



# Fair Trade Farmers in Mexico

*Fair Trade guarantees a minimum of \$1.26/pound (a living wage) and access to credit at fair prices to poor farmers organized in cooperatives. These fair payments are invested in food, shelter, health care, education, environmental stewardship, and economic independence. Fair Trade promotes socially and environmentally sustainable techniques and long term relationships between producers, traders and consumers.*

Coffee has been an important export crop in Mexico for hundreds of years, especially for the southern states. Coffee exports generate about \$700 million in national income. But for the majority of small-scale farmers, the earnings from their coffee harvest remain nothing short of miserable. Earnings from this labor-intensive crop do not cover even their basic needs — food, housing and health — much less do they provide the capital necessary in order for the small-scale producer to consider personal or community development.

Today approximately 200,000 of the 283,000 coffee producers in Mexico are indigenous campesinos with land holdings of less than 5 acres. Most farmers continue to live in a state of acute poverty.

## UCIRI, Oaxaca

In Oaxaca, Mexico, the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Isthmus Region, established in 1982 now has over 5,000 families who farm roughly 15 acres. The tree was chosen by UCIRI to represent the structure of the organization. The roots are the families of 53 communities that make up UCIRI. The trunk stands for the General Assembly of Delegates elected by each of the communities. This assembly is the primary forum for the creation and implementation of the Union's projects, signified by the branches. The fruit hanging from the branches represents the results of their labor, shared by all of its members. These fruits include schools, health clinics, home visits by doctors, the training of nurses and dentists, and the strengthening of their indigenous culture. This coop has helped create the region's only public bus line; a hardware and farm supply center; healthcare services; cooperative corn mills; an agricultural extension and training program; accounting training; and the only secondary school in the region.



... ésta es Nuestra Palabra: Testimonios de Actual

## S.S.S. Mut Vitz "Bird Mountain" Co-op, Chiapas

The cooperative Mut Vitz is primarily comprised of Tzotzil Indigenous campesino farmers from the 6 municipalities of El Bosque, Simojovel, Bochil, Jitotol, San Andres Larrainzar, and Chenalho. Since its few short years of existence, over 1,000 farmers have joined the cooperative, and will produce about 15,000 100-pound bags of high-altitude coffee this year. The producers are currently in transition from "natural production" to "certifiable organic" production methods and pay particular

attention to all appropriate practices for sustainable, shade-grown coffee.

Mut Vitz coordinates a network of 48 organic promoters working in 28 communities to promote organic production practices. Because of the lack of government support for people living in this zone, producers have been searching for autonomous economic and social alternatives to support development in their

communities. One critical aspect is the creation of alternative, economic models, supporting social development for the promotion of democracy, self-management and sustainability, as well as covering the people's basic needs of food, health care and local infrastructure.

Lucio Gonzalez Ruiz, Past President of the Board of Directors, spoke recently about organics:

*"Years ago, a government coffee institution, IMECAFE, gave away chemical fertilizers to the small producers and encouraged them to use it. The farmers used it in their plants that first year, and the plants looked very pretty and they produced very well. The following year the fertilizer was no longer for free. Still, some farmers went ahead and bought it. The third year the price for the fertilizer went way up, and the farmers could not afford it any more. So, many coffee plants died in this process. The plants got used to the chemicals and they suffered without it and dried*

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up. We realized that the chemical is good for only one year; that for only one year the plant produces coffee, but not after the second year. Then the coffee plants die, and even if we plant new ones they do not produce because the soil is already damaged with the chemicals. For this reason we are doing organic work in all the parcels; we are growing only organic coffee; we are using shade for our coffee plants and we are diversifying our shade trees; and we are also using compost in our corn fields or milpas.”

### The Crisis

For the last ten years, the price of coffee in the world market has hovered around \$1 per pound – meaning that the farmers get between 30-50 cents. However, in recent months a crisis of overproduction has pushed prices down to below 60 cents a pound – less than the costs of production.

The price crisis has hit Mexican farmers extremely hard. In November of 2000, Mexican coffee producers called on the government to declare a state of emergency in the country's coffee zones as coffee prices hit a seven-year low in international markets. “There is a major problem with harvesting the coffee in many growing zones because of the lack of financing. Producers simply cannot afford to harvest at the current prices,” said Fernando Celis of the Coffee Producers Associations Council, which represents 70,000 producers.

Serving as grim proof of the severity of the social crisis in Mexico caused by low international coffee prices, six of the 14 found dead in the Arizona desert in May of 2000 were identified as small coffee farmers from the state of Veracruz.

Luis Hernández Navarro of *La Jornada*, a national newspaper, writes; “the alarm signals have gone on in the Mexican countryside. The coffee growers have sent the country a distressing S.O.S. The new government officials would do well not to disregard this message. The Chiapas rebellion of 1994 was fed by the coffee crisis that began in 1989.”

## Resources on Fair Trade Coffee in Mexico

*The Strength of the Indigenous People of Mut Vitz*

This video, created by the farmers themselves, can be purchased at: <http://store.globalexchange.org/mutvitz.html>

### Chiapas Media Project

ph: 773-583-7728, [www.chiapasmediaproject.org](http://www.chiapasmediaproject.org)

### Mexico Solidarity Network

[www.mexicosolidarity.org](http://www.mexicosolidarity.org), ph: 773-583-7728, [msn@mexicosolidarity.org](mailto:msn@mexicosolidarity.org)

### Comercio Justo México

Jerónimo Prujin, (52) 5271-3763, [comjustomex@laneta.apc.org](mailto:comjustomex@laneta.apc.org)

### Organic Consumers Association

[www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org), [chris@organicconsumers.org](mailto:chris@organicconsumers.org)

## Where to buy Fair Trade Mexican coffee

### Equal Exchange

[www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com), ph: 781-830-0303, [info@equalexchange.com](mailto:info@equalexchange.com)

### Peace Coffee

[www.peacecoffee.com](http://www.peacecoffee.com), [info@peacecoffee.com](mailto:info@peacecoffee.com), ph: 888-324-7872

### Dean's Beans

[www.deansbeans.com](http://www.deansbeans.com), ph: 978-544-2002, [dean@deansbeans.com](mailto:dean@deansbeans.com)

### Café Campesino

[www.cafecampesino.com](http://www.cafecampesino.com), ph: 912-924-2468, [bharris@cafecampesino.com](mailto:bharris@cafecampesino.com)

### Cloudforest Initiatives

[www.cloudforest-mexico.com](http://www.cloudforest-mexico.com), ph: 651-592-4143, [cloudforest@hwpics.com](mailto:cloudforest@hwpics.com)

## Global Exchange Mexico Program

Global Exchange's Mexico Program seeks to support Mexico's democratic movement through public education in the U.S. about the realities of Mexico and the need for changes in U.S. trade and military policy toward Mexico. For more information, see [www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/mexico](http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/mexico)

### The following are available on Global Exchange's website:

Coffee crisis sends Mexico producers to death in Arizona. *Dow Jones Newswires*. May 29, 2001. By Maja Wallengren.

Benefits for Mexican producers who have tripled sales: “Fair Trade” Coffee Campaign Progresses in the U.S. *La Jornada*, April 11, 2001. By Jim Cason and David Brooks.

Mace, Bill. *Global Commodity Chains, Alternative Trade and Small-Scale Coffee Production in Oaxaca, Mexico*. Miami University MA Thesis, Oxford, Ohio, 1998.

### Find recent news on coffee in Mexico at

[www.globalexchange.org/economy/coffee/update.html](http://www.globalexchange.org/economy/coffee/update.html)