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Shade-Grown Organic Coffee Production in Peru: a Project Linking Ecological and Fair-Trade Issues with Efficient Marketing

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Abstract

The Altomayo region in Peru is ideally suited to the growing of coffee; high-quality Arabica is harvested on small plots in highland Amazon rain-forest. Ecologically, this region is a bio-diversity hotspot, and efforts to maintain the primeval habitat of high canopy, like old growth trees are extremely important. Shade grown bird-friendly organic coffee has proved to be ideal, and at the same time assures better incomes. Some of the smallholdings are farmed by recently established migrant families from the higher Andean regions, others by small groups of native peoples of the Amazon rainforest.

With simple techniques involving partial felling only, no burning, mulch and compost, etc., the deficiencies of ancestral practices such as slash-and-burn are being overcome.

The farmers associated to introduce sustainable and organic practices. In 1996 the “Asociación de Productores Agroecológicos” (APROECO) was founded. This cooperative venture now has 872 members — all small farmers who have taken up growing coffee to IFOAM and SMBC standards in 50 000 ha of rainforest. They are supported by a team of specialists operated by PRONATUR, a private enterprise cooperating closely with GTZ.

APROECO is divided into 6 main geographical regions, with up to 7 committees each. Every member has a vote, and his or her say in decision-taking at meetings. This democratic approach has proved to be an efficient tool in advancing the aims of the Association. The interests of these independent smallholders are thereby taken up and channelled efficiently.

The change towards ecologically sound agricultural practices is monitored by the extension team. Their continuous presence in the field helps to introduce concepts of efficiency, product quality and environmental responsibility.

In 1999 APROECO/PRONATUR teamed up with GTZ (Proyecto de Desarrollo Integral Alto Mayo) receiving a local subsidy. The synergies thereby generated have resulted in efficient and transparent marketing support, in joint research projects (bio-insecticides and fungicides) and positive experience in linking commercial activity within commodity markets to cooperative systems, thus leading to a realistic and sustainable fair trade situation.

Keywords: Agro ecology, biodiversity conservation, coffee, extension service, fair trade