paved road onto the main street. I imagine I hear the melody of old Western television shows as the bus edges through town between old adobe buildings with huge front patio areas. The first building in town is used for tobacco; empty when I first begin visiting. On my last visit to town, the building was full of dried tobacco leaves: dry, dark dusty leaves hanging in symmetry. There are several markets for dry goods, a store with consumer items, used clothing. The names of agricultural unions and cattle associations are painted across the faded facade. This street has an abandoned feel, without much action except the coming and going of the buses and taxis. The union buildings are shut up tight, the tiles on the roofs askew. The street only gets busy when the traveling fair moves in with electric carnival rides or when the town saint day procession moves through the community.

Cocos is a mestizo community. Local anthropologists estimate that over fifty percent of the population is presently in the US. There is a town in east Texas that many have nicknamed "Little Cocos," given the high percentage of migrants living there. This town has a long history of migration to the U.S., somewhat of an aberration in a region where international migration is fairly new. I first traveled to Cocos with COVER workers to meet with a group called the Primos who had started a shadehouse project. At the time I met with the leader of the group, they had begun the process of making the concrete posts that would be used as the tutors in the shade

house. The first time I spoke with Francisco (Paco) Ramirez, who was to become one of my two informants there, he mentioned that he was not from Cocos originally and that he had spent sixteen years in the US working before moving to Veracruz with his wife. They have one son born in the United States and two daughters born in Mexico, with whom they live in a single family house near the center of town. I initially made visits to his house with COVER agents who were working with Paco's group to build one of the new shadehouses. After several visits with COVER, I made arrangements to visit his family to talk about a more in-depth study.

That first encounter with the family was more awkward that I had expected. I had begun working with the Lopez family at about the same time and had fallen into a pattern of visits in the community that felt familiar. In Cocos, introducing the idea of research to the family was odd. At Zapata, when I asked permission to work with the family, I was given a lecture about how important it is to learn about other cultures, how we have so much to teach each other and that this exposure would be good for both parties. In Cocos, I asked if I could come to the community several times a week, spend the day watching their work, talking about life and investigating their ideas about vanilla. They were stumped with what to do with me. At first, they said the only day I could visit was Sundays, because other days were too busy with work. "But work is what I am after," I told them. Finally, I told them with a laugh, "It is important that the daily lives of people in Mexico are understood in more concrete terms. I know it is a strange job, but that's what we do. I'd like to spend time with you and your family while you work." I think they had their doubts about how to fit me into their daily lives and they were suspicious about how my "watching them

work" was useful. But they agreed to let me come and I started by spending time with Paco's wife in the house. I was hopeful that by building rapport with her, Paco would trust me to follow him around in the orchards and be comfortable enough to talk to me about his life. In the end, they were gracious enough to let me hang around and we developed a comfortable rapport. I often spent my days helping Teresa in the kitchen, cleaning cactus or deseeding chiles. I followed Paco around the orchard or talked to him as he built posts for the shadehouse, moved the compost piles or dub the irrigation pit.

I chose the Ramirez family not because, in comparison to the Lopez family, they represented direct opposites in lifestyles, though at first glance it may appear that way. Whereas the Lopez family works with labor from an extended household, the Ramirez family is a nuclear family. The Lopez family has a history in vanilla, the elders having grown up in the orchards working for their parents. The Ramirez family lives in a town that has relied on cattle production and migration for economic diversity and has only entered vanilla production in the last two years. The Lopez family plants in a traditional orchard and has intensified within their orange groves. The Ramirez family has planted their pichoco orchard and is constructing a shade house. Subsistence crops are the mainstay of the Lopez family while the Ramirez's purchase machine made tortillas off the back of a motorcycle.

But the impression that these two families are complete opposites is misleading. The fact is that both of these families rely on a carefully balanced economic strategy that requires diversification for success. In this new era of vanilla production, the variety of production techniques has multiplied as has the

demographics of the producers, and this means that there are different ways to implement the principle of diversification. I wanted to work with the Ramirez family because I felt their story showed the range of variation among producers, a different point along the spectrum in relation to the Lopez family. Getting to know the Ramirez family revealed some important things to me. Hearing about the delays and political pressures that Paco Ramirez faced made clear to me the extent to which there had been a power shift within the Consejo towards the interests of industrialists and state government bureaucrats. It also made clear the fact that even the most innovative and modern producers cannot rely exclusively on vanilla. The family's success, when it comes, will have been due to its tenacious hard work –more *in spite of* COVER and what it has become than *because* of it. The difficulties they described in their experience as migrants made clear to me the depth of their commitment to remain in rural Veracruz, if at all possible.

The Ramirez family lives in a new house that they are constructing themselves. They bought the land with money saved from their work in the United States. Paco and Teresa have completed all the exterior walls of the house and a strong aluminum roof. Throughout the year, construction continues: a garage in front to store wood and protect the truck, interior walls stuccoed with concrete in time for visitors from the north. They have running water and plumbing, electricity, a refrigerator, an oven, television and radios. Though Teresa has an electric washing machine, she washes the clothes by hand and hangs them in the sun. Using the washer would mean more money for the electric bill, and, besides, everyone washes

by hand here. They have three children, one in elementary school and two still at home. Teresa's family lives in town, her father owns a butcher store on the main street. They bought an orange orchard about a ten minute walk through grazing fields. Though the ideal work week would allow for the family to rest on Sundays, Teresa often complained that Paco worked too much. He always had a new project to start and was meticulous in completing each project.

They have only been in Cocos for the past five years, having moved back after many years working in the United States. On day as Teresa and I processed chiles to make into sausage, she told me about their endeavor into vanilla and how they came to live in a town where so many have left. Teresa was born in Cocos and lived there until she attended college in Puebla. She earned a bachelor's degree in public administration and worked in Puebla for several years. Her government job did not pay well, so she decided to find work in the United States.

Teresa joined a group of migrants from Cocos that had arranged for a coyote to guide them across the border. She traveled to North Carolina because she had relatives working there and she was able to use their house as a base camp until she found work. Paco and Teresa met at the Kmart on her first evening in North Carolina. She was an educated young woman that saw her time in the states as an opportunity to experience new things, learn English and make a life. He had left home as a teenager, without a high school education and saw the states as a place to make enough money so that he could settle in Mexico with a family, land and a future. Despite their differences, they married and made a home together in North Carolina where they worked a series of jobs. She was successful at several of her

jobs and was chosen as a supervisor. The owners of the store relied on her to direct the other workers and she was very successful at her job. After they had their first son life became more difficult. Teresa related how hard it was to balance work with childcare. She worked up to the evening he was born and went back to work shortly after his birth because she was able to arrange childcare. The company she worked for treated her well and gave her a supervisory position because she had good English skills and leadership abilities. But her son suffered from asthma and she had to leave the factory to take care of him. Once his condition stabilized, she tried to find childcare but was unsuccessful and decided to stay home with Pacito. She began to make food to sell in the neighborhood and to other employees where her husband and father-in-law worked. She made tamales and bread, treats for other migrants either too busy to cook for themselves or without the skills. She would rise early before the men left for work and bake bolillos and pan dulce. This business was very successful and she was able offset her former wages.

When her son was two and a half years old, Paco and Teresa decided to return to Mexico. For Teresa, it was not an easy decision as she enjoyed working in the U.S. and especially enjoyed the income she was able to make. Teresa and Paco differed in their interpretation of life in the states. Whereas Teresa could see herself making a life there, Paco never saw the United States as a place to raise his family.

