



Learning, One Scoop at a Time Costa Rica and the Café Monteverde Service Project

With wicker baskets strapped around their waists, students from Friends School Haverford pick red and green coffee berries off coffee plants at Finca La Bella, in the San Luis Valley of Costa Rica. The coffee beans inside the berries are the livelihood of farmers in the valley.

The Corobici Indians originally inhabited the Monteverde area. It was settled in 1918 and named “Cerro Plano.” The San Luis Valley was settled in 1920. Quaker families from Alabama moved to Costa Rica in 1950 searching for a place where they could live a peaceful life style. They purchased 3,500 acres of land above Cerro Plano and named their new home Monteverde that translates to Green Mountain. In time they came to realize the importance of preserving the watershed. As a result they established the world renowned Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve.

Students began studying the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve in the fall of 2002. The coffee service project was subsequently developed in the spring of 2003 to help the farmers of Finca La Bella, a parcel of land that sits just below the preserve at an elevation of 3000-4300 feet above sea level. Finca La Bella is the cornerstone of the Ann Kriebel/ San Luis Project, a project co-founded by the Quaker Meeting to promote sustainable agricultural practices. The 120-acre farm is divided into 24 parcels that are leased to previously landless farmers and their families. Since its inception, this project has inspired many with a vision of an environmentally sustainable and peaceful world. So, starting in the fall of 2003, 4th grade students began labeling, scooping, bagging, weighing, and selling coffee beans to support this worthy cause.



FSH students learn about sustainable agriculture, the ecology of the region, the coffee industry and social economics via their study of Costa Rica and their participation in the coffee service project.* The farmers sell the coffee beans to a cooperative for fair price. This is what is known as “Fair Trade Coffee.” What they receive is consistently better than what they would be paid by a large corporation. Each year the 6th grade students return all profits from the sale of Café Monteverde to the Finca La Bella Farmers Association. Since the fall of 2003 students have raised \$10,700. The farmers have used the money to finance the construction of a new reliable water system that provides clean, clear, sparkling, fresh water to the fields and homes of the families of Finca La Bella. The money has also been used to extend electricity to the community building and is helping to finance the construction of a hostel for international guests who visit the farm to share ideas and learn about sustainable agricultural techniques.

“It is wonderful for students to learn how labor-intensive coffee picking is and how, although farmers are getting fair wages, they still don’t earn much compared to people in the United States.”

Teacher Mark



Studies have shown that traditional shaded coffee farms like Finca La Bella provide habitat for over 420 species of birds. Coffee grown in the shade of indigenous trees not only preserves wildlife and plant habitats but also stabilizes the soil, decreasing erosion and protecting valuable watersheds. Instead of chemicals, farmers rely on shade trees to fixate nitrogen in the soil and leaf litter to create naturally rich and fertile soil. In addition, 100% of the coffee pulp is converted into organic fertilizer. Coffee grown in the full sun requires heavy inputs of chemicals and pesticides. Small-scale farming allows coffee farmers to manually control weeds, eliminating the use of chemicals prohibited by the Co-op. These practices not only benefit the coffee drinker but also help protect the health of the farming communities in the San Luis Valley.

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