

Coffee

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF VIRMAX CAFÉ



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FACES

SCAA Evaluation

APRIL 2003 marked one of the brightest spots of the year so far. Our attendance, together with a selected group of Colombian coffee growers, to the SCAA 15th Conference and Exhibition proved to be very fruitful, as expected. We achieved our main goal, which was to talk to as many people as possible and relate the story of the unique partnership we have so far built with Colombian coffee growers. All through the weekend we worked hard to continue to position Virmax as the supplier of choice when it comes to Colombian high quality Specialty Coffees.

The growers who attended the conference with us were anxious to meet with roasters and importers and let them know how they are making a difference. Growers were able to personally describe how their lives have improved, how their communities have benefited from the premiums they are receiving and how much they are committed to continuing improving the quality and consistency of their coffee. And the buyers reassured the growers that if they keep up their good work they (the buyers) are committed to continue purchasing their coffee.

It was the perfect way to show the growers and the buyers that the direct relationship model IS a reality. The growers were elated at the opportunity of asking the buyers of their coffee questions with regards to their product and vice versa. We hope that in the near future we can arrange visits to Colombia for many of the roasters that purchase our direct relationship coffees and to meet at communities where the coffee is grown. Without a doubt this will deepen the already developing relationship between roasters and growers.

Apart from the meetings organised with importers and roasters, growers also attended the Amigos del Café sessions. We are sure that the things that they learned in the seminars will be transmitted to their communities back home, becoming part of the learning curve of their associations.

For us at Virmax it was a great opportunity to meet and talk with customers and competitors alike, to whom we stressed our long-term commitment to quality and the importance of quality as the main determinant of coffee prices in the Specialty Market. We believe that this opportunity was a learning experience for both sides, and would like to thank the importers and roasters for taking the time to meet with us and with the growers. We hope we can meet again next year in Atlanta, if not sooner.

The SCAA Conference and Exhibition was one more step into the development of a sustainable model for the Colombian Specialty Coffee industry based on hard work, long-term partnerships and transparency. We are certain that the road ahead is not easy, but we look at it with optimism and enthusiasm, confident that the partnerships we have forged, and continue to develop with growers and roasters will lead to a common benefit, for them, for our customers and for us. From this and many other perspectives the trip was a complete success.

In this edition of Coffee Faces you will find reports from each of the community leaders that travelled to Boston, their impressions and observations first hand, and looking to the immediate future we have plenty of information with regards to the Mitaca crop, as well as some background information about one of our stellar coffees: Timaná. ☺

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Virmax is a proud member
of the SCAA

COFFEE GROWERS IMPRESSIONS OF THE SHOW



Jose Ramon Collazos
Café Los Guacharos

“For me, the participation on the SCAA Conference and Exhibition was very useful. Being able to talk directly with importers and roasters, and hearing from them about the importance of quality and how they are willing to pay a premium for high quality coffee.

My main impression of the seminars was that there is a very big difference between the price received by the growers who provide the raw material (us), and the profits that roasters are obtaining for the sale of our coffee.

It would be great if for the next event, we would program visits to roasters’ plants in order to learn what happens to the coffee we produce.”



Bonifacio Ortiz
and Fabio Salas
Café La Cacaica

“In our case the participation in the SCAA Conference and Exhibition was a very interesting experience. We had the chance to have direct contact with importers and roasters, and even though we had language limitations, we could manage to reach conclusions in terms of our commitment to continue improving the quality of our coffee.

We think that it would be very interesting to meet with other producer groups from Colombia and other countries directly, in order to get to know their opinions and share experiences with the objective of deepening the learning experience.

We are optimistic with regards to the future, based on a clear management of the international business relationships. By doing so, we can continue to improve our plantations increasing the quality of our coffee, while at the same time we and our families can benefit from the extra income generated thanks to our direct relationship with importers and roasters.”



• **LA CACICA** •
COLOMBIAN RELATIONSHIP COFFEE

Coffee FACES

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Robinson Figueroa Café Timana



“For me, the SCAA Conference and Exhibition was an enriching experience. It gave me the opportunity to learn about the realities of the international coffee market, where quality is more important than charity.

For us, this means that the effort we are currently doing in obtaining quality improvements will reflect in a better income, a better quality of life for the growers and an improvement in the social situation in our communities. We believe that projects such as ours must be financially viable, environmentally friendly and socially responsible, properly rewarding the grower for his work.

The meetings with the customers complied with our expectations, and we hope that this type of meeting can be repeated in the future. I also agree with Mr. Collazos (Café Los Guacharos) in the sense that it would be very interesting to visit one or more roasting plants, in order to learn more about the process that our coffee goes through.”



As we are all aware, there are never guarantees with respect to the timing of an agricultural product. There are so many factors involved that it is almost impossible to make accurate predictions with regards to production levels and when the crop will reach its best level.

When our last edition of Coffee Faces was edited, all factors pointed towards a regular start of the Mitaca Crop in the Huila region. Unfortunately, a longer than expected dry period has caused a delay in the first pickings of the season. The elevated temperatures and dry weather also resulted in an increased activity of the broca (coffee borer), which damages the coffee bean, lowering its quality. Because of this, the volume and quality of the coffee that has been picked so far is low and not really in the Specialty category in terms of quality.

