

## PROFILE: COMISUYL

The village of Subirana in the Department of Yoro in the central highlands of Honduras, the most mountainous country in Central America, with its population of 4,000 inhabitants might seem like an unlikely setting for a world leading initiative in the coffee and renewable energy sectors. However, through its local agricultural cooperative, COMISUYL (Cooperativa Mixta Subirana Yoro Limitada) and its 115 members, Subirana is setting new standards in sustainable coffee production and processing. At the same time, it contributes high quality certified coffee (Fairtrade, Organic) to the international coffee market using 100% renewable energy in its dry mill processing plant. Subirana has therefore become home to the world's first off-grid coffee processing centre powered by renewable energy technology.

The story of how this small cooperative in a remote part of Honduras managed this achievement is a testimony to the vision of a number of leaders in the cooperative going back to the year 2007. Those cooperative leaders, especially its Manager, Maira Manzanares and then President Agustín Acosta, as farmers themselves realized the importance of taking collective action to impact positively on the environmental prosperity of the nearby Pico Pijol National Park, while at the same time help to improve the livelihoods of their farmer members and families. For all the right reasons, they wanted their cooperative to be at the forefront of actions that would put COMISUYL and its farmer members on the national and international stage.

From an early stage the cooperative realized that they would not be able to undertake initiatives of significant impact on their own. In 2008, contact was made with the Mesoamerican Development Institute (MDI -part of University of Massachusetts) and the seeds of a productive alliance were sown. That alliance, along with the involvement of a third partner, Biocombustibles de Yoro (BYSA), has led to the cooperative achieving its world leader status. BYSA is a group of 250 producers of Jatropa oil (supported with equipment supplied by MDI), which is used to fuel the dry mill processing at night when solar energy is not generated. As a direct result of the activities of the project, COMISUYL, with the unflagging support of the MDI is now processing and exporting its coffee under the brand of Café Solar and also maintaining its Fairtrade and Organic certification.

In addition to the clean sustainable production and processing levels achieved, the initiative has also supported the concept of increasing and maintaining forest habitat in coffee cultivation with Integrated Open Canopy (IOC) production. This agro forestry system has proven to be superior to shade coffee in that IOC supports forest-dependent birds in addition to the birds that utilize shade coffee. COMSIUYL is now a member of the committee for the protection and enhancement of Pico Pijol National Park in the department of Yoro in Honduras.

COMISUYL also now supply quality coffee to a small group of roasters and distributors, which have formed a loose alliance under the label of Café Solar. These include Red Barn Coffee Roasters (USA), Merchants of Green Coffee (Canada), Royal Coffee (USA), Casa Progreso (Sweden)

The farmer-owned, off-grid processing center is the only processing facility in the entire coffee-rich state of Yoro that can meet specialty coffee standards for export (Speciality Coffee Association of America SCAA-85). The Honduran Coffee Institute (IHCAFE) has designated this coffee region as “Azul Meambar” and describes the coffee from this region as “having a delicate aroma of caramel with sweet developing tropical fruits creating a very complex cup”

In addition to leading the way in implementing clean, renewable energy alternatives, the cooperative has also continuously invested (primarily using Fairtrade premium funds) in education, training and development programmes aimed at the youth of the communities served by the Cooperative. The type of training and education referred to is:

1. Continuation of the successful education initiative (at primary and secondary level) promoted by COMISUYL in conjunction with the educational agency Instituto Hondureño de Escuela Radiofónica (IHER). This initiative has allowed more than 120 adults and young people (who had dropped out of the formal education system at an early age) to complete their primary and/or secondary education in their own community in Subirana.
2. Training programmes for young men and women (approximately 40 in total) in the operation and maintenance of off-grid processing centers which use solar thermal energy, electricity derived from locally produced jatropha oil, and onsite manufactured fuel pellets using coffee parchment and jatropha oil residue.

COMISUYL continues to work towards its dual aim of improving the livelihood of its members and their families and simultaneously provide a quality coffee to the international marketplace, a coffee that both respects the environment and delights the taste buds of consumers all over the world.

Now that is something to shout about from the highest peak of the Pico Pijol National Park at 2282 meters above sea level!!

Basic data:

Location: Subirana, Department of Yoro, Honduras

Date of establishment: 1995

Date of Fairtrade certification: 2001

FLO ID: 845

Membership: 115 (82 men and 33 women)

Volume capacity: Approximately 150 metric tons of green coffee of which 80% is organic

Altitude: 900-1400 Metres above sea level

Varieties: Caturra, Catuai, Villazarchi, Ihcafe 90, Indio, Lempira, Arabigo, Borbon

Mission: Promote the integral development of the cooperative by means of the coffee growing activity of our region and support training and education programmes for our members, that contribute to their development.

Vision: To show solidarity towards all small scale coffee producers in our region and be a development organization for our members, offering excellent service in selling coffee, with an overall focus on productivity and sustainability.

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