

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GROUP PROVIDES LOAN

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AGUA PRIETA, Sonora - When he arrived in this city from the village of Salvador Urbina eight years ago, Daniel Cifuentes had lost hope that his small coffee farm in Chiapas could earn enough to support his family.

A coffee-roasting cooperative that peddles justice and fair wages in every cup of joe has brought it back.

"My plan was to come here and work at whatever I could find, because of necessity. If I'd had the opportunity, I would have crossed into the United States because of the same necessity," said Cifuentes, who took jobs in factories and labored in construction earning a little more than he could as a coffee farmer.

When despair and hopelessness made crossing into Arizona illegally a possibility, his wife would tell him to wait, saying "at least here we're still together."

Now Cifuentes is a manager and a coffee roaster for Cafe Justo - Just Coffee - a cooperative of Salvador Urbina farmers that roasts and packages 12-pound batches of coffee for shipment to the United States. He is one of three paid employees at the roasting facility in Agua Prieta.

Cafe Justo ships more than 300 1-pound packages a week and is primed to keep growing because American consumers are willing to pay more for coffee that factors in environmental concerns and fair wages for the Mexican farmers who grow it.

Cifuentes and 34 other Salvador Urbina coffee farmers are finding America's caffeine lovers seem willing to pay their asking price of \$8 for a pound of dark-roasted, natural, shade-grown and bird-friendly coffee.

While the cooperative's coffee costs about twice as much as some well-known brands and about the same as any gourmet or specialty coffee, it is a price that provides the farmers a better chance to support themselves.

It also reduces the need for the farmers or their children to leave Salvador Urbina in search of better pay, said Eri Cifuentes, Daniel's brother and the current elected head of the cooperative in Chiapas.

That helped attract interest from Fronteras de Cristo, the Presbyterian Church's border ministry in Agua Prieta.

When the Rev. Mark Adams noticed that many members of the Lirio del Valle - Lily of the Valley - church were from Chiapas, he and other church members learned that many Chiapas farmers were being forced to leave home because of low coffee prices in a glutted market.

That began a dialogue within the church about "how to enter into a just relationship between those people growing the coffee and respond positively to what was going on with immigration."

They helped the coffee farmers organize on the fair-trade model, a system that begins with the premise that farmers deserve a livable return for their product, and provided them a \$20,000 loan as seed money for the cooperative. It let the growers own the roasting facilities and market and distribute their product.

All three paid employees of the cooperative's roasting facility are Mexican and two are former Santa Urbina coffee farmers.

"So all of the money stays in Mexico, all of the job creation is in Mexico and all of the profit margin stays in the Santa Urbina community," said Adams. "It's a new kind of model and the hope of Just Coffee is to take that model and share it with other communities."

Cafe Justo's plan called for selling a ton of coffee in the first year of operation. With a month left until its first anniversary, it has sold more than four tons.

And late last week, Cafe Justo got an order for 2,000 pounds of roasted coffee beans from an Arizona-based grocery store chain.

"Things here are bad, but they'd be very critical without the advantages that the cooperative has provided. The buyers are not interested in paying for our coffee," said Eri Cifuentes in a telephone interview from Chiapas.

He said local brokers will pay about 350 pesos - about \$35 - for a quintal, about a 100-pound sack of green organic arabica and robusta coffee beans.

The cooperative is able to pay its members more than \$130 per quintal.

The goal of Cafe Justo is to be able to market its coffee so well that one day all of the coffee farmers in Santa Urbina can join the cooperative, controlling the 3,000 to 5,000 quintales of coffee grown there each year.

The coffee crop accounts for about 70 percent of agricultural production in Chiapas.

The prospects look good for coffee cooperatives like Cafe Justo, said Tim Kingston, a spokesman for Global Exchange, a fair-trade advocacy group in San Francisco.

The amount of fair-trade coffee sold grew by 54 percent from about 6.8 million pounds in 2001 to 10.6 million pounds last year. It and other members of the specialty coffee market were the most dynamic performers of the otherwise stagnant coffee market, he said.

The growing importance of coffee with a conscience was highlighted last year by the decision of coffee giant Starbucks to include fair-trade coffee among its products.