



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

NICARAGUA

NOTE FROM THE FIELD

USAID Trains Junior Cuppers

Quality raises the international profile of Nicaraguan coffee

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USAID trains sons and daughters of coffee farmers to evaluate coffee quality.

USAID Quality Coffee Program helps 2,000 farmers improve quality and sales

When Ingrid Cornejo sips a cup of coffee she is now likely to use words like citric, chocolatey, or herbal to describe the flavor. She also has another set of words for a bad cup of coffee. "If it has a taste like dirt, fermentation, mold, or medicine, it's defective," she said.

These are just a couple of the new skills that Ingrid learned during a USAID course that trained 20 young farmers as "junior cuppers." A cupper is a specialist in evaluating the taste and aroma of coffee. Like most of her fellow graduates, 17-year-old Ingrid grew up on a family-run coffee farm and already knew something about growing and processing coffee. Now, as a cupper, she will be able to provide quality control and technical advice for her family and other growers in the mountainous coffee-growing community of San Juan del Rio Coco.

Ingrid's family grows certified organic coffee, and her father is a member of the CORCASAN Cooperative, one of seven farmers' organizations receiving assistance under USAID's \$1.7 million Quality Coffee Program. The program is helping small and medium scale producers increase the quality of their coffee in order to sell in the higher paying specialty and organic coffee market. The 2,000 coffee growers participating in the program have already exported 345,000 lbs. of specialty coffee since the program began in 2003.

The Quality Coffee program also supports the activities of three faith-based organizations, World Relief, Catholic Relief Services, and Lutheran World Relief, which assist farmers to improve coffee quality and promote marketing campaigns with their faith-based communities in the United States. Last harvest, the U.S. company Starbucks bought 20,000 quintales (1 quintale=100 pounds) of specialty coffee, with a value of \$2 million, from a group of farmers participating in the World Relief program under USAID's Quality Coffee Program.

USAID began helping Nicaragua's small and medium scale coffee growers to raise quality and to produce organic coffee several years ago through a program with the Cooperative League of the United States of America (CLUSA). The USAID/CLUSA program financed 21 laboratories and trained 65 sons and daughters of coffee farmers as cuppers to monitor coffee quality. These labs are located on the farms or at the offices of the cooperatives that continue to receive

assistance. Many international coffee buyers say these labs are helping Nicaragua produce excellent coffee. Some of the cuppers trained by the USAID/CLUSA program are now professionals, including Lexania Marin, who was the teacher for the Junior Cupper course.

USAID is also working to establish relationships between producers, buyers and consumers that will benefit everyone. USAID signed an agreement with Cafenica, Thanksgiving Coffee, and the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation to give farms lasting market linkages with specialty coffee buyers willing to pay fair prices for high-quality, sustainably produced coffee. In addition, USAID has trained producers in better farming and processing methods that will help them meet higher international standards.

After the agreement was signed, specialty coffee buyers toured Cafenica's cupping labs and met with farmers. Scott Merle, a coffee buyer at Baddorf and Bronson Coffee Roasters in Olympia, Washington, was making his first trip to Nicaragua to get a better understanding of how the cooperatives work. "Nicaraguan coffee is a good, solid cup of coffee," said Merle. "If they can keep the quality consistent, I'll definitely be buying more."

Paul Katzeff, head of Thanksgiving Coffee, is optimistic about the industry's recent strides. "The entire coffee industry in the world is looking at Nicaragua and these cupping labs," he said. "The Nicaraguans have presented a model of hope because quality and price are

related, and the only way you can get quality is if the farmers understand what the target market wants and the target profile and taste that you are aiming for."