

FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED COFFEE CAMPAIGN

FAIR TRADE FARMERS IN EL SALVADOR



“Selling our coffee to the fair trade market allows us to get a much better price for our product than we could get on the regular, world market. With increased income, the members of our cooperative and their families are able to live better. We had a very dismal situation before we had access to the fair trade market. Our children were malnourished and many of us could not afford to put shoes on their feet! Now with fair trade prices we are able to do this and more. Part of the money that the producers get from the fair trade price (called a premium) is set aside for community projects. With this fund we have renovated the soccer field in town, put a new roof on the local school and paid for emergency medical expenses of some of our members. We just wish that more people in the United States would buy fair trade coffee. At the current moment we cannot sell all of our member’s coffee on the fair trade market. There is just not enough demand.”

President of APECAFE in El Salvador, Alfredo Rumaldo Asencio. Dec. 2000



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Coffee is El Salvador's primary export product. Over half of the population makes its living growing, harvesting or processing it. However, since coffee was introduced to the country in the mid-nineteenth century, its cultivation and sale has been controlled by a very small number of wealthy landowners. This small oligarchy amassed immense fortunes while thousands of landless people lived on the edge of survival. In 1980, rural discontent with this situation forced the government to enact an agrarian reform to distribute land.

Farmers living in rural areas of El Salvador still do not face an easy life: over 60% of rural Salvadorans live in poverty. Small-scale coffee farmers, faced with poverty and low coffee prices, organized cooperatives to share resources and earn a better future for their families.

FESACORA, the Salvadoran Federation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives, was founded in 1982 and currently consists of 13,598 individual members grouped in 118 democratically managed cooperatives in El Salvador. They are supported by Oxfam America and first marketed their coffee under Fair Trade terms in the US through Fair Trade pioneer Equal Exchange.

The powerful earthquake that struck on January 13, 2001 has added disaster to the incredible challenges faced by people of El Salvador. To date, the earthquake has claimed over 600 lives and injured over 2,600. There are nearly 46,000 displaced people as a consequence of the destruction.

The earthquake has also affected coffee farmer coops. Among 36 member cooperatives, FESACORA reported 34 deaths, and APECAFE lost two members. All of these co-ops have suffered damage to homes and buildings and the Federation has begun to address the immediate needs of food, shelter and medicines in these communities. Most of all, their future ability to grow coffee and hence feed their families is in danger.

By selling their coffee to the fair trade market, FESACORA helps these co-ops rebuild their communities after fifteen years of civil war. One of these cooperative is located in Las Lajas, in the Municipality of Coatepeque. Coffee farmer Francisco Aviles Orellana, one of the members of the Las Lajas Cooperative, says:

"Before being a member of the cooperative I was a poor landless day-laborer who worked for the landowners, a Swedish family. With the agrarian reform of 1980, my family and I benefitted with the acquisition of land and then created the cooperative of which we are members...

"[T]he benefits have been many, but the most important benefits are having access to education for my children, and access to health services at the community clinic that the cooperative helped to finance. Before we didn't have water in our homes, but the cooperative dug a well and now we have our own water which is paid for by the cooperative. The cooperative has helped all of the community a lot. The clinic serves everyone, the school accepts children from beyond our community and the water arrives to the houses of people that aren't members of the cooperative, so I think that the cooperative has definitely helped the whole community."

Resources on Coffee in El Salvador

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

Paige, Jeffrey M. *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Benitez, Sandra. *Bitter Grounds*. 1998. A novel about three generations of women from different classes through the history of the coffee industry.

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