

The Story Behind the Coffee

A Brief History Of The Current Situation

Throughout its 1500-year history our love affair with coffee has continually grown and evolved. From the early days as a medicinal, to its current status as a beverage as intricate and appreciated as wine, coffee has always been held in fascination and high regard by poets, philosophers, kings and paupers alike.

So popular became this drink that only petroleum surpasses its value in the world market. With an annual value of some \$2.3 billion dollars (in 1996), its similarities to petroleum end there. The extravagant lifestyles that most petroleum producers enjoy stands in stark contrast to most coffee producers who are engaged in a daily struggle to simply get by. With a long history of boom and bust cycles, the coffee market most recently crashed in 1995 – about the same time that the specialty coffee market began to enjoy considerable profits and popularity. Caused by a massive surplus in production that was largely a result of newly planted, low-quality robusta beans from Vietnam, this crash is lasting far longer, and its consequences more severe, than anyone could have predicted. With over half of the world's coffee produced by small family farmers on less than 13 acres – many with *far* less – the impacts have been extreme.



Current coffee prices are less than even the production costs for many farmers throughout the world and yet still the largest companies in the industry continue to make millions of dollars every year. With no money for labor during harvest, children are being pulled from schools, the most basic social services like healthcare and education are eroding. Debts are skyrocketing and traditional family lands are being sold at a fraction of their value to pay creditors. With the land that once sustained them gone – both in cash and food crops – farmers are moving into a cycle of urban poverty that has deep and lasting consequences for millions of people and, in many cases, entire countries.

Where We Stand



While there are many certifications for coffee out there, we feel that few of them, *individually or combined*, address all of the long-term, systemic issues plaguing coffee production.

For instance, organic certification nets farmers a much higher price for their crops but involves a three-year process that cuts their production up to 40% by some estimates. To an already struggling farmer who is wary of the future stability of such a move, it is a change that represents a huge gamble.

For most, just beginning this three-year process is, financially, the beginning of the end. It also represents a truly massive change in the way things have been done for some farmer's entire lives – a change not easy to swallow without education and consideration and respect for these cultures.

Likewise, some trade certifications can be unavailable to some who are doing amazing things, both environmentally and socially. For instance, there are many gray areas created when the price paid to farmers also includes the in-kind benefits of a cooperative that supplies many of the things other certified farmers must pay out-of-pocket for.

Our Mission

Coffee For A Cause is **taking a truly holistic approach**, like that endorsed by the Rainforest Alliance and Utz Kapeh certifications, along with an increasing number of other organizations and responsible importers. We are seeking farmers, cooperatives and less organized farmer collectives who show a true and lasting desire to do the right things and are committed to constant improvements in all areas of their agriculture and business. Above all else, **we insist on quality** because it is the only thing that will ensure a long-term market for our coffee and our farmers.



CoopeDota's new, state of the art burners

We look for **environmental stewardship** – Like CoopeDota who has just installed new dryers this year that burn the skins of dried beans – called 'castillas', or 'parchment' - instead of wood for fuel and will **save 150 acres of trees annually** while reducing pollution output.

We look for **socially responsible organizations** like farmer Cooperatives that assure health care, low interest loans, supplies and education to their members on health issues surrounding the use of pesticides and herbicides. Our partners provide organic alternatives and encourage their increased use wherever possible.

And after all of this, we ensure that **at least \$1 from every single bag we sell is given directly back to Costa Rica through the EcoTeach Foundation** and its many education and conservation initiatives. Sea Turtle research and conservation, reforestation, volunteer projects, community service, educational supplies and opportunities for the local populations – these are but a few of the projects your purchases will help to improve and expand.

NOW THAT'S SOME GOOD COFFEE!!

EcoTeach Foundation - Coffee Fundraiser
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