When they first returned to Mexico, they started off in the northern state of Tamaulipas, where Paco's family still lives. During their time in the U.S., they had sent money to his family to purchase a house and land. For that reason, they set up home there first. Once Teresa was settled in the house near his family, Paco

returned to the states to work. He had worked the previous two years with the same man and his boss asked him to return to work one more year. Once he finished the year of work, he joined Teresa and their now two children. They decided to sell their property in the north and move to her community of Cocos in Veracruz.

The state of Tamaulipas has been heavily farmed so Paco felt their chances of making a living in the tropical south were better. There was land available to build a house and her father had just heard about a neighbor that wanted to sell one of his orange groves. The tropical climate and geography was new to a man used to the desert plains of the north, but he set about building their house and developing business interests. He went in with Teresa's cousins and opened a welding shop on the main street. He had learned welding skills while in the states and was able to gather enough equipment to provide this service. The land they sold in the north allowed him to invest in wood, which he rents to builders. This turned out to be a good business. Buildings in this part of Mexico are made out of concrete; the wood is recycled into various forms for floors, walls and ceilings. With the price of oranges low, he was able to get a good deal on the orchard. Like other farmers in the area, he tended to leave the oranges on the tree as long as possible, investing labor on other projects. He was experimenting in one part of the orchard with nopal (cactus) production which he hoped would make a good item for the local markets.

Before settling in his wife's town, he had not paid attention to the role of vanilla in the area. Teresa explained that when Paco found out about vanilla the price was a lot higher than today. Though prices are low at the present time, they have hoped that by the time they begin to harvest their orchards, prices will have stabilized.

Teresa talked a lot about the amount of work it took to run the various businesses and take care of the house and land. She was both proud and frustrated by Paco's work. She worried about him when he worked ten hour days seven days a week, often losing weight in the hot weather. But she understood that he was determined to make something for their family and that the work was never finished. She worried about whether the pay off for the work would be worth it. Unlike the Lopez family, they had only the two of them to complete all tasks in the house and various businesses. They had a strict division of labor, with the housework (cooking and cleaning) and child care being her domain. Though taking care of three children and a house is a full time job, she also helps her father in the butcher shop. She would like to bake bread to sell but they do not have an oven at the present. One day, after she had washed the family's clothes and hung them in the sun, killed two chickens and prepared the day's lunch, taken the son to school and returned with his lunch (he refuses to take a cold lunch) and was preparing spices for the chorizo, she looked at me and exclaimed. "Look at me, I have a degree! Here I am at home with the children." Teresa had felt frustrated with the lack of childcare in the U.S., but her ability to work outside the house did not improve by returning to Mexico. Even though she had returned to her community, her parents were too busy with their own lives to help with the children. With her degree, she could find a government job in Papantla or Poza Rica, but she would still have to struggle with childcare issues. She has brothers and cousins but most of her family members cycle in and out of migration so that they are not a reliable source of childcare.

Returning to Mexico did not solve Teresa's childcare problems, but it did reduce their living expenses. Food is relatively cheap, and they do not have debt on their house. Little by little they add onto the house and they continue to build the different businesses. They are able to live only by maintaining extremely diverse economic endeavors, of with vanilla is the newest venture

Paco first heard about vanilla through relatives in town. He attended a tour offered by COVER of Vallejo's shade house and investigated pichoco orchards. He talked with a cousin that lives in Texas and they began to invest in the project. Paco invested his land and labor, and his cousin provided the capital. Paco planted the pichoco orchard beside the house, a plan that allowed him easy access and provided a certain amount of security for the plants. He did not receive a lot of technical assistance at the time, but sought out advice from growers in other communities. Because he had already invested in the pichoco orchard, he qualified for a grant from the government to construct the shade house. He organized ten of his wife's cousins into a group and began the process of soliciting funds for the shade house. COVER provided access to the grant and arranged for all the technical support and ordered all the supplies for the project. They began the construction of the greenhouse in the fall of 2004 and were ready to begin planting vanilla vines by July 2006.

Economic Diversification: Vanilla and Risk

Hard work and risk are not new to Paco. His story is important for what it tells us about the differences between push and pull factors on both sides of the border. As a very young man, work in the states was an opportunity to earn money that he would someday invest in property and work in Mexico. While he was

successful in the states, there were good reasons to return to Mexico. Paco talked about his childhood and how he decided to try work in the states. He was born in Tamalipus and worked with his father on an ejido. They raised cattle and grew sorghum, corn and beans. He only attended school until the third grade, when he began to work for his father full time. At the age of sixteen, he decided to look for paid work and first found a job on the Mexican side of the border working to harvest in large agribusiness fields. Eventually, he migrated further north and held a series of factory and construction jobs in the mid-west.

He heard there were jobs in North Carolina and shortly after he moved there he met Teresa. He had a steady job there with the same company. He was so well liked that he has an open invitation from the owner, something he thinks about when the supply of cash is low. But life in the states with children was not what he wanted for his family. The first time I met him he mentioned that once he had a child, he knew he would return to Mexico. His take on American culture was that it wasn't something he wanted to expose his children to. He was frightened by the drug use and worried that parents did not teach their children to respect their elders. Perhaps the stress they experienced with childcare created enough pressure for them to return. He returned because he wanted to make tangible use of his earnings. In the United States, he said, it is difficult to build anything with your savings because investing it would be too risky. If a migrant is caught by immigration, they lose all their belongings.

The idea to plant vanilla came from a compadre. At first he turned down the idea because it takes a long time to get a yield. But in spite of the investment of time,

money and labor, he has decided it is worth the bet. He first learned about COVER from friends when they were soliciting communities to create groups of ten to build shadehouses. They were offering the projects at no cost to the producers so he was not concerned with what the project might mean to his cash flow.

They began work with COVER in the summer of 2005. Paco worked seven day weeks and had the shade house ready for netting by the beginning of 2006. During the time that I worked with their family, they waited almost four months to receive the netting they had ordered and paid for through COVER. Paco began to get suspicious about the role of the extension program. Not only was it taking a long time for him to get materials he had had to sacrifice to pay for, but he had several negative experiences with agents. One agent came to town to talk to him about his vines in the pichoco grove and advise him on the progress of the shade house. All of the advice he received that day ended up being not only wrong but detrimental to his crop. The agent had given him bad measurements on the shade house which caused him a half week's work to correct. Even worse was advice the agent had given him in regard to cutting the vanilla vines, which ended up stunting the growth of that years crop, resulting in a loss of blooms for the entire season. He had been planning to pollinate that spring, but was having his doubts as to whether the agents would have the skills to teach him. Paco didn't want to tell me about the mishap, but Teresa told me one day out of frustration, "They say we learn through mistakes, but it is their fault. They told us to cut them in October and now they won't bloom for a full year." I mentioned that I had learned to pollinate the flowers the week before and he wanted to learn. He said he was doubtful that the extension agents would know how to

pollinate correctly. He had three blossoms that day so we pollinated each. He continued to fertilize the few blooms in the orchard that spring and by the time I left Mexico, he had a small crop, including the three we pollinated that first day. He was disappointed in the loss of blooms for that season, but happy that he was having success in pollinating. He seemed relieved that he learned the technique without the help of the extension agents.

