

Follow the Thing: Papaya

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Executive summary

This report was commissioned to analyze and question the supply chain of a papaya, stretching from the supermarkets in the UK to a Jamaican farm. To do so, its author, Ian Cook, subtly covers the economic, political, social, cultural and agricultural processes shaping the chain. While doing so, he overlaps the information with vignettes of people who take part in the trade of this highly valued commodity.

The paper draws attention to the nature, history, and production of the papaya as a regular fruit. It explains how the chain begins with a fully green product that goes through several countries, mediums of transportation, processes and people and how it ends up in a British home, where sometimes it is not even consumed.

As any other product in the globalized world we live in, the papaya market is not only driven by profit, but also by the law of supply and demand. These two factors highly affect every step and intermediary in the chain production, all explained and mentioned in the paper and summarized below.

I. Production

- A. The process begins in a farm in Jamaica, where labor is easy and cheap to recruit due to the competitive prices of the market. The workers pick up the papayas green enough so that they can arrive to their destinations, mostly in Europe, with a yellow streak. This process requires advanced agro-technology and agrochemicals, modern tractors, sprayers, drip irrigation, water pumps, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides - all of these being hazardous for the human health. Moreover, in order to do this successfully, the papayas must be picked in perfect weather conditions.
- B. Labor conditions are hard due to the demanding and under-pressured nature of their jobs.
- C. This process involves the farmer and the foreman, who deals with day-to-day decisions about job allocations, lines and time-off.
- D. After picking up the fruits, hundreds of workers place them in crates for the packaging house.

II. Packaging

- A. The farmer sends the papayas to the packaging houses, where they are washed, weighted, graded, trimmed, wrapped and packed neatly in boxes. The white latex oozing from the fruits' peduncles - papain - represents one of the main dangers for the workers

if it drips onto their skins. It is a highly toxic product that endangers the workers' life if it drips onto their skin. However, due to the gloves' and other equipment's short-life, workers - mostly women - live unprotected against this issue, risking their health every day. Women constantly controlled and evaluated by their superiors undertake most of these tasks.

- B. Papayas of all shapes, sizes and conditions arrive to the packaging house freshly picked where they are tipped into tanks of fungicides, weighted and grouped in categories of 7,8,9, 10 or 12 depending on their weight. Workers remove any possible dirt or imperfection and wrap them in white paper before placing them face up in a standard box with a sticker of the company's name, ready to export.

III. Exportation

- A. All papayas arrive to their destinations in big bulks through a minimum of three suppliers. Never directly. In this process, buyers and importers must be and are in continuous touch with each other in order to discuss matters such as price, amount, and transportation, most of them dependent on the law of supply and demand. The importer makes sure that the supplier and buyer arrive to middle terms and that the process satisfies all legal procedures. In the papaya market, there are high levels of competition, so suppliers and buyers are always looking for the highest profit, which usually involves the lowest price. For this reason, during this step is where the differences between the rich and the poor become bigger.
- B. The process of transportation is highly demanding and accurate. All papayas are grouped with others of their same size, all identical, and transported to their destinations. Although shipping the products is a longer journey, commercial air traffic is rare.
- C. In order for the exportation to be successful, there should be no delays on the previous steps of the chain. The demands are highly strict within importers, retailers, and consumers.

IV. Consumption

- A. Supermarkets and buyers plan an entire marketing strategy to make the papayas look appealing to the consumer, explaining what they are, how they taste like, their country of origin - Jamaica - and providing some recipes and incentives to buy them. On some occasions, workers and companies lie to the consumer with regards to the use of pesticides in order to achieve their purchase. It is sold a solo production for solo consumption.
- B. On a regular basis, only a 9% of the regular market (the "AB" or high income population) demand this commodity. Moreover, within this small percentage, only a smaller one ends up being consumed, for most of the papayas end up being waste due to a lack of time.

The paper ends mentioning how "papayas are impossible to avoid", for *papain* - the product obtained from the white packaging latex - can be found in almost every product of the market, including vegan cheese, canned meats and toothpaste. Cook raises the question of whether any "radical" or "sustainable" politics of consumption can realistically make a change, and invites the reader to discuss both the issue and any possible solution. Furthermore, the author successfully manages to not only explain the complex chain and processes involved in its production, but also to portray how driven it is by capitalism and profit.

In conclusion, this report represents a great insight into of one of the most basic and natural commodities of the market - a papaya. It also leaves the reader questioning the nature and the issues within the market. It is indeed a game changer.