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Will Valverde, International Operations and Fairtrade at CoopeAgri

CoopeAgri R.L. was created in 1962 and is based in San Isidro de Pérez Zeledón in Costa Rica. It acts as an alternative to the privatisation of the coffee industry and to protect farmers against the market volatility of the unregulated coffee market. Australia and New Zealand have only recently begun purchasing CoopeAgri’s Arabica coffee in 2008, but already 94,875kg of CoopeAgri’s coffee has been purchased for the Australian and New Zealand markets.

The total Fairtrade Premium paid to CoopeAgri in 2008 by Australian and New Zealand Fairtrade businesses was AU\$26,336. At CoopeAgri the Fairtrade Premium supports a number of projects democratically chosen by the members of the cooperatives:

- A coffee nursery (see box).
- Environmental education resources.
- College scholarships to 5 students from each public school from the Perez Zeledon region.
- Fairtrade Premiums from CoopeAgri’s sugar production fund a river conservation project. In the past few years the clearing of land and extraction of water for irrigation by the pineapple industry have led to high levels of erosion along the river banks, deforestation and reduced water levels. The project issues environmental protection certificates to landowners and conducts environmental education programs to raise further awareness.
- CoopeAgri has also instituted a number of other projects funded through yearly dividends, of around US\$2.00 per member. These funds finance projects such as a housing project for needy families in the community. To date 49 houses have been built.



Coffee producer Victor Hidalgo and his son, CoopeAgri, Costa Rica, Courtesy CoopeAgri

Fairtrade at Work: A Safety Net for Coffee Farmers

Between 2001 and 2004 at the height of the most recent coffee crisis many farmers abandoned their fields and subsequently were not able to reinvest in coffee plants. CoopeAgri’s coffee nursery project is offering farmers the opportunity to renew their production. It is also providing new plants to replace aging and damaged plants. [Coffee plants’ productivity cycle is about 20 years.]

During 2008, the nursery grew 240,720 coffee plants.

“During the international coffee crisis hundreds of coffee growers abandoned their fields, nearly 20% of all growers. Today, with the Fairtrade Premium being invested in a coffee plant nursery, farmers have been given another chance of staying in the activity they inherited from their parents.”

Victor Hidalgo, CoopeAgri coffee grower.

Young coffee plants from CoopeAgri’s coffee nursery, CoopeAgri, Costa Rica, Courtesy CoopeAgri



FLO ID: 1481

Fairtrade Certified since: 1994

Fairtrade Certified products: Coffee and Sugar

Number of members: 10,000 farmer members

Total volume purchased for the ANZ market in 2008: 94,875kg of Arabica coffee

The CoopeAgri Story

CoopeAgri is deeply involved in the protection of the environment and pays careful attention to the processes involved in the production of coffee.

CoopeAgri actively promotes responsible management of natural resources through the production and commercialisation of organic products, and an educational program on responsible farming and environmental conservation.

CoopeAgri believes that responsible management of natural resources will benefit its members in the area of economic and sustainable development. In addition CoopeAgri offers a variety of forestry related services to its members with the goal to educate and spread knowledge on responsible farming and conservation of the natural environment.

Revenue from the Fairtrade Premium has been invested to improve the working and living conditions of farmers and their families and is invested in the diversification of local income-earning opportunities.

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COUNTRY PROFILE: COSTA RICA

For decades Costa Rica has stood out for its stability and has benefited from the most developed welfare system in the region. It has no standing army, and its citizens enjoy one of the highest life expectancy levels in the Western hemisphere and better living standards than their war-torn neighbours. Traditionally dependent on coffee, banana and beef exports, Costa Rica has diversified its economy.

Country Statistics (2008)

HDI rank: 48 out of 179

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Life expectancy at birth: 77.5 years

5% of children under 5 years old are underweight.

GDP per capita: US\$11,900

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is obtained by dividing the annual GDP, at current market prices, by the population of a country. GDP is the total value of all goods and services produced in a particular economy.

Unemployment rate: 5.6%

Export commodities: bananas, pineapples, coffee, melons, ornamental plants, sugar, seafood, electronic components, medical equipment.



Coffee producer Victor Hidlago, CoopeAgri, Costa Rica, Courtesy CoopeAgri

REFERENCES

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<http://hdrstats.undp.org>

www.fairtrade.net

www.fairtrade.com.au

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Exchange rates: A single average was calculated for the period 2004 to 2008 using monthly averages from the New Zealand Reserve Bank.

AUS\$1 = US\$0.79

www.rba.gov.au/

This report has been produced by Fairtrade Labelling Australia & New Zealand (FLANZ) and Oxfam Australia. Analysis has covered the period of Australian and New Zealand Fairtrade purchases and sales from 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2008.

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To read the report *Tackling Poverty Through Trade* and more Producer profiles visit www.fairtrade.com.au/Producersandimpacts or www.oxfam.org.au/coffee. For fact sheets on Fairtrade Certification and Fees visit www.fairtrade.com.au/Producersandimpacts.