Besides problems with technical assistance, some of the infrastructure of COVER programs provided difficult for the Ramirez family. When COVER goes into communities to start shadehouse projects, they require that ten individuals work together in a group. The agents told me that the reason COVER required ten individuals in a group was to enable them to raise the money to fund their part of the project (30% of the total costs) and to assure that once the shadehouse was established, they would have enough labor to tend to the crop. I asked if the groups were family members or if anyone in a community was able to join. They said that at times groups were made out of family members but often they were community members that heard about the initiative. I wondered if shifting work groups from primarily household labor to entrepreneurial would create difficulties in accomplishing tasks. About half of the projects we visited in the field had problems that might be attributable to this fact. When we arrived at one project where we were to meet the group leader, we had to hike into town to find a representative after waiting an hour. When we located a group member, he described to us the difficulties the group was having in organizing work days and collecting money and supplies to complete the next step of the shadehouse. I wondered if it would have

been more useful to organize groups by family, as that was the most common way for producers to organize labor. But this new initiative was based on a more individualistic view of production so groups were to be made up of individuals who could be described as "good workers." The contradiction to this organizational structure was however that there were no traditional forms of obligation tying the groups together and could account for some of the delay of many of the projects.

For the Ramirez family, delay was a matter of the bureaucracy, not a matter of an insufficient amount of work. On the one hand, when the agents visited Paco's shadehouse, they were impressed by the skill he exhibited in constructing the various components and the speed with which he accomplished projects. Though he was one of the last projects funded in the 2005 grant period, he was several months ahead of all the other groups. At times, he was delayed from completing the next step of his project because he had to wait for enough of the other projects to catch up to justify the purchase of bulk materials. So Paco's work ethic and skill meant that he was an ideal worker. On the other hand, he was penalized for being too efficient.

When I was first introduced to Paco, I was told that the group he was a member of was made up of cousins in town. But when I visited the shade house, more times than not, Paco was working alone. I worried that asking him about this matter would cause problems with COVER, because they had been so explicit about the group rule. Finally, I broached the subject. He said that the other men that make up the group have other jobs and study, so they have worked out a system where they pay for labor. Paco had built a group out of investors rather than equal workers. The situation seemed for the most part to be agreeable to him, though he often complained

about an inability to find men that were willing to put in a long day's work. He had the cash to pay laborers, which would have allowed him to take a day off each week, but more often than not, he did most of the work with minimal help. At the beginning of several projects (the garage, the security house, and the well) he would travel to neighboring ranches looking for day laborers, offering to pay cash and a meal for a day's work. Most days, he returned to Cocos without helpers, to begin another project on his own.

I asked him what the implications are in a town where half the population is in the United States working as migrants. With such an impressive level of migration, could one assume that men of working age had migrate, thus leaving a deficit of eligible workers. He said, "There are plenty of men here. There's no shortage of workers in this town, only a shortage of men that want to work. They might work a couple of days, then they have money to drink and they are off." This was a common complaint that I had heard in other communities. The Lopez family hired workers occasionally during orange harvest, and they often mentioned difficulty in finding workers.

The netting Paco had ordered in January showed up in April but a fourth of what he needed to complete the house was missing. COVER agents assured him they would have the netting to him within the month, but he continued to worry about finishing the house in time to plant the vines. After waiting such a long time for his netting, he was frustrated. He mentioned that he felt that he was being punished for not supporting the party line at COVER. During one of his visits to the office he had not responded to what he felt was political pressure. He recounted how several

agents encouraged him to vote with the PRI party in the upcoming federal elections. He was a supporter of the opposition party. He and Teresa were suspicious that the next elections would be won by the PRD but that ultimately the elections would be stolen by the PRI. For this reason, he felt that in the offices of COVER, he needed to keep his opinions private. When he felt pressure in the offices, he did not respond either in the positive or the negative and now that his materials were consistently delayed, he worried that politics had become an issue in finishing his project with COVER. However, he never spent much time worrying about the delay, as he was constantly engaged in new projects. While he waited for the net, he finished digging (by hand) the well on the property that he would need for irrigation, and he built a small house on the property that he would use to house a security guard someday.

In my day to day experience with COVER, politics were only discussed as abstract ideas. The agents working in the field and the director were recent graduates from the university. They were the first people in their families to complete university educations and in some cases the only individuals from their small farming communities to seek out education after high school. During our discussions, they expressed concern over the history of exploitation of farmers and felt part of their job was to improve the producer's access to fairer prices. The director at one point even told me that the biggest problem was that producers needed an organization that worked in their interest, rather than an organization that represented such diverse interests as producers, curing houses, brokers and exporters. Though there was never any overt political campaigning at any COVER event I witnessed, the fact that COVER was slowly converting from a locally run organization with a large amount

of autonomy to a government agency run out of the state capital could account for some of Paco's discomfort. The state governor is from the PRI party and at the time of this discussion, representatives from the state government had begun to visit the COVER offices in preparation for the upcoming conference. Paco told me, "Political parties don't matter to me. I don't care who gives me money. But no one has the right to tell me to vote for this or that. You feel like they are buying you so that you'll vote for them. I, for one, will not vote for PRI. But whoever has money can do what they want." He was reluctant to go into the office because of this pressure, and wondered if his lack of enthusiasm for their political party affected his project.

Though the Ramirez family is new to vanilla production (and Paco is new to the region), their entrepreneurial experience works to their advantage. Vanilla is one other option in their diversified economic strategy. They are aware of the historical problems associated with production and realize they have to find better ways to market their product. The newest and youngest of producers understand the importance of setting up direct access to the market. I asked Paco what role the government should play in rural life. He said that he wasn't sure what the government should do. His experience in the past had been that the government is self-serving. He is suspicious that local 'coyotes' have worked out a deal with COVER that will allow them to pay low prices. He admits that his family is benefiting from COVER programs but he wonders if farmers benefit the least.

Paco was frustrated with COVER's time-frame. He began building the shade house in August (clearing land, building and setting concrete tutors, setting poles for

the frame) and was ready to add the netting by January. He raised the money and paid for both the net and the delivery by mid-January. Paco was an ideal participate for COVER, he was self-motivated and worked until he finished each job, just the type of worker that Engler specifically talked about in her description of the perfect producer. All the groups that had entered the project at the same time as Los Primos were still at various stages of completion, some I visited had not even completed their concrete posts but the new year. So on the one hand, COVER in policy wanted to work with hard working individuals (within groups) but were not structurally sound enough to respond to variation in work pace. He was not rewarded nor encouraged for his ability to get things done at such a fast pace. In fact, he felt he might be punished for not supporting office politics. It was a bit of a bureaucratic hole: he could only progress as fast as the slowest of all the organization's projects because COVER would only buy materials in bulk. Regardless of the frustrations, he continued to improve his land and looked forward to the day when he would perhaps be able to take Sundays off.

Though this family had only begun working in the vanilla industry, they had already developed a clear sense of what kind of production and marketing they would need to do to make it profitable. Paco dreamed of developing markets for his family's vanilla. He has relatives in the U.S. that work in international sales and several that work as journalists. He feels like his experience as a migrant gives him an advantage in dealing with foreign businesses and making useful contacts for developing his own markets. He also feels that the experience of working in so many different enterprises during his sixteen years as a migrant laborer create a desire in

himself to be self-sufficient and to work for himself. In his mind, running his own business and being self-sufficient is the best way to build something to give to his children.

