

Profile COAGRICSA

“It all started when 32 farmers gathered under the shade of a large oak tree on the farm of Don José Antonio Herrera in June of 1998. It was the time of the crisis in the international coffee market and we knew things could not continue like this if we wanted to stay in the coffee business. I suppose you could say that was our first General Assembly!”, laughs Oscar Serrano, Manager of Coagricsal. The cooperative Cooperative Agrícola San Antonio Limitada was formally established in 2000, made up of those same 32 farmers.

Fast forward to 2016 and Coagricsal now has just over 1500 members, 1148 men and 371 women with exports of 3680 Metric tons of Green Coffee, almost 90% of which under Fairtrade conditions and 70% of which is organic. The cooperative now has one of the most advanced coffee processing mills in Central America, using the most modern technology. Coagricsal has invested a large part of its fairtrade Premium income in trying to ensure state of the art facilities that ensure a consistent quality in the product offered to its customers. That commitment has been matched by the development of a technical assistance department to its farmer members, which like wise strives to ensure that members run their farms in the most efficient manner and improve their income and general living conditions.

Sandra Marleny Deras has worked in the administration of Coagricsal since 2001. “We have always focused on quality as we know that the international coffee market is always liable to volatile up and down movement. We are also conscious, however, that our farmer members need to achieve good volumes as that is a key factor in reducing the cost of their farming. Being part of Fairtrade since we first received certification in 2002 has been a big support for our development. Not only in terms of the certification process (we have had our challenges with that, she laughs!) which helps us to improve our administrative and environmental practices but also in terms of the contacts facilitated in the market place. Although we still export most of our coffee to Europe, Germany in particular, we have also opened up markets in North America and in Asia. Fairtrade Premium income has been vital not only for the development of our infrastructure, but also for improvements in conditions in the communities of our producer members: for example in primary health clinics, drinking water facilities, educational scholarships, improved road Access. We now have cooperative members in 7 departments in Western Honduras and the challenge is to ensure that members can feel a positive impact at all times from their participation in the cooperative.”

Since around 2009, Coagricsal has been active in trying to prepare its members for the challenges posed by climate change. It has worked particularly hard with its members who farm their coffee in lands between 700 and 900 Metres above sea level. Given some of the quality and therefore market issues associated with coffee from lower altitudes, in 2011 the cooperative embarked on a diversification programme, focusing on the cultivation of cocoa. The programme started off with 10 producers and now almost 500 producers have small holdings of cacao. All cacao is cultivated organically and in 2015 the cooperative made its first export of organic Fairtrade certified cacao to Switzerland. Javier Juarez a founder member of the cooperative and now part of the

technical assistance team for the development of the cacao diversification programme firmly believes that, given the challenges of climate change, farmers need to be prepared to work towards alternative sources of income, ensuring that farming continues to be a viable activity for them and their families. “ We have been fortunate in that Coagricasal, through its coffee, is known in the international market place. This has facilitated our farmers who have diversified into cacao. The fact that we confident is ensuring a market and a decent price for our cacao, has helped convince farmers that cacao is an investment worth making”

Andres Velasquez, another founder member of the cooperative and currently President of the Board of Management believes that the cooperative has come a long way in a short time. “However, we cannot rest on our laurels as there are still many challenges to face. We have invested in educational opportunities for our youth but we must go even more down that route if we want them to stay on in agriculture and not leave their home base for the supposedly greener pastures of the cities or of North America. We need to develop renewable energy alternatives both for environmental and economic reasons. For that reason during 2016 we aim to develop an energy co-generation facility that will help us to reduce our energy costs and hopefully in the not-too-distant future we can gain an income by selling to the national grid.

They are challenges that we welcome and we will do our utmost to overcome and move on to the next ones!”

Basic data:

Year of establishment: 2002

Number of members: 1519 (1148 men and 371 women)

FLO ID: 879

Volume capacity: 4500 Metric tons of Coffee, 500 Metric Tons of Cocoa

Coffee varieties: Catuai, Caturra, Lempira, IHCAFE 90, Icatu

Altitude: 900-1300 Metres above sea level

Additional products: Cocoa and pepper

Vision

Our vision is to be a financially solid cooperative, with transparent processes in all our operations and with all our products ensuring environmentally friendly activities. We also work as a team with our members and in that way contribute to the economic and social growth of the families and communities of our country.

Mission

Our mission is to serve the small scale producers from different regions in the west of Honduras with support in training, finance, production and processing of coffee, cocoa and other quality products in an environmentally responsible manner. All this with the objective of contributing to the economic and social growth of Honduran families.

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