

Harvesting and wet processing on the family farm

Harvesting and wet processing coffee is hard work. The entire family, including children, join in the labor. The photos to the right show the essential steps of the coffee harvest on an eleven acre farm in the mountains near Matagalpa.

When the cherries are ripe they must be carefully picked by hand, leaving the stem attached to the tree to bear next year's fruit.

After picking, the cherries are de-pulped (see photo on page 30D), washed in fresh water, and set out into the sun to dry. Bits of pulp and bad beans must all be removed before the coffee is finally bagged and shipped to the co-op for dry processing and final sale.

Coffee farmers are not paid for their harvest until the co-op sells their beans for export. Since this might not happen until many months after the harvest, an important principle of fair trade is for Equal Exchange to pay an advance to co-op so the farmer can be paid a portion of his income when he delivers his beans to the co-op. These funds enable the family to meet their expenses and avoid high interest loans that might trap them into debt slavery.



The LWR Coffee Project – helping small farmers survive and thrive

Coffee is coffee. Right? So why should it matter what kind of coffee we buy as long as it tastes good and we can afford it?

The problem is that when we think like this we only care about ourselves and about how much that cup of coffee is going to cost us or what it is going to taste like.

The truth is that for every cup of coffee we drink there are millions of peasant farmers and poor laborers struggling to earn a living. Most of them are enslaved to a system of production and distribution that fails to pay them a living wage.

Landless coffee pickers earn less than \$3.00 a day during the three month long coffee season and are unemployed the rest of the year.

Due to depressed prices and a worldwide glut of coffee, small farmers who sell their crop on the open market are forced to sell their crop for less than the cost of production. Many larger, diversified farms opt to cut or eliminate coffee production thereby subjecting already acutely poor farm workers to year round unemployment.

But there is a solution—a simple solution—a win-win solution—where small coffee farmers are paid a sufficient price for their coffee beans and we get an excellent cup of coffee for a reasonable price.

It is called "Fair Trade." Since 1986 Lutheran World Relief's fair trade partner Equal Exchange has purchased coffee directly from small farmer co-ops and guaranteed them a price sufficient

to cover their costs and provide a fair profit for their labor.

In 1996 LWR launched the Coffee Project and began to encourage Lutheran Congregations to buy their coffee directly from Equal Exchange so that coffee farmers might enjoy the security of sufficient income for their labors.

Nationwide, thirty congregations including two from the ECSW became involved the first year. A year later 627 congregations purchased just over seven tons of coffee. By 2003, 45 tons of fairly traded coffee was shipped to over 3000 congregations.

This year, members of the Lutheran Church have been challenged to double their consumption of fairly traded coffee to 95 tons.

Participating congregations can find many ways to increase their participation. Make it a goal to use fair trade coffee at every church function. Set up a kiosk and sell it for members to drink at home and work. Share a complimentary bag with guests and prospective new members.

And if you or your congregation is not participating yet, today is a great day to start. Simply contact LWR and ask for a Coffee Project brochure by calling 1-800-597-5972, or by email at lwr@lwr.org or by visiting their web page www.lwr.org.

When you are ready to order call Equal Exchange at 1-781-830-0303 ext. 228 or visit their home page at www.equalexchange.com and follow the links to order on-line.



Dry processing at the coffee cooperative

After the farmers finish wet processing their beans it is time to take them to market.

For most coffee farmers in Central America this means selling their beans to a coyote (an independent middleman) who buys from the farmer at the lowest price possible and then sells to other middlemen who all squeeze a few cents of profit out of every pound they sell. Needless to say, the farmer get the least out of this conventional transaction. Often it is less than the cost of production.

But for those who belong to co-ops

participating in fair trade there are no coyotes and the coffee goes right to a co-op owned processing plant. Every bag of coffee is tagged and rated for quality. The beans are dried in the sun for up to twelve days. Processing machinery removes the last layer of parchment from the bean and sorts them by grade. A team of women remove any bad beans that may remain. And finally, the coffee is cupped, a taste test to ensure a quality product and to help the importer decide which beans to buy.