Besides building his business through connections with outside markets, he has clear ideas about how he should handle the business in Mexico. He realizes the market he wants to capture will demand high quality. He is also realistic, he is not asking for more than he can produce. He wants to grow high quality vanilla and get a fair price for it. He is committed to working hard and he is willing to bet that he will find a good market.

Vanilla at this point in the life stage of the Ramirez family is a better bet than migration. The Ramirez family maintains a diversified economic strategy that includes migration as one option among many. Before they had children, migration to the United States was a good option, given their desire to make enough money to purchase land and build an independent life. Now that they have children, they are more attached to staying in Mexico. However, like the producers in the survey, migration remains a last resort. Of the producers I surveyed, almost half had migrated in the past; but only fourteen percent planned to migrate in the future. Like the Ramirez family, they expressed hopes that their work in vanilla would enable them to stay in Mexico. Migration was a bet like vanilla, but during a different stage in their lives. They have many connections in the U.S. that would facilitate repeat migration but, for now, they want to do what they can to make their vanilla business work. They are betting on vanilla to keep their family in Mexico and to give them something to pass on to their children.

Families new to vanilla production may have much to learn but they bring innovative ideas and at times connections to outside markets. By the spring of 2006, producers were ready to talk about the industry and develop strategies for moving forward. COVER organized the First International Vanilla Conference in Papantla Veracruz in order to bring together producers, industrialists, marketers and buyers from around the world. Producers old and new came together for four days of lectures, tours and meetings to discuss the future of vanilla. Producers came looking for answers but they also came to make their voices heard.

Chapter 8: The First International Meeting of Vanilla Producers: New Alternatives in Developing the Vanilla Industry

In the spring of 2006, employees at COVER began planning an international conference for producers. When I first heard about this event, I wondered if the preceding months of controversy had motivated COVER to address the disappointment producers were vocally expressing throughout the region. Before the official cutting date each year, producers must receive official approval to harvest their beans and bring them to market. This went smoothly enough, as I witnessed for several weeks before the December 10th harvest date. Producers, or representatives of a group of producers, would arrive at the COVER office in Papantla and register as official vanilla producers. The procedure for harvest approval included a registry that required producers to be photographed and present this photo identification for all transactions. This was designed to protect the producers in several ways. To begin with, the registry of producers legitimizes the producers; as mentioned previously, the government had given monies to several 'groups' of imaginary producers and the money was pocketed. In addition, COVER also hoped to protect the producer from theft (both in the fields and with the buyer) with the combination of an official cutting date, registry and a requirement that buyers may not purchase vanilla without proof of authority from COVER.

But shortly after the beginning of harvest, the office became a center of controversy. At the beginning of the harvest season, farmers were only offered thirty pesos ($3 US) for a kilo of green vanilla. At first, when producers came to inquire

about the best price in town, COVER employees answered that they were not involved with the selling process. When prices did not change and producers were left holding green vanilla, they arrived at COVER en masse with more questions about price. They wanted to know why it was so low and what COVER was doing about it. COVER director Isabel Engler told producers that the organization had no control over prices and had no authority to deal with the problem. Almost daily, the newspaper published articles with producers accusing "coyotes" of cheating farmers out of a fair price. Some leaders accused Sergio Lopez, the newly elected president of the national producers' organization of not defending producers. Most of the articles mentioned the lack of leadership at COVER and accused the director of siding with elite buyers.

At this same period of time, the field agents mentioned to me that COVER planned to sponsor a conference for producers in the spring. They said the goal was to gather as many producers together for planning meetings and workshops about production, distribution and marketing. They also planned to invite international companies in the hopes of developing more direct access for producers. The impetus for the conference arose from a new organization established as an online community for farmers by Patricia Rain. The International Tropical Farmer's Network, ITFN, was established as a Google web group to provide a forum for vanilla farmers around the world. In the forum, farmers primarily discuss marketing techniques and share technical information. Ms. Rain initiated the conference in Papantla to launch this group.

Patricia Rain first traveled to this region, in the eighties, to do research in preparation for a cookbook on vanilla. A romantic and activist, Ms. Rain fell in love with the vanilla business and soon became an advocate for vanilla farmers. As the "Queen of Vanilla," she opened an internet-based business where she sells high-quality vanilla and promotes fair trade. She traveled to other vanilla-producing countries and began to build a network between producers. It was due to the relationships she had formed with these growers and a concern about marketing their products that she developed the idea to coordinate producers of vanilla on an international level. When she first organized the ITFN, farmers from Madagascar, Indonesia, Central America, Tahiti, Uganda, Kenya, India, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Mexico joined the discussions. Access to computers and internet service is limited in many of these countries so those producers that are able to access the network represent other producers in their area. As membership grew, farmers began to discuss meeting to set an agenda for developing the vanilla industry worldwide. Ms. Rain has long term connections with many of the founders of COVER, so Papantla was chosen as the first host for the network. COVER was asked to oversee the project.

For COVER, the conference was an opportunity to address the concerns of producers and promote public relations with international companies. Although they began talking about the conference in December 2005, they did not have many of the specific details organized by mid-March 2006. This created a new controversy. Many of the founding members of COVER were disillusioned with the inability of COVER staff to organize the conference properly, so Mr. Vallejo and several other

founding members of the board got involved with the conference preparation. After Mr. Vallejo visited Jalapa several times to talk with the state agriculture employees, the government was brought in to orchestrate the conference. They hired a professional company to organize the conference. This group more or less had one month to confirm speakers, arrange for the infrastructure of the conference (grounds, lighting, sound, tour buses, food) publicize and print the various documents needed.

The conference was a source of controversy because the planning stages were indicative of the ineffectiveness of COVER. The frustration caused by the conference may have been the final impetus for many of the members to think seriously about focusing their energies outside of COVER activities and look for new networks for developing the industry. The primary purpose of organizing for these producers was earning more money by cutting out the monopolies. At this point, they had come to believe that COVER no longer represented the small farmer's interests and they were anxious to learn what they could from the conference about creating new opportunity for producers.

Conference in the Tropics

A huge sign outside the fairgrounds welcomed producers to this First Annual International Vanilla Conference. The official poster featured a Totonac man, dressed in a crisp white traditional shirt, fertilizing a vanilla bloom with the Tajin pyramid in the background. Producers registered at the entrance of the fairgrounds and made their way to the amphitheater. There were two days of presentations by scientists, international business owners and an American vanilla producer. One

afternoon was scheduled for breakout sessions with producers in discussion groups concerning organization, pollination, value-added production and marketing. The final afternoon was scheduled for fieldtrips to various production sites.

A critic of COVER had warned me that the conference would only attract orange growers and that the parking lot would be full of trucks that "no true producer" would ever own. Patricia Rain, on the other hand, had pictured the first conference of the international network as a large gathering of indigenous growers, the crowd full of Totonac families in traditional dress. The reality was somewhere in the middle. The farmers and their families mostly wore store bought clothing and arrived in collective buses. Only a third of the producers at this conference speak an indigenous language but the majority are full time subsistence producers. These are modern producers, individuals and families that have strong traditional ties within their communities but understand global markets and seek to participate fully in those markets. They do not fit easily into finite categories. They seem to be much less worried about how they are defined by outsiders and more concerned with developing their potential within the vanilla market.

