

Profiles in Sustainable Agriculture: *Ciudad Barrios Coffee Cooperative Improves Community, Builds School with Kraft Premiums*

THE HILLS OF THE CACAHUATIQUE MOUNTAIN range of northwestern El Salvador were chopped bare of their scraggly oaks so long ago that some locals say they were never forested. A swathe of 43 acres that bristles with short, newly planted pines, therefore, looks incongruous, striking a contrast against the yellow-grassed, denuded slopes. At first blush, such an effort seems pointless, perhaps fulfilling an abstract, environmentalist agenda. But the coffee farmers planting the trees have something concrete in mind — water. The rows of pines and the square holes that pock nearly 70 acres on neighboring hills where more trees will be planted are the first phase of a reforestation project destined to encompass more than 300 acres and fill underlying aquifers flowing toward 12 communities below.

Reforestation is one of the projects that farmers of the Ciudad Barrios Coffee Producers Cooperative shouldered to improve the quality of life in their communities and repair the environmental damage wreaked by decades of poor land stewardship. Thanks to an alliance with international processed food giant Kraft, the farmers saw higher returns for their coffee, which they poured into community projects, such as the reforestation of their corner of the Cacahuatique — a steep strand of shaded coffee farms studded with single-road villages and anchored between two volcanic goliaths — Chinchontepec in the southwest and Chaparrastique in the southeast.

Certification Attracted Higher Prices

Kraft turned to Ciudad Barrios after four farms belonging to the cooperative met Rainforest Alliance standards for the sustainable management of their land — land that is now marked by placards bearing the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal. Rainforest Alliance Certified farms are audited yearly for compliance with a series of measures developed in cooperation with scientists, NGOs, farmers and local governments to protect wildlife and support the welfare of laborers and surrounding communities.

The Rainforest Alliance's partner in El Salvador, SalvaNATURA — the leading environmental group in the country, charged even with the management of the national



Farms certified by the Rainforest Alliance are managed according to the highest social and environmental standards.

parks — inspects certified farms like those of Ciudad Barrios to insure their adherence to the organization's strict standards. Together with other partner organizations throughout Latin America, SalvaNATURA and the Rainforest Alliance make up the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN), a cross-continental coalition of nonprofit organizations committed to sustainable farming. To obtain Rainforest Alliance certification, the Ciudad Barrios farmers joined forces to protect their rivers, block erosion with strategically placed living fences, sponsor environmental education talks to promote a cultural shift toward heightened environmental awareness, reforest and protect abused and uncultivated lands and otherwise protect the natural integrity of their land and ensure respect for the human rights of those who work for them. Once certified, they qualified to sell to Kraft, which pays a premium of \$10 on every quintal of certified beans.

Though 700 of the farmers belonging to the nearly 1,000-member cooperative are extremely small-time, producing less than 50 quintals — 100-pound sacks, each worth \$50-90, depending on the market price — per year, they have opened their wallets and purses for the communities around them. By November 2005 they had sold 8,700 quintals to the multi-

national for more than \$1 million, making their community contributions substantial. In late 2005 the cooperative donated land and building supplies for the Los Gutiérrez Education Center, a new school with four classrooms and indoor plumbing that is several dignified steps up from the two-room shanty and outhouse that more than 100 children squeezed into in years past. The 2006 school year started in the new facility, with a second teacher to help head teacher Hilda Roxana López, and with nearly 200 students after an influx of children from a nearby village.

The cooperative also constructed El Amatón ecological center and, above its mill overlooking Ciudad Barrios, a railed lookout point called El Suspiro — “The Sigh” — for “all the implications of the word,” said one cooperative member, alluding to its popularity among couples.

Also funded by the premiums received from Kraft, the cooperative planted more than 26,000 trees in 2005 and plans to plant 52,000 in 2006, according to the cooperative’s general manager, Próspero Trejo. Reforestation and land protection have made the mountains a safe haven for armadillos, coyotes, dozens of bird species and other animals, and ensured fresh



The premiums earned from selling their Rainforest Alliance Certified beans helped the cooperative build a new school, now attended by nearly 200 children.

equipment when spraying chemicals, good housing and equal pay for men and women (the latter make up 30 percent of Ciudad Barrios farmers).



Thanks to an alliance with the international food giant Kraft, Ciudad Barrios farmers see higher returns for their coffee.

water for Ciudad Barrios and nearby mountain villages. “I think Rainforest Alliance certification was the best choice for our cooperative because all of us benefit from the social and environmental improvements it requires on the farms,” Trejo says.

Certification Slowly Changes Minds On and Off the Farms

The lessons of environmental conservation and responsible treatment of workers may be spreading by word of mouth: Máximo Hernández, a year-round field hand, acknowledges that workers at other farms ask about the differences they see on the certified land, commenting on the abundance of wildlife, the prohibition of hunting, the use of protective

Years before Ciudad Barrios farmers considered getting their farms certified, the cooperative had won an award from El Salvador’s Environment Ministry for the water conservation efforts at its mill, which uses wastewater as fertilizer. Because of its history of insisting on environmental protection, certifying the nearly 1,000 individually owned farms in the cooperative will be more a matter of modifying some behaviors than making sweeping physical changes. Cooperative member Silvio Enrique Amayo believes that is the last step before the entire cooperative earns certification. “Change the mentality of the producers, that’s what we have to do to get certified,” he says. “It’s not like certifying the communal properties,” which are not run at the whim of each owner.

In the meantime, the cooperative’s leadership is considering new ways to spend its higher incomes. Trejo is looking at the possibility of building a new clinic or establishing a fund to help the poorest members improve their homes. “We are committed to maintaining these environmental and social standards,” he says.



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The mission of the Rainforest Alliance is to protect ecosystems and the people and wildlife that depend on them by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. Companies, cooperatives and landowners that participate in our programs meet rigorous standards that conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable livelihoods.

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