



Touring Prodocoop where the coffee beans are ready for export

PHOTO BY JULIA BAUMGARTENER

This was mostly due to the heavy rains. After lunch we journeyed to the community of El Colorado where the rains took a heavy toll. The mountain swelled, causing a massive landslide. People lost their homes and little relief was being given.

We left El Colorado and Los Llanos and journeyed back down the mountain to tour Prodocoop - a cooperative distributor where the coffee 'beans' get ready for export. Prodocoop serves both conventional and organic coffee producing cooperatives, but in all cases honors Fair Trade pricing. Fair Trade embodies the philosophy that everyone needs to have the same standard of living for the same type of work. Small-scale farmers everywhere deserve a decent wage for their hard work. And they deserve it all of the time, not just some of the time.

This year's coffee harvest was about half as much as the years prior, primarily from the rains. This was true of coffee production worldwide. This year the base price of coffee was \$2.50/lb - with an extra 20 cents/lb for organic, and 10 cents/lb more for the Fair Trade premium. What happens when the commodity market for coffee goes up and over the Fair Trade minimum price structure? Cooperatives are now in competition with the Nestles and the Starbucks of the world who contract 'coyotes' or middle men who will pay the growers cash now for their beans because the growers are cash strapped to pay

their workers.

The shrinking supply of coffee and the rise in coffee prices has attracted commodity speculators that used to avoid coffee because of its low price and general over-supply, which has sent futures prices ever-higher. Higher prices may cause some individual growers to be tempted to leave the co-op and organic certification and practices. Cooperatives will continue to have a difficult time securing coffee from members who sell to local buyers for high prices.

Transparency in the system is needed now more than ever. Fair Trade is a tool to change the global economy and to help equalize the disparity of wealth between countries in the global north and the global south. Just Coffee pays more than the 10 cent Fair trade premium (and they don't tell the growers how to use the money from the premium payments which some Fair Trade certifiers/companies will do). La Fem, also doesn't profit from their producers. All of the coop dues goes back to the women-La Fem serves as a link to buyers and suppliers, to organize projects, and empower women. It is this transparent relationship piece along all levels of the supply chain that makes the process work between La Fem and Just Coffee (Just Coffee has a face-to-face relationship with all their producer cooperatives they work with delegations being venue to support this important outreach). For more infor-

mation on pricing structure, Fair Trade, and upcoming delegations, visit Just Coffee's website: <http://www.justcoffee.coop>. In journeying to Nicaragua, I was most appreciative and impressed by La Fem's level of organization and the hospitality these women have. Their commitment to working cooperatively alongside their passion for farming and deep connection to the land, I can't help but think comes through each cup of their coffee, Las Diosas, that Just Coffee roasts. These women work really hard to bring you your coffee!

The women growers with La Fem are interested in the idea of co-designing a grower exchange program for Wisconsin Farm women and women growers in Nicaragua. Two of the women will be traveling to Madison, the end of April 2011. This is a great opportunity to learn, share and exchange ideas and to continue to shift how the world thinks about women, food security, agriculture and the global marketplace to see women as key agricultural agents of change in rural communities.

Ultimately we hope to co-design a project that will not only help to coordinate and strengthen organic production, and fair trade initiatives, but will also create a new model of innovation that better prepares our growers and our communities as stewards of sustainable businesses and a sustainable future alongside building abundant, food sovereign communities for Wisconsin, Nicaragua and the world.

• Erin Schneider co-owns Hilltop Community Farm outside LaValle, Wisconsin where she and her partner, Rob McClure run a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and specialize in uncommon varieties of Midwest fruits. To learn more about their farm, visit their website: <http://www.hilltopcommunityfarm.org> or email e.schneider.billtopfarm@gmail.com.

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