

Profiles in Sustainable Agriculture: *Lavazza's Tierra! Coffee Supports Workers, Wildlands and Wildlife*

VILLA RICA, A COFFEE GROWING TOWN IN THE UPPER Peruvian Amazon, is an eight hour journey from Lima along the world's highest railway. Inhabited by both the indigenous Yanasha and descendants of German settlers who arrived in the 1920's, the area is one of Peru's few coffee growing regions. Some 54 farms — both native and non-native-owned — belong to the Villa Rica Association, which has supplied Italy's Lavazza company with beans for the past three years. Of all Lavazza's supplier farms, those in Peru are among the poorest, which is why the company chose to include these farms, as well as supplier farms in Colombia and Honduras, in its Tierra! project.

Tierra!

In cooperation with the Rainforest Alliance and Volcafe, a leading coffee exporter, Lavazza is providing the technology and training needed to foster the sustainable practices that produce top quality beans, promote the well-being of workers and communities, and conserve the environment for now and the future. Coffee from these project farms is being used for Lavazza's new Tierra!, one of the company's 100 brands.

As Lavazza's head of coffee buying, Mario Cerutti, explains, "The ultimate goal of the Tierra! project is to make it possible for communities of small coffee-growers, presently living in dire and disadvantageous circumstances, to improve their living conditions and the quality of their product, as well as to acquire new tools for marketing their coffee at more favorable conditions — to become truly competitive and autonomous decision-makers and to exercise economic control of their product."

The Certified Approach

The Rainforest Alliance works with coffee farmers throughout Latin America to ensure that they protect wildlife and wildlands by growing their coffee under the shade forest.

Those farms that meet the comprehensive environmental and social standards created by the Rainforest Alliance in collaboration with its local partners in the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) are awarded the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal of approval.

"Coffee farming is a tradition in these areas, but with changing market conditions producers are finding that they must update some practices if they are to stay in business," explains Rainforest Alliance executive director Tensie Whelan. "If farmers are given the proper guidance and some assistance, coffee production can be forest-friendly and profitable and sustain vigorous rural communities."



As early as the 1930s, the founder of Lavazza insisted that coffee farming should help the environment and benefit local communities.

Having made the required improvements, all of the Tierra! project farms are now Rainforest Alliance Certified, which means that they are...

- protecting wildlife habitat,
- planting trees and protective buffer strips along streams,
- combating pests without the use of dangerous pesticides,
- rebuilding housing,
- replacing inefficient old coffee mills with modern machines that use a minimal amount of water and control pollution,
- composting organic wastes,
- implementing worker health and safety programs.

Implementing Improvements

These upgrades are particularly impressive given the conditions that Rainforest Alliance experts found on the Tierra! project farms during their first round of visits. The Honduras farms, for example, belong to a coop called Grupo de Productores de la Fortuna, which represents 60 small holdings. On these small farms the team encountered poor living conditions, wastewater from the houses and coffee mills running directly into the streams, farmers applying pesticides with no training or safety equipment, workers deforesting areas to plant new coffee farms, soils eroding and garbage accumulating.

“These conditions are typical of farms in this area,” explains Jose Alfredo Torres, the agronomist who led the assessment of the farms in Honduras. “But given the incentives and tools, the growers have a tremendous willingness to make improvements. That spirit is also typical.”

To prepare for Rainforest Alliance certification in Honduras, Lavazza paid for Torres to train all coop members in integrated waste and pest management, reforestation and environmental education. Members now know to separate their household garbage and compost all organic waste, and to collect plastic drinking bottles to turn into traps for the bean pest “broca.”



The Tierra! Project aims to make it possible for communities of small coffee-growers to improve both their living conditions and the quality of their product.

The farmers have already planted some 2,500 tree saplings, and are raising 5,000 seeds of fruit trees and hardwoods in a community nursery.

In addition to improving the land and life for farmers, the Rainforest Alliance certification practices are geared to enhance efficiency. “Our aim is to use sustainable development to improve the quality as well as productivity of the cultivated land,” explains Fabrizio Paredes, global manager of Prodelsur, the Peruvian branch of Volcafe. To help the exporter meet its stated goal of more than

doubling the amount of coffee produced by the Peruvian farms, Volcafe has instituted various technologies such as a new processing system with solar powered driers that are not only efficient, but don't rely on fuel. “Thanks to this machinery and sustainable treatment techniques, production should double in about three years,” estimates Paredes.

The Peruvian farms have also instituted a systematized pruning process whereby old coffee bushes are cut way back so that the trunks sprout new shoots that mature into higher-yielding plants within three or four years.

These improvements are part of a patented farm management approach that according to Prodelsur business manager Tony Arabe, “allows small producers to manage their farms economically while assuring global sustainability.”

Besides helping the farmers earn Rainforest Alliance certification, Lavazza made investments to improve their living conditions, building new houses for the families of 51 workers, bathrooms with septic tanks, implementing wastewater treatment systems and supporting worker and community training in conservation, first aid, accident prevention, fire prevention and the safe use of agricultural chemicals.

Giuseppe Lavazza, a member of the family's fourth generation, says that the company founder, Luigi Lavazza, insisted as early as the 1930s that “coffee farming should help, not hurt, the environment and lifestyles of rural communities. We are just carrying his belief forward to this globalized world where corporate responsibility can be part of any successful business.”



Lavazza is working to foster the sustainable practices that produce top quality beans, promote the well-being of workers and communities, and conserve the environment.



www.rainforest-alliance.org

The mission of the Rainforest Alliance is to protect ecosystems and the people and wildlife that depend on them by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. Companies, cooperatives and landowners that participate in our programs meet rigorous standards that conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable livelihoods.

Rainforest Alliance

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