The state government dropped the admission fee to assure that all producers would have access to the event (including food). One of the biggest criticisms was that "real" producers would be unable to afford the trip to town or an admittance fee. Many of the local producers' organizations arranged for collective buses to provide rides into town each morning. The critics of COVER were concerned that this conference was being organized to promote the businesses of local elites and that ultimately the producers that need access to information, technology and grants would

be overshadowed yet again. In reality, the conference was a mixed bag. The government paid for the entire conference, making it accessible to everyone that could get into town. There were smaller breakout meetings geared to inform farmers about the most important elements of growing their business. The lectures given were varied but mostly focused on topics that were geared towards developing a strong niche market based on local growers' potential. The businesses that were invited to present their products were much more high tech and required large amounts of capital (shadehouse materials, chemical pesticides and fertilizers), a reflection of the emphasis of newer production processes.

On the first day of the event, the outdoor amphitheater was full by the time the first presentation began. Sergio Lopez, the director of the national vanilla producers union, welcomed the producers and their families. He said that the purpose of the conference was to organize producers and create a plan for making vanilla production a viable industry. He encouraged everyone to work together over the next three days to develop strategies for building a stronger industry for producers. After all the official introductions, instructions for the following activities and proper ceremonial recognition took place, the conference began with a series of lectures aimed at broadening producers' knowledge about vanilla.

Presentations: Encouraging Production for a Niche Market

The speakers represented a range of interests. There were scientists from the state university in Mexico City, representatives from producers' organizations,

business owners from the U.S. and international producers (Costa Rica and the U.S.). Each of these presentations served as an example of options for local producers. These presentations illustrate well both the strengths and obstacles faced by these producers.

Local producers have always had the feeling that their vanilla was high quality, and there were presentations that lent scientific data to that assumption. The first presentations were given by biologists and emphasized the high quality of the vanillin crystal in Mexican vanilla. These were followed by presentations by leaders from a Fair Trade organization (Comercio Justo Mexico) and an organic certification program (BIO AGRICERT). These producers have always understood the value of this crop and have protested un-fair trade for centuries. The role that organic production might play is unclear, as Mexican farmers are historically tied to chemical contracts through government programs. But what was clear from these presentations was that some of the niche potential for vanilla depends on these characteristics. At the moment the majority of Mexican producers to not add chemical fertilizers or pesticides to vanilla crops. This could be crucial for entering gourmet markets. But the bureaucratic aspect of certifying farms for organic trade could be an obstacle, given costs and access to information. The Fair Trade market now popular within the U.S. and Europe is also an interesting angle for building these businesses. Fair trade is essentially what these farmers have demanded since the 1750s. Their participation in this niche market could be powerful, as they have a point of view to offer consumers. They not only believe in the value of their product and work, but they also have marketable symbolic capital. These producers are attempting to maintain a

sustainable lifestyle and their skill and ability to do so is impressive. Development that values these ties to traditional systems is key to prospering in niche markets.

An American vanilla producer from Hawaii offered a new way to think about production. Jim Redekopp of Pa'quilo Vanilla Company runs a family farm on the big island of Hawaii where he incorporates vanilla production into eco-tourism and local sustainability. He is currently working with the USDA on a rural development project. His farm is located in an area that used to be sugar cane plantations. When the price of sugar fell, these plantations closed, leaving land to be sold off at high prices and loss of employment. Mr. Redekopp and his family have built a self-sustainable farm run on solar energy. He employs six local workers and pays them $10 an hour. His goal is to continue to grow the vanilla orchard and employ more locals at a fair wage. His presentation, he said, was an attempt to share his experiences with Mexican farmers and encourage them to diversify their vanilla farms through eco-tourism and value-added products.

The Pa'quilo farm has contracts with cruise ship tour guides for one-hour tours of the vanilla orchards. He says that the most important thing for producers to do is to educate the public. He begins each tour with a lesson about the origins of vanilla and the importance of buying pure vanilla. He talks to the group about the importance of sustainable lifestyles and how fortunate he feels to raise his children on a farm and make a difference in local economic struggles by employing neighbors at fair wages. He creates a wide range of value-added products and makes these available to the tour groups as samples and for purchase. When he told these Mexican producers that he sells a single vanilla bean for $10 USD, the crowd gasped.

He stressed that through tourism, he is able to reach his market directly and to sell his vanilla and other products for retail profits. He said, "Everyone has a story. Let your story sell your vanilla." He encouraged the producers to develop their marketing image and create a concrete identity. Branding, he said, was key to letting the consumer know what you are about and creates your image.

Mr. Redekopp's presentation was followed by a short question and answer session (the entire presentation was given in English with simultaneous translation for the crowd). The questions asked by the crowd illustrate the complicated relationships between producers. The first question was about the role of the U.S. government in farming. Redikopp explained that America was founded on farming and that the USDA is concerned about developing rural areas which have been abandoned as families move to the city. His farm is an example of re-vitalization of rural economies and the government gives him seed money to get this project off the ground because, he says, "If my farm is successful, then others will have hope and anyone crazy enough will take the risk too."

The next question confused Mr. Redekopp; and the translator, not being from the region, did not understand the significance of the question. Someone asked, "How do you guarantee that no one will steal your beans or vines?" He hesitated and said that he didn't have trouble with theft. After a moment, he suggested working within the community to build good relations, pay good wages and respect your workers so that people would feel connected to the farm, to use dogs and ultimately, have a gun. While all these suggestions were good, they were disconnected from the reality of traditional production and local culture. These producers organize their

lives around building good relations with their neighbors, within their communities, but theft in Mexico, as I suggested in the last chapter, is a more intractable problem. There were some questions about how he creates the value-added products, and he emphasized that he does not try to compete with large companies. He is making a gourmet product out of high quality beans. His customer has learned about the importance of quality and sustainable production, so they appreciate quality and are willing to pay a higher price.

One of the conference organizers asked the crowd if they thought they could accomplish something similar to Mr. Redikopp. He suggested that they organize a group to build a farm for tourists. In the past, tourism has not been a big industry in this region of Mexico. Papantla was declared a "Magical City" by the U.N. in 2005 and has begun making the necessary changes in infrastructure required by this designation. Eco-tourism is attainable for some of these producers, but not likely for the majority. Redekopp's presentation did provide a unique perspective that generated some excitement and opened new ways of thinking not only about vanilla production but also about distribution. Though the number of farms needed for tourism would be small, tourism might provide a larger market for products and create new access to the market.

A producer from Costa Rica, David Gardella, talked about his farm that conserves rain forest by planting vanilla in old growth forest without cutting. He argued that this is one of Mexican producers' greatest marketing tools, that their work can make a difference. He introduced the idea of a "vanilla exchange" that would set grades for producers. The idea behind the exchange is that because there is no

standardization in the vanilla industry, producers have no bargaining power. Creating standards would help producers move towards a more stable market, where they could produce with some level of certainty. This idea was not entirely new, as there had been a system of quality control in the past. The idea that this system would create more certainty is an important concept with these producers, the more security they can build into the production and distribution process the better. Mr. Gardella announced that he would begin the process of organizing a vanilla exchange through the International Tropical Farmers Network (ITFN). The Vanilla Exchange will act as a registry for vanilla producers and buyers. This method of consolidating the vanilla market will insure fair prices and quality product.

