

# Coffee

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
OF VIRMAX CAFÉ



NUMBER 3 • JUNE 2003

## FACES

THESE HAVE BEEN exciting times. The interest for specialty coffees continues to grow among roasters and consumers. Slowly, but surely, the industry is realizing that there must be sustainability in the coffee plantations for coffee to have a future. And they have realised that although sustainability means higher prices, it also means higher quality, since growers are able to invest in their farms.

As such, we believe that Virmax is at the front of the pack, developing quality and sustainable coffees together with many small Colombian coffee growers. Growers are also slowly realizing that it is in their best interest to produce better quality, for not only they receive higher prices but it also means having the means to progress. The work being done today is just the beginning of a long-term process, one that will generate benefits for future generations of coffee growers, not only in financial terms but also in social terms.

After one year of hard work, we have begun to see the first fruits of the Relationship Coffee Programme. We can see a new sense of community emerging from coffee growing regions, where the common benefit is beginning to gain importance over the individual benefit; where dividends of hard work are shared among all its participants, generating an increase coffee growers' incomes, but also for their regions through employment and investment. The sons and daughters of today's coffee growers will enjoy a better future thanks to coffee, and will most likely continue the traditions that have been passed from father to son for more than a century. They will also be better educated, which will allow them to have more opportunities.

June 2003 marks the first anniversary of Virmax's Relationship Coffee Programme. To mark this occasion, we decided to dedicate this edition to the coffee growers of the Asociación de Productores Agrícolas de San Roque Oporapa (ADPASO), who with their coffee La Cacica were the pioneer group.

In this edition of Coffee Faces you will find a survey taken by the members of ADPASO on which they let the world know their opinion of the Relationship Coffee Programme, as well as how they have used the funds generated by the premium they are receiving. We believe that the results speak for themselves. And because of them, coffee growers are more motivated than ever to produce high quality coffee.

In addition, Alejandro Cadena, the General Manager of our Colombian operations travelled to Oporapa to visit the ADPASO community. In this edition's Travelogue you will find his impressions of the hometown of La Cacica.

Finally, the *Mitaca* harvest has at last arrived. This means fresh, high quality coffee and new findings. We are convinced that among our portfolio, which now includes coffees from Nariño and Cauca, besides Huila, you will find one that you will cherish.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Coffee Faces and look forward to receiving your feedback at [newsletter@virmax.com](mailto:newsletter@virmax.com).

TRAVELOGUE  
Oporapa, Huila 2

ADPASO SURVEY 3

DID YOU KNOW? 4

UPDATE ON  
THE HARVEST 4



Specialty Coffee  
Association Of America

Virmax is a proud member  
of the SCAA

## OPORAPA, HUILA

By Alejandro Cadena

I had always wanted to see with my own eyes how these 130 small coffee growers were being able to produce such an exquisite and wonderful coffee.

**L**AST MONTH, as part of the celebrations of the first anniversary of the La Cacica Relationship Coffee, I was invited by ADPASO (the coffee grower association that produces La Cacica) to visit their hometown. Although La Cacica was the first coffee developed as a relationship coffee and I had already met with them several times in Pitalito, I had never been able to travel to Oporapa because of security reasons. However, this time the growers reassured me that the situation was calm and that it was safe to go.

I had always wanted to see with my own eyes how these 130 small coffee growers were being able to produce such an exquisite and wonderful coffee. So I accepted their invitation with joy and enthusiasm.

I was met in Pitalito by Bonifacio Ortiz, ADPASO's president and after a year of working together a good friend. I hopped into his 1957 Willy's Jeep, a classic workhorse of the Colombian coffee grower, for a one and a half hour ride. Although Oporapa is located some 25 kilometres from Pitalito, the road from Pitalito is in a very poor state. But that really wasn't much of a problem because thanks to our slow pace, we were able to watch the beautiful scenery: Oporapa is located in the left (Western) bank of the Magdalena river (Colombia's longest), so the road hugs the mountains resulting in spectacular views of the canyons below. At the same time, it was a good opportunity to catch up with Bonifacio.

We arrived to the town at about 9:30 AM. I was first taken to see the supermarket funded by the Association, which is located in the town's central plaza. I was impressed to see how nice and organized it is, with almost every necessity, from fresh vegetable to pencils and pens. Besides the one I visited, ADPASO also runs an

agricultural supplies store and another supermarket in San Roque, a nearby "vereda". All the Association's members can buy their necessities at reduced prices and they can also get credit depending on the amount of the coffee sold to the Association.

