

FELIPE MIZA CASTRO, COFFEE PRODUCER



His Passion

'I am very happy today to launch for you this website for Irish children. I have come from Guatemala to Ireland to tell the people here about my life, and about my coffee, and about Fairtrade. I am happy that Irish people can now buy coffee from my place in Guatemala. My group is called Manos Campesinas, 'the hands of the small farmer', and we are 1,073 people in our group.'

'I'm a married man, 48 years old, I've been married for 18 years and have fathered three children, a girl of 18, a boy of 16 and the smallest a boy who is five years old. The time I've spent working in coffee began when I was very small since my father, he was a farmer too and I always gave him a hand with the farm work.'

'I started school when I was seven and managed to get through the first six years. But as we were a very large family, ten brothers and sisters, there wasn't much chance of going on studying. I found a job in a project that was helping people in my own community, teaching them how to deal with farm animals, like pigs, rabbits and poultry. Then I began working all day and studying at night, and got another three years basic schooling. At that time there wasn't any further education in my village.'

His daily life

'At the moment one of the greatest problems is the fall in prices for coffee that can be got to keep a family and educate my children. One of my main aims is to convert my plots of land over to organic coffee, so as to compete in the markets on quality instead of quantity. I'm working hard on this. Because of Fairtrade I receive more money and when I produce organic coffee I will also receive more money.'

Because a lot more coffee is produced than people in the world drink, the price paid for coffee to small farmers like Felipe is very low. Growing organic coffee, that does not use chemicals, means that farmers like Felipe can sell their coffee for a better price.

A better deal

Felipe and the other farmers in his group are lucky to be able to sell all of the coffee they export to the Fairtrade market in Ireland, Britain, Holland and America. The manager of Manos Campesinas says, 'Fairtrade keeps farmers on their land. While low coffee prices have forced thousands of farmers to emigrate to Mexico and the U.S., none of our members have had to give up their land.'

Carlos Reynoso, another farmer from Manos Campesinas agrees, 'About four or five years ago, coffee prices began to fall. That made our existence and our lives that much more

difficult. We received less income for our production, but that also meant less money for food, health care, and education. The premiums we receive from Fairtrade help us send our children to school, and provide food and medicines for our families.'

As well as this Manos Campesinas provides training programs which work with women to build leadership within their organizations. Women learn about cooperative structure and practice concrete skills such as public speaking and administration. Manos Campesinas also supports the women in their efforts to administer small productive projects, such as coffee nurseries, and compost making.