The next presentations offered different views of the business side of the industry. The first was from the owner of a spice company from the U.S., the second was from the former spice buyer from McCormick, and the final presentation was by Patricia Rain. The owner of the spice company had two primary messages for the producers. First, he was embarrassed to tell them that he did not buy Mexican vanilla, because there simply was not enough. He buys 100 tons of vanilla a year and has to go where the vanilla is produced in volume. He repeated several times that he felt sad that he does not purchase Mexican vanilla, but that lack of product makes it impossible for him to purchase there. Second, he assured the producers that he was dedicated to buying Mexican vanilla and encouraged them to concentrate on producing high-quality product and they would have a market. His advice was to focus on organic production. He suggested that organic production has the same production costs but yields over three hundred times more in profit.

But even in the organic market, the company owner emphasized, Mexican producers would have to be able to produce a certain volume to satisfy buyers. His parting words were twofold. First, he suggested that the producers talk to their grandfathers. He said, "Ask your abuelos; the Totonac used good traditional techniques. With their help, you'll be able to produce the best vanilla in the world." Second, he emphasized the need to organize. The opportunity to build a new market is there, but depends on the ability of the producers to organize, get production costs down and increase the volume of dried vanilla. Through strong organization, which includes alliances between the producers, curing houses and industry, Mexico has, according to him, a good position from which to build this new niche market.

Hank Kaesthe, formerly of McCormick, had much the same message. The majority of his presentation was a series of photographs from around the world of various vanilla plantations and accompanying stories of different ventures into new agricultural or processing techniques. His final message was that Mexico must work to keep its production of high quality vanilla while increasing the volume. He emphasized the need to fill a niche market for gourmet vanilla and that they must keep production costs low to accomplish this. At this point, only one percent of the world's vanilla is produced in Mexico. He suggested that producers should use the publicity generated by the conference to create awareness of the origins of vanilla and capitalize on that for marketing purposes. He recognized that the world owes a debt to the Totonac farmer for cultivating vanilla. The farmers watched in disbelief as Mr. Kaesthe explained production and curing processes in far-away places: China, Indonesia, Uganda, India, Tonga, Comoros and Madagascar. In this presentation the

local and the global were linked. For many the idea of direct access to the market was a motivating factor in attending the conference and these presentations made concrete how global the market truly is. The fact that so many other countries are producing vanilla did not seem to bother the farmers. They were eager to seek out other producers and to learn from the ways in which vanilla has been marketed by other organizations.

The final presentation by activist, author and business-owner Patricia Rain was delivered by Norma Vallejo, daughter of Victor Vallejo. Ms. Rain was undergoing cancer treatment and was unable to attend the conference. She also prepared a video presentation which was played after the reading of her script. This conference was in part the result of her efforts to organize networks between vanilla farmers on an international scale. Her message was one of encouragement for the work they have already done and for the work to be done. She is adamant that producers be paid fair prices and that companies make conscious product choices. She put together a workshop for the conference on how to market vanilla products, which was highly attended. She organized her lecture around the rallying cry of Cesar Chavez, "Sí se puede." Though most of the audience was unaware of Chavez's work in the U.S. for the rights of agricultural workers, they seemed to appreciate the enthusiasm Ms. Rain displayed for their industry. On the ITFN email group today, many contributors sign their messages with this slogan, "We Can Do It."

Ms. Rain's paper emphasized the role of developing a global network of farmers that would enable them all to establish just markets and direct access to buyers and consumers. While there were not many non-Mexican producers at this

conference (only the American and Costa Rican), the hope is that the ITFN will host an annual conference in a different vanilla producing country each year, creating new relationships and sparking new programs. Besides the network, Ms. Rain is helping to organize women's cooperatives in Mexico and Uganda, beginning the initial steps for the next conference (to be held in Java, Indonesia), and continuing to educate the public through her website, business, lectures and book signing opportunities and letter campaigns aimed at important companies that buy vanilla (Starbucks, Nestle, Hagen Daz).

Many speakers at the conference talked about the necessity of creating a niche market for Mexican vanilla. The lifestyles of the families currently engaged in production must be recognized as an asset and future programs should be developed to support these producers.

Alternative Development: "Betting" on the Producer

Today the ITFN continues to work to promote producers' interests. The Vanilla Exchange has now opened and is offering producers a price of $50 U.S. per kilo for quality vanilla. This price represents a real watermark. Mr. Vallejo has estimated that producers need to get this average to make vanilla production worth their investment of labor and capital. The members of the ITFN use the web forum to keep abreast of news concerning weather and prices in producing countries. They are organizing new projects, primarily in the form of women's cooperatives in Mexico and Uganda to make vanilla ornaments and value-added products to market through

Fair Trade organizations. Most recently, the members are organizing a meeting in Papantla for August 2007 to establish an agenda for building the vanilla industry.

Listening to the proposals for the ITFN, it became apparent to me that the alternative development agenda that had characterized the first phase of COVER was being recovered by this group. It was able to recover this early vision of Mr. Vallejo's because its interests were not divided, or weighted, in favor of the buyers and industrialists. Small producers were to be its exclusive members. Being an international network, it is also able to "leapfrog" over state and national government pressures to conform to a more conventional development agenda.

Local Knowledge and the Development Project

Anthropologists critical of development projects argue that these projects are hegemonic in nature. In this case study, it is undeniable that social inequalities have affected the course of development. Local elites have controlled prices and limited producer's access to outside buyers. Government funds have often been wasted on grants to fake organizations, squandered in bureaucratic fleecing, and given to industry elites in what amounts to corporate welfare. Stereotypes and misunderstandings of campesinos have been used to justify this system of inequality. Producers have been accused of not understanding capitalism because they save cash earned from vanilla sales. They have also been accused of being dishonest when they do not sell their harvest to local buyers --though they do so only in order to look for higher prices. In this case, it is not the producers that do not understand the complexities of the market, but the businessmen and government agencies that do not

understand the complexities of economics. Producers still balance their production decisions between subsistence and commodity production while diversifying into as many other projects as needed to support their households. Both the families that I spent time with were adept at diversifying their economic activities so that they could compete on the market and minimize their risk. In the case of the Lopez family, they focused on subsistence production that provided enough sustenance for the household and commodity production to satisfy their cash needs. They did not need to produce vanilla in order to buy corn, but they did need to have a commodity crop that they could integrate into their larger subsistence crops and did not require large amounts of capital to maintain. The Ramirez family did not produce subsistence crops, but was equally dependent on a delicate balance of diversified activities. For the Lopez family, participating in only market driven endeavors would cripple their economy. For the Ramirez family, the inability to return to subsistence production made diversification even more crucial. They do not have a problem understanding this, though outsiders (local elites and government employees) do not seem to have a clue how important this balance between subsistence economy, entrepreneur endeavors and market production is to these households.

But to make the analysis a merely critical one would be a disservice to these producers and their families. For however corrupt a development project may be, it is but one component in a complex economic and social system. And the fact of the matter is these farmers do not have a problem with development programs as such. They are willing to innovate, and they are interested in new techniques and are motivated to intensify vanilla production. What they are unwilling to accept any

more is corruption, whether it is in the form of price controls by local elites or government nepotism.

