

ENSAMBLES IN GUERRERO, MÉXICO

JUBA: INTRODUCING SPECIALTY COFFEE IN GUERRERO

Juba means mountain in Mepha, the indigenous language spoken by the people who produce those wonderful coffees



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HISTORY OF COFFEE IN GUERRERO

The state of Guerrero is one of Mexico's 16 coffee producing states, has borders with Oaxaca and Puebla.

In Guerrero, 80% of the territory are mountains where the main economic activity is agriculture. Coffee was first introduced by the Spanish in Sierra de Atoyac, and most of the labor force for picking coffee was brought over from the poorest areas of Guerrero - a region called Montaña Alta.

Those workers, seed by seed, propagated their homes with coffee, bringing it in their pockets from the big plantations in Atoyac. There are currently over 4000 coffee producers in the region of Montaña Alta. The coffee adapted well there, and forest were cleared to create new farms.

The region is now characterized by the production of shade grown natural coffees.

Guerrero almost only produces naturals, which is rare in Mexico, with more than 90% of total exported coffee being washed.



Producers sewing the shade net for the new nursery

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Nowadays, Montaña Alta suffers from high rates of poverty, marginalization and migration to the more northern states of Mexico, as well as the US, in search for work. In the face of a lack of opportunities, and the growing demand for narcotics in northern countries, a crack in the door was opened for drug trafficking to take over these vulnerable regions.

This proliferation of narco-trafficking has unfortunately painted Guerrero in a very unfavorable light, the perception of which is exceedingly difficult to overcome.

Because of the dangerous conditions of the region, few companies have invested in the area with regards to the purchasing of coffee.

Almost 100% of Guerrero coffee is bought, directly or indirectly, by one single private company, who then resells to big international buyers.

This monopoly has set prices for coffee that, in 20 years, has not passed 18 pesos/kg of naturally processed coffee (equivalent of <\$1/lb green).



Don Mateo y Don Rodrigo preparing the compost for the nursery

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THE PROJECT

Partnering with Miguel Guevara since 2018, Ensamble Cafés Mexicanos began a project focused on specialty coffee, in two communities within the municipality of Malinaltepec: Ojo de Agua and Paraje. In these communities, Miguel, who is originally from Montaña Alta, has been working with producers to improve quality and help producers to achieve different markets.

Miguel delivers training on selective picking, cherry flotation, drying.

He also supports the project by obtaining regional funds to finance a nursery, local warehouses, raised beds and a small mill.

The first producers to join this initiative were all women. Many women in this region are empowered to make decisions because their husband is often living north for work. Those women call themselves the “Evas”, in reference to the first woman Eve.

They decided to call the project JUBA, which means mountains in their indigenous language Mepha.

Discontentment with low prices has allowed this process to grow rapidly, increasing from 5 to 15 to 60 producers year over year. In 2020 Ensamble paid up to 50 pesos/kg for coffees of high quality, offering 2.7 times more than any other local collector.

In 2021, Ensamble extends the project to more areas and intends to purchase 6 tons from the municipalities of Malinaltepec, San Luis Acatlán and Iliatencobe. The coffee will be milled in Guerrero and then sent for classification in Oaxaca where a partnership with a bigger mill was made in order to prepare the coffee at export standards.



Miguel Guevara (to the right) chatting with the producers from Montaña Alta about specialty coffee

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