



## Fair Trade Farmers in Colombia

*Fair Trade guarantees a minimum of \$1.26/pound (a living wage) and access to credit at fair prices to poor coffee 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.*

According to the International Coffee Organization, coffee exports from Colombia currently total about 12 percent of the world's total coffee exports. The environmental and economic cost of technified coffee production has caused many farmers to look at the organic alternative. The 2001 Sustainable Coffee Survey names Colombia as one of the top producers of organic coffee.

In fact, Colombia is the only country in the world with a national coffee federation called FEDECAFE (National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers) that pays a subsidy when international prices are low and provides social services and infrastructure improvements in coffee-growing regions. To fund this work, it taxes exports heavily when international prices are high. The Federation has local branches in each coffee growing region—a coffee growers' committee and a coffee cooperative which buys coffee from small and medium growers and exports it through the Federation's export agency, EXPOCAFE. EXPOCAFE exports about half of the country's coffee.



### Association of Organic Coffee Farmers of Colombia

One coffee cooperative, Asociacion de Caficultores Organicos de Colombia (ACOC), has an integrated agricultural approach to growing coffee. Members of this organization compost all the organic waste from processing their coffee in large beds of earthworms. The earthworms turn coffee pulp, and all other organic matter, including animal manure, into rich humus, which the farmers add back to the soil surrounding the root zone of their coffee trees.

Coop founder Luis Enrique Aranzazu is certain that his trees are healthier and more productive since he began applying compost as fertilizer. Another coop founder concurs. "I believe my Colombia variety trees, which are now organic, are definitely returning to the yield they had when they were chemically dependent."

ACOC boasts a very modest roasting facility which permits ACOC to roast, grind, and package its own brand of coffee, "Madremonte," the only roasted, organic coffee available in Colombia. Furthermore, the project lends ACOC a great deal of autonomy—the coop members control the product from field to store shelf.

ACOC is not alone in its pioneering quest. The group receives technical assistance from The Peasant Institute (Instituto Mayor Campesino—IMCA) in Buga, an organic farm research center

run by Jesuit priest Jose Alejandro Aguilar. The Institute is committed to improving campesinos' lives by offering economic programs utilizing cheap, local resources in a sustainable fashion. New coop members must begin the transition to organic production methods. They receive training—also known as "earthworm indoctrination"—from the founding members of the coop and IMCA's technical staff. IMCA is currently networking with similar

organizations in Central and South America, exploring ways to set up a local solution to third party certification, owned and controlled by Latin Americans.

### INGRUMA

Another coffee cooperative is INGRUMA, formed in 1984. It serves nearly 80,000 people on four reservations and provides technical support for farming, education, and promotion of indigenous culture.

INGRUMA's economic programs center on the community store. Member-owned stores sell goods to the community at lower prices than commercial competitors. One member stated that she could buy potatoes for 300 pesos that sell for 450 in other local stores. Because they sell to themselves, owners are careful to carry the highest quality food they can buy locally. In

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addition to providing goods and employment, community stores help fill a gap in the local economy by buying "green" or undried coffee from their members.

On their "minifarms," most farmers do not have the facilities to dry their beans in order to sell them to the local cooperative associated with the coffee federation or a private intermediary.

Within INGRUMA, a committee consisting of a representative from each reservation ensures that the funds are used democratically, for the good of the community. These funds have enabled INGRUMA to build homes for more than 75 families, three reservation headquarters and two coffee drying sites, to hire consultants, to start a revolving loan fund for agricultural supplies, and to work on a number of special projects.

### Plan Colombia

Since 2000 the US Congress has approved over \$2 billion in US aid to Colombia, making it the country to receive the third largest amount of US foreign aid in the world. Although the aid is allegedly to help fight the war on drugs, 80% of the money will go to the military, which is well known for massive human rights violations in the country with the highest homicide rate in the Western Hemisphere. Since the US increased the aid two years ago, political murders and displacement have doubled.

In 2002, Congress approved a bill that allows the aid previously destined for the "war on drugs" to be used by the Colombian government in their counterinsurgency war. Even more troubling, \$98 million was allotted to protect an oil pipeline of which US based Occidental Petroleum owns half. US taxpayers are paying for the security of a private corporation in a foreign country, when US aid could be more beneficial if it were used to support cooperative development projects, like the organic coffee farmers mentioned above.

Low world coffee prices are also having their effect. In the spring of 2001, FEDECAFE retired their ubiquitous marketing symbol Juan Valdez, due to a lack of money. In addition, FEDECAFE has closed five of its eight offices around the world over the past few years. As farming coffee becomes increasingly less viable as a source of income, more and more coffee farmers are turning to growing coca. According to *The Washington Post*, approximately 1,000 of Colombia's 560,000 coffee farms have replaced their crops with coca or poppies for the drug market.

Americans concerned about the impact of drugs in the US can help Colombians gain security for their families through purchasing Fair Trade coffee from Colombia.

## Resources on coffee in Colombia

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Ortiz, Sutti. *Harvesting Coffee, Bargaining Wages: Rural Markets in Colombia, 1975-1990*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

Roseberry, William, Lowell Gudmundson, Mario Samper Kutschbach, eds. *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

## Where to Buy Fair Trade Colombian Coffee

### Equal Exchange

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

### 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: (229) 924-2468 or (888) 532-4728  
[info@cafecampesino.com](mailto:info@cafecampesino.com)

## Global Exchange

### Colombia Human Rights Campaign

This program tracks U.S. involvement in the country through military aid. Please contact [colombia@globalexchange.org](mailto:colombia@globalexchange.org) or 415-255-7296 for more information, or visit [www.globalexchange.org/colombia](http://www.globalexchange.org/colombia).

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