For development programs in Mexico, such as COVER, the best bet is to create a coalition between producers and local professionals that would enable them to develop programs that address local needs --in a sense a directed bottom-up agenda. This is the kind of alliance Olivier de Sardan is suggesting when he looks beyond the critical analysis offered by the "anthropologists of development" towards a development alternative based on "social logic" --a conjunction of professional and local knowledge. To be fair to COVER, they did make important headway for many farmers. They were able to garner government support for farmers that provided grants and materials. They reinvigorated interest in production and helped to foster relationships between producers. Farmers are still willing to work with COVER and are hopeful that these programs will work to their advantage in the end.

Given new access to technology, it is also useful for producers to create international relationships that enable them to deal in more direct ways with buyers. In a way, these producers have been asking for direct access to the market for over two hundred years, since they filed formal complaints concerning monopolies by local business men. One morning I rode along with Mr. Vallejo as he checked on several projects at his ranch. A young girl, one of his many god-children, ran up to the car to chat with him about school. Mr. Vallejo explained to me as we pulled away that he had made a new offer to his many employees that year. He let them choose how they would receive a cost of living increase: they could have an increase in their daily salary or they could enroll their children in internet/computer classes, which Mr.

Vallejo would pay their tuition and travel expenses. All the employees choose the technology classes and quickly enrolled their children. They are eager to build family resources in as many ways as possible.

As this study shows, producers will look for other options when a project no longer functions according to a social logic, or does not feel just to them. If a program is well suited to the social milieu of a population, then those producers will work hard to incorporate new systems or technology into their larger production system. Development projects are one subset of a larger diversification strategy, so when they don't work, these producers move on. In this case, they do not have the political power or the social mobilization to stop government corruption. But they are willing to look for other organizing mechanisms.

Given the current administration of COVER, the producers' best bet is to look outside the agency without severing ties altogether: to continue to intensify production at an appropriate level for their household, to build coalitions with local professionals and international organizations, and to create incentives for a more just development apparatus. By creating coalitions with local professionals such as anthropologists Rocio Aguilera and Luis Luna and agronomist Erasmo Curti, these producers can overcome the problems experienced with COVER because the interests of these professionals are aligned with producers. Given environmental changes, intensification of production does require technical changes in the production system. This can be addressed by agronomists that are willing to look at the context of production and help producers to choose and develop the most appropriate technology for each community or household. Local anthropologists not only offer

ideological critique of programs like COVER but have experience integrating technologies into rural production systems.

There has to be incentive for change or, as this case shows, an unaccountable government bureaucracy will revert to corruption. The survey shows that producers are no longer willing to sell their vanilla green. They know that having a more direct relationship with foreign buyers would allow them higher profits. The problem with this scenario is that while curing vanilla can be easily achieved in the countryside, assuring the quality of that vanilla is more difficult. If the government is not careful, there will not be an industry to develop. If producers do not learn to cure the vanilla in such a manner as to assure quality, Mexican vanilla will have a hard time competing in a market with already high quantities of low-quality vanilla. The success of Mexican producers, and for a Mexican government interested in increasing export revenues, relies on the right balance of quantity and quality. This challenging global context may be the producers' best bet for encouraging less corruption in government programs, which would increase their access to funds, technical and marketing support.

Most recently, Mr. Vallejo has written to tell me that he is back on the board of directors of COVER. He hopes to influence the direction of projects, but he is skeptical. The make-up of the board remains the same, with only three producers represented and six business and industry representatives. He fears the state bureaucrats have too much control now and that COVER will continue to be an instrument of nepotism and corporate welfare. Though it was not inevitable that COVER be corrupt, previous experiences with government development projects

made this a rational fear. For this reason, Mr. Vallejo is also working on several other projects to develop production and create markets. He is more active in the national producers' organization which, since the election of Sergio as president, has tried to minimize conflict of interest and focus efforts on producers' needs rather than the industry as a whole. This organization is a federally-funded group, so it is talking about breaking off to become private, in hopes of having more control over future agenda. Mr. Vallejo is actively involved in the ITFN, working with Patricia Rain to organize international producers, assure a fair and consistent price for producers and market pure vanilla. As Mr. Vallejo has repeatedly said (and the lives of producers illustrates) these farmers are not asking to become rich off vanilla. They want to develop an industry that would assure consistent, fair prices.

The ITFN holds the most promise for many of these producers and has become an alternative development strategy. They are asking questions about the relationship between the local and the global and looking for ways to integrate the two.

Commodity Production: Betting on Globalization

The bet that these farmers are making is not unusual for rural producers. Most producers must maintain a highly diversified economic strategy that works best when they minimize risk by remaining flexible. This study is about the way they use vanilla as one option among many, but it could be any commodity. That vanilla production has a long history in this region makes for a more complicated context for understanding new development projects, this situation is further complicated by the need to adapt old production systems due to environmental changes, rather than

simply introducing a new system. This is true for the producers at the conference as well as for the Lopez and Ramirez families. Though the Lopez family has a long history with vanilla production, they have also been willing to integrate other commodity crops into their system. With renewed interest in vanilla, they have worked to find the best way to intensify production without creating too much strain on their capital and labor resources. The Ramirez family does not have any experience with vanilla, they come to it as a result of COVER, but even they do not rely on vanilla for their livelihood. Vanilla production, like migration for the Ramirez family, is a subset of the larger context of diversification.

One of the paradoxes of globalization is that at the same time that it creates new relationships between people all over the world, it also causes people to work as individuals they learn to compete on a larger scale. This contrast of unity and individuality is a constant source of tension. One way these farmers are dealing with the difficulty of dealing with the market as individuals is to capitalize on new opportunities to organize on a larger scale. Organizing locally has been a common approach, but when faced with long entrenched social structures they have not created the business opportunities they had imagined. With the ITFN, they are seeking a global community in an attempt to equalize their access to the market. In this way, they have reframed "the relationship in a global space" (Kearney 1995) so that they are able to capitalize on local knowledge and global markets. They combine long held sentiment that their work is valuable with new ideas about fair trade.

Fair trade as a marketing concept is fairly new but echoes beliefs these farmers have long held. This marketing strategy creates the direct relationship they

have desired to build and allows farmers to capitalize on many of the key aspects of their lifestyle: this commodity is produced by small scale farmers using sustainable techniques and family labor in such a way that households, communities and the environment are preserved.

Development and globalization as phenomenon have been criticized for accentuating and accelerating inequality in the world. But these producers are not ready to give up on either. The global market is not without risk, it is one other option in a highly diversified economic strategy. Producing commodities allows farmers to manage the risk. What is different about these producers is that they in many ways demand the right to develop on their own terms. They are willing to "bet" on vanilla, but they want the government or any other development organization to play fair.

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[2] Information in this thesis was obtained from the anthropologist Rosario Aguilara. Most of the information taken from this thesis is her original work, however I was unable to use her work as it is unpublished and was unavailable. I was not able to find the author Cano to clarify his sources. I would like to recognize the contribution of Ms. Aguilara in her more than twenty years of work among the Totonac.

