



Agriculture Innovation: Producer / Roaster Exchange
in Guatemala from June 23 – 30, 2015
Hosted by CoopCoffees and Manos Campesinas



A huge shout out to everyone involved, for making this experience such a wildly successful and entertaining learning tour and exchange between producer partners and roaster/owners in Guatemala! The adventure began at the Aurora airport – gathering our group of participating roasters and producer representatives from across Central America. Meanwhile, Felipe was leading the land transfer group from Mexico and Western Guatemala – to meet up together with Manos Campesinas, our local host and partner, in Quetzaltenango.

The week provided an excellent blend of roaster/producer exchange and hands-on demonstrations around topics such as the use of intensive and regenerative organic techniques, improving production and creating greater resiliency in the fields in the face of the on-going leaf-rust or *roya* epidemic, as well as other common coffee plagues. We also learning about how better production practices are impacting coffee quality and the overall viability of their organizations.

INTRODUCTIONS

We started off with a quick overview of the week's activities and objectives, welcoming remarks by Carlos Reynoso, General Manager of Manos Campesinas and then brief introductions by each participating organization, followed by conversations focused specifically on the use and impact of the Roya Recovery support.



With the Roya Recovery support they have received directly from CoopCoffees roasters and via the CoopCoffees / Root Capital match fund – the Manos Campesinas technical team has established demonstration plots to trial several different varieties in differing altitudes and growing conditions to test locally for *roya* resistance, productivity, quality and overall performance. They are documenting their process along with the results in order to offer clear recommendations to their producer members.

We tasted production samples from Guatemalan local roasted coffee initiatives as well as fresh roasted samples from our participating members. Each roaster representative presented a snapshot of the local tendencies in their markets and some of the challenges they face.



There was plenty of discussion around the increasingly competitive market for high-quality coffee in roasting and coffee shops, as well as roaster needs shifting between a demand for stable and consistent (from year to year) quality profiles and the demand for unusual or “unique” quality profiles. This conversation was underscored at the cupping table, and in later discussions with farmer representatives.

Field Renovation and Organic Practices

We visited the fields of Mateo Reynoso, who was adamant about maintaining his Bourbon, Catuai and Caturra trees. “AnaCafe tecnicos have come through and told us we need to switch to more roya resistant varietals; they say that Bourbon can’t survive here in their era of roya infestation, Mateo said. “But it’s a lie. You can see here that with the right care – my Bourbon trees are doing just fine.”



Here Mateo shows off not only his highly productive Bourbon trees, but also the bird nest full of eggs – possible in his strictly organic fields.

Into his second year of renovation, we see his trees coming back very nicely, full of cherries (and so much more...) and coming back to very acceptable production levels.

At Lake Atitlan, we visited the collective compost production and biofertilizer processing site at Comité Campesino del Altiplano (CCDA) and learned of the impressive repertoire of natural solutions from a basic “cola de caballo” tea used to control the spread of pests and illness – including leaf rust control, to more complicated recipes of multi-ingredient, fermented mixes.



The following day, we crossed the lake again to San Pedro Atitlan, to visit Adenisa – one of the Manos Campesinas base organizations. “When roya came, we really didn’t know what to expect or how to respond,” Organic Promoter Domingo Juch said. “The last time we saw this kind of presence was in the 1980s – but even then the impact of the fungus was much less intense.”

This time around, his fields were devastated by leaf rust and Domingo was forced to conduct drastic pruning, stumping and in some instances replanting of new trees. His initial results are encouraging. “Now we think about issues such as aeration within the fields, preventative pruning and no-till cleaning of the underbrush,” he added. “We are developing an entirely new approach to coffee farming.”

This region has received significant supports from a Canadian initiative – combining private, public, local and international supports. We heard reference to “PROSOL” on several occasions – which has offered matching funds for seedlings, renovation and a number of smaller, entrepreneurial initiatives around the lake and in the larger region of Solola. All producers from Adenisa were able to take advantage of the PROSOL support – assisting their renovation work.



Wrapping Up....

Based on feedback from both producer and roaster participants – it seems that people were very satisfied (delighted) with the variety of topics, experiences in the field and the opportunities to meet and discuss, roaster-to-roaster; roaster-to-producer; producer-to-producer; and the positive mix of personalities with staff, agricultural experts, roasters and producers all together under one roof.

Back to the Boats. We enjoyed a speedy return across the lake to our hotel in Panajachel and connecting to our buses and flights back home.... Again, thanks to everyone for providing such good, positive energy and great dialog and exchange!

