

Fair Trade cooperative *el salvador*

Asociación Cooperativa de la Reforma Agraria El Salto, Ahuachapán



The laughter of the coffee berry pickers could be heard for five minutes before we reached them on the muddy, snake-like path that wove itself up and down through the lush undergrowth of the coffee farm. Coffee picking is a labour of excitement and anticipation for the families who are part of the El Salto Cooperative, straight up 900 meters from the sandy beaches of El Salvador's pacific coast. Between 900 and 1200 meters, the El Salto Cooperative grows high grown, washed arabica coffee with the hope of selling in the fair trade market.

The harvest season is the most hopeful time of year and cooperative members pick alongside seasonal laborers from the community. The pickers strap a large wicker basket to their waist and deftly pluck rows of berries off the coffee plant branches and into the basket. The baskets are then emptied into sacks that hold between 50 to 100 lbs of berries and are carried to an open area nearby to be cleaned and sorted by hand.

Sorting out the green berries from the mature red berries is hard work. Families squat down near the ground, using both hands to pick out the unripe berries and any loose leaves or guck that has gotten into the sack. In a large clearing near the sorting area, two cooperative members arrive daily, setting up a large industrial scale to weigh the results of the morning's labour.

Family names and subsequent weights are called out in succession as everyone waits expectantly for their turn. An average family picks about 150 lbs of berries per morning, others bring in up to 350-400 lbs.

The members of the El Salto Cooperative belong to APECAFE, an organization of small producer cooperatives registered as FairTrade. APECAFE uses increased revenues from Fair Trade to finance training programs, promote the change to organic coffee, facilitate training in organic methods and improve infrastruce in local schools.



Photos & text Erika Clark/TransFair Canada 2002

*Members/El Salto: 143
Community of 500 people
Land: 710 hectares
collective farm
Qualities: High grown
Varieties: washed arabica,
pacas & bourbon
Altitude: 900 m*

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