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Appendix I:Vanilla Producers Survey: The First International Conference
(English translation)

Community: State: Age:
Marriage status: m w s Do you work with your spouse? Y n
How many children do you have? Do they work with you?
What type of land do you work? Communal private other How many hectares?
Do you know how to read? Do you speak an indigenous language?
System of vanilla production: acahual pichoco orange shadehouse other
How many plants do you have? How many years have you been growing?
Do you have irrigation? Do you have plans for an irrigation system?
Do you use agro chemicals? Have you received technical assistance? Do you want assistance?
Are you a member of COVER? If no, why?
Are you a member of another producer's organization?
Have you received grants? From which program or organization?
Type of help: irrigation plants shadehouse other
Money: loans other
How much vanilla do you produce a year? How much do you earn a year? How much do you invest each year?
How much time do you dedicate to vanilla? Daily weekly monthly

Do you grow corn? Do you buy corn? Regularly?
What other crops do you sell?
What are your household cash needs? Food medicine education consumer items other
Do you (or someone in your household) work as a day laborer? Where?
Do you have other work enterprises?
Have you (or someone in your household) migrated for any amount of time? Where?
Do you (or someone in your household) have plans to migrate? Where?
Do you hire day laborers? How much do you pay daily?

What are the principle problems faced by vanilla farmers?
Labor technical financial other
Is this true in your case?
What will you do with your vanilla? Sell green cure and sell cure and create products to sell
Do you have plans to change your current method? How? I want to cure my produce I want to make value-added products to sell
If you plan to cure your vanilla, do you expect to receive higher prices?
What is the highest price you've been paid for vanilla?
In what year did you produce the most vanilla? Why was that a good year?
Are you interested in selling vanilla outside this region? Are you interested in working with a cooperative?
How can the government improve their services?
What do you hope to get out of this conference?

Cuestionario para productores de vainilla: Primer Congreso Internacional

Comunidad: _____ Estado_____Edad:_____
Estado Civil: casado viudo/a soltero/a Trabaja con usted su esposo/a?: si no
Cuantos hijos tiene?:_____Trabajan ellos con usted?:_____
Tipo de tenencia: ejidal particular pequeno prop Otra___Cuantas hectareas tiene usted?:____
Sabe leer/escribir: si no Habla alguna lengua indigena?_____
Sistema de sembrar: acahual pichoco naranjo casa de sombra otra_____
Cuantas plantas por ha.?:_____ que edad tiene la plantacion?_____
Tiene riego? Si no Tiene planes para riego? Si no
Utiliza agroquimicos? Si no Recibe asesoria tecnica? Si no Quiere asesoria tecnica? Si no Es usted miembro/a de COVER? Si no-------porque no? Es miembro/a de otra organizacion de productores?_____
Recibe apoyo? Si no Programa o institucion que lo apoya?_____
Apoyo: proyectos: riego plantas casa otro_____
Dinero: prestamos otro_____
Cuanto produces por ano?_____ Cuanto gana por ano_____Cuanto inverta por ano_____
Cuanto tiempo le dedica a la vainilla dia___ semana_____mes_____

Siembra maiz? Si no Compra maiz? Si no Regularmente? Si no
Que otras cosas cosecha para vender?_____
Que compra su familia con dinero en efectivo? Comida Medicina Educacion Articulos de consumo Otro_____
Trabaja usted (o alguien de su familia trabaja) como jornalero/a asalariado/a? Si no Donde? _____Otro trabaja?_____
Usted (o alguien de su familia) se migra por algun espacio de tiempo? Si no Donde? Vera Mexico EUA
Usted o alguien de su familia tiene planes de migrarse? Si no Donde? ____
Usted contrata a jornaleros? Si no Pago por dia?_____
Cuales son los problemas principales que enfrentan los productores de vainilla? Mano de obra Tecnicos Monetarios Ambientales otro_____
Esto es verdad en su caso? Si no
Que hace usted con su vainilla? Vender verde Beneficiar y vender Beneficiar y transformer el producto
A usted le gustaria cambiar esta situacion? Si no Como? Quiero beneficiar Quiero hacer productos
Si usted beneficia la vainilla, la retiene en espera de precios mas altos? Si no
Cual ha sido el major precio de su vanilla por kg?_____
Cual ha sido su mejo ano de produccion_____porque_____
Quiera vender productos afuera de region? Si no Interes en trabajando en cooperative a hacer lo? Si no
Como puede el gobierno mejorar sus servicios?

Que espera usted de este congreso?

Appendix II: Vanilla Producer Survey 2: First International Conference
(English translation)
Community: State: Age:
Marriage status: m w s Do you work with your spouse? Y n
How many children do you have? Do they work with you?
What type of land do you work? Communal private other How many hectares?
Do you know how to read? Do you speak an indigenous language?
System of vanilla production: acahual pichoco orange shadehouse other
How many plants do you have? How many years have you been growing?
Do you have irrigation? Do you have plans for an irrigation system?
Do you use agro chemicals? Have you received technical assistance? Do you want assistance?
Are you a member of COVER? If no, why?
Are you a member of another producer's organization?
Have you received grants? From which program or organization?
Type of help: irrigation plants shadehouse other
Money: loans other
How much vanilla do you produce a year? How much do you earn a year? How much do you invest each year?
How much time do you dedicate to vanilla? Daily weekly monthly

What problems have you faced growing vanilla?

What factors keep you from growing more vanilla?

Why do you want to grow more vanilla? What would motivate you to increase production?

Do you think there will be a time in the future where you will want to produce more?

To increase production, where will you have to invest the most?

Labor:	family members	Money:	paid laborers	Technology
	Self		capital	Other
			Shadehouse	

What keeps you from producing more now?

Is vanilla a business or a way of life? Why?

How could the government improve their services?

How do you classify growers? By the quantity of vanilla they produce, their lifestyle or the production methods?

Cuestioinario II para productores de vanilla: Primer congreso internacional

Comunidad: _____ Estado_____
Edad:_____
Estado Civil: casado viudo/a soltero/a Trabaja con usted su esposo/a?: si no
Cuantos hijos tiene?:_____Trabajan ellos con usted?:_____
Tipo de tenencia: ejidal particular pequeno prop OtraCuantas hectareas tiene usted?:____
Sabe leer/escribir: si no Habla alguna lengua indigena?_____
Sistema de sembrar: acahual pichoco naranjo casa de sombra otra_____
Cuantas plantas por ha.?:_____ que edad tiene la plantacion?_____
Tiene riego? Si no Tiene planes para riego? Si no
Utiliza agroquimicos? Si no Recibe asesoria tecnica? Si no Quiere asesoria tecnica? Si no
Es usted miembro/a de COVER? Si no-------porque no? _
Es miembro/a de otra organizacion de productores?_____
Recibe apoyo? Si no Programa o institucion que lo apoya?_____
Apoyo: proyectos: riego plantas casa otro_____
Dinero: prestamos otro_____
Cuanto produces por ano?_____ Cuanto gana por ano_____Cuanto inverta por ano
Cuanto tiempo le dedica a la vainilla dia_____ semana_____ mes_____
Que problemas ha enfrentado usted al cultivar la vainilla?

Piensa usted incrementar su produccion vainillera?

Que le animaria a usted a producir mas vainilla?

Por que razon quisiera uno producir mas? Que motiva el deseo de producir mas?

Prevee usted momentos en el futuro en que vaya a querer producir mas vainilla?

Para incrementar produccion, que suele inverter usted?
Mano de obra De la familia Dinero: para pagar mano de obra
technologia
Propia para mejoramientos de capital otro
para casa de sombra

Que le impide incrementar la produccion ahora?

Es la vainilla un negocio o un estilo de vida? Porque?

Como puede el gobierno mejorar sus servicios?