Given that we are committed to only exporting coffee that complies, and if possible exceeds, the high quality standards set by ourselves and our customers, we have decided to delay our exports of Huila coffees until we are satisfied with the quality being produced.

However, it is not all bad news. This delay in the Mitaca crop in Huila may well mean that we may be able to have an uninterrupted supply of fresh coffee until the beginning of 2004 since the Mitaca Crop will end by the time the Main Crop is programmed to start.

In Cauca and Narino the situation is quite different, with high quality parchment coffee already being delivered to our warehouses. Therefore, the first samples of fresh coffee to be shipped out will be Cauca and Nariños, which will be complemented in early June with fresh samples of high quality Huila coffees.

With regards to shipments, we expect to be in a position to start Mitaca shipments by the second half of June, including coffees from all the regions. We understand that this "delay" might be inconvenient, but we would rather keep our customers waiting for a couple of weeks instead of shipping them a coffee that will not be up to standards.

On the bright side, we will be able to have a chance of showing the majority of our customers coffees from new regions, Cauca and Narino, that we hope will be received with the same enthusiasm as the coffees from Huila have had amongst our customers.

DID YOU KNOW?

What is the relationship between rainfall and the harvesting time of the coffee crop?

Coffee beans take between 32 to 36 weeks to mature from the moment flowers appear in the coffee branches. The main determinant of the development process is the amount of water that the tree receives after the flowering stage since it is through the water that the plant is able to absorb the nutrients of the ground.

If the amount of rainfall is lower than average, the coffee bean will take longer to develop, up to 36 weeks. In extreme cases - such as droughts, the coffee tree does not receive enough water to "feed" the developing beans, resulting in only few beans maturing, while the rest will be either immature or blackened, which are not usable for high quality coffees.

The timing of the harvesting season is therefore closely related to the rainy season, and will have slight variations from year to year depending on the amount of rainfall that the coffee growing region receives in a specific year.

TIMANÁ

In 2001 a group of more than fifty coffee growers from the Municipality of Timaná in the South of the Department of Huila created the “Asociacion de Productores Agricolas de Timana”- ASPROTIMANA. Their objective was to work together in finding solutions to the coffee crisis. In June 2002 we met Robinson Figueroa, who leads the organization, and after looking at their coffee, decided to work together with ASPROTIMANA in the development of a high quality specialty coffee.

After almost one year of working together, ASPROTIMANA and Virmax exported together approximately 200 bags of its coffee: Timana Relationship Coffee. This is only the start of a project, which aims to export almost fifty percent of their



annual production as high quality specialty coffee: 2000 bags per year.

Currently, the Association is made up 85 families, all of them small coffee growers (with an average land area of 3 hectares) who are deeply committed to improving their standard of living by producing and exporting high quality coffee. Their aim is to invest a considerable part of the premium they receive in the community and the improvement of the quality of their coffee. The premiums they have received for the sale of the first 200 bags has already been invested in the acquisition of a warehouse where they can properly store their coffee and the hiring of an agronomist to help them improve the quality of their coffee.

The name Timana originates from the tribe that originally inhabited this region, the *Timanaes*, who prided themselves in being the fiercest and most dominant group if the south of Colombia. After the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors, Timana quickly established itself as a strategic base due to its unique geographical location, just in between the main two branches of the Colombian Andes.

Results are being obtained slowly, but progressively. The members of ASPROTIMANA are highly committed to the direct relationship programme setting an example for coffee growers in the Huila Department.

Café Timana has a medium body and and bright acidity, with an intense aroma, that combined with a slightly citric flavour, results in a truly exquisite Colombian coffee.

If you would like to additional information about this coffee, please contact our London office at london@virmax.com, or +44 (0) 207 939 9955. ☎

OFFERING SHEET

UK Warehouse

Brand	Preparation	Position	No. of Bags	Notes
La Cacica	EUR, SG	SPOT	60	R
Café Bohemio	EUR, PG	SPOT	175	E
Café del Paraíso	EUR, SG	SPOT	168	E

Continental Europe Warehouse

Brand	Preparation	Position	No. of Bags	Notes
La Cacica	EUR, SG	SPOT	75	R
Café Bohemio	EUR, PG	SPOT	75	E
Café del Paraíso	EUR, SG	SPOT	75	E
Timaná	EUR, PG	SPOT	60	R

Updated: May 20, 2003

Terminology

E: Estate
 O: Organic
 R: Relationship Coffee: Produced by a co-op or association of coffee growers
 EUR: European Preparation (screen 15+)
 PG: SCAA Premium Grade preparation
 SEL: Select (screen 18+)
 SG: SCAA Special Grade preparation
 SUP: Supremo (screen 17+)

UGQ: Usual Good Quality (screen 14+)
 AFLOAT: Coffees that are on their way to our warehouses and will be available in the next 4 weeks
 CLEARING: coffees are clearing customs. Should be in our warehouses in about a week
 DEL: Coffees that are supposed to be delivered the last day of the month listed
 SHP: Coffees that are to be shipped in the month listed
 SPOT: Coffees in our warehouse

If you are interested in receiving samples or further information on any of our coffees, please contact us at +44(0)20 7939 9955 (London).
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