I also managed to visit their warehouse, where they buy and store the coffee produced by its members until it is sold to us or to the local co-operative. At the time of my visit, they were doing some reforms to the warehouse, making it bigger and easier to access. Additionally, they are adapting an area that will be used for a new cupping lab, replacing the existing one, financed by the premiums they are receiving from the sale of La Cacica.

After the small tour of Oporapa it was time to meet ADPASO's members. Although because of the risks involved coffee growers were informed of my visit on very short notice, the meeting room was almost full. I was really impressed to see that almost all of ADPASO's members were there that morning, considering that most of them live at least an hour's drive from the town.

It was an informal affair, and we basically discussed what had happened last



Panoramic of the Municipality of Oporapa, with the town in the background.



year, our first year working together. We also talked about the plans for the future and I reminded them that if they wanted to continue improving their quality of life it was necessary for them to continue to do a good job, focusing on producing the best quality coffee they could. I also took advantage and answered all the questions they had.

After attending the meeting, I was invited to visit the coffee plantations of several members and to get to know the region better. The harvest was just about to begin, so most of the coffee trees had ripe cherries and some were already starting to dry their parchment. I was surprised to see how many of them had parabolic drying patios (a drying patio which looks more like a greenhouse because it is covered by plastic and is open on the sides). By having one of these, coffee growers can dry their coffee faster because even when it is raining coffee can be dried by the wind without getting wet) and many who do not have one told me that they were planning to use the premium received to build one.



But perhaps the best aspect of my visit to Oporapa was that during my ride around the member's farms I had a chance to talk to some of them. In general they are really happy and enthusiastic about the direct relationship programme. And the extra money received seems to be well spent: Some have used the money to fix their homes; others have used it to improve their *beneficia*, others have built new drying patios and even some have use the premium to pay their college tuition. It is re-assuring to see that the money has been well spent and that they are more enthusiastic than ever to keep on focusing on producing better quality coffee and towards a better future for them and their families.

Unfortunately soon after having a delicious *sancocho* for lunch it started to rain really hard. It was the first big rainfall for many months –and a much needed one. Some coffee growers even began to say that thanks to my visit it had rained. I certainly do not think it was me who caused the rain; what I do know is that because of the rain I had to cut short my visit to other farms... which is the perfect excuse to come back again soon! ☺

IN ORDER to find out their impressions on the Relationship Coffee Programme and how they are using the premium received, we asked ADPASO to do a small survey among its members. Here are the highlights of the survey:

What do you think about the Relationship Coffee Programme?



Why do you like/dislike the Relationship Coffee Programme?



Thanks to their participation in the Relationship Coffee Programme, ADPASO's members have received on average 83% more than the average Colombian internal price for coffee during the same period.

How has the premium been used?



For their last container exported, ADPASO's members received 111% more than the Colombian Internal price at the time of purchase.

## Why is it necessary to prune coffee trees?

**Y**OU MAY PROBABLY HAVE HEARD that coffee growers prune their coffee trees every five to seven years. This is done because of two reasons:

1. Because as coffee trees grow older, they become taller. Therefore it becomes harder for coffee pickers to pick the beans.
2. But the most important reason is that coffee trees only produce fruits on new branches and on new knots. Therefore, as the coffee tree becomes older there is less space where the coffee tree can produce new fruits.

By pruning coffee trees every five to seven years, coffee growers in effect re-start the plant's growing process, creating new branches where new fruits can grow. This helps growers maintain a high level of productivity in his/her plot.

Pruning is also less expensive than planting new trees and it takes less time to begin producing since pruned coffee trees restart producing fruits only one year after they are pruned compared to 18 months for new trees. ☺



## Coffee FACES

© Copyright 2003  
Virmax Limited

**Published by:**  
Virmax Limited  
Delta House  
175-177 Borough High Street  
London SE1 1HR  
United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0)207 939 9955  
Fax. +44 (0)207 939 9945  
E-mail:  
newsletter@virmax.com  
www.virmax.com

**Designed by:**  
© Marca Registrada  
Diseño Gráfico Ltda.  
Calle 74A No. 22 - 31, of. 309  
Bogotá, Colombia  
www.mrenlinea.com

## Update on the harvest

After several months of waiting, finally the mitaca harvest has got under way. As expected, the first lots sampled were not very good due to the damaging effect of the broca. But fortunately we are now starting to receive lot samples that have much lower broca ratios and much better cup quality. Unfortunately, some of the coffees we had high hopes for have not managed to meet our expectations.

But on the positive side we have discovered three new Relationship Coffees:

- El Vegón
- San Francisco
- Belén

All three coffees are grown in the region of La Plata, in the central-west part of the Department of Huila.

We have already started to send samples of these coffees to our clients and as more coffee becomes available more samples from other coffees will be sent. ☺

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).  
E-mail: coffee@virmax.com