



Just Us, Coffee Roasters, Nova Scotia and Mexico Fair Trade Cooperative

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Short title: Fair Trade Certification for coffee, Canada

Key Message: By establishing business co-operative for coffee, a small town in Canada was able to collaborate with local co-operatives in Mexico, showing a win-win situation for environment, development, and business.

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Picture 1 (Up): The inside of a cafe
Courtesy: Just Us!



Picture 2 (Right): Andrea picking coffee
Courtesy: Just Us!

What was the problem? What is the link to local policy?

The Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op is a small co-operative in Grand Pre, Nova Scotia, Canada. It is a worker owned co-op whose mission statement is "People and the planet before profits." Just Us! Coffee Roasters was developed in the early 1990s, by connecting with producers and workers in developing countries. The co-op imports and markets organically grown coffee, teas, sugar and chocolate. All products are certified Fair Trade by TransFair Canada. Behind the principles and goals of Fair Trade is a rigorous international system of monitoring, auditing and certification. The entire organization is also certified by Organic Certified Producers and Processors (OCPP).

In the Chiapas region of Mexico, there was civil war being fought over who should profit from coffee production, which is the main economic resource in the area. Small-scale indigenous farmers had to depend on the big coffee companies (known locally as *coyotes*) to transport, process, and export their coffee. In response, the farmers were fighting for the right to

organize their own co-operatives, an attempt to bypass the big companies who paid the farmers as little as possible.

When travelling through Mexico, the entrepreneur Jeff Moore, saw an opportunity with these co-operatives to bring the coffee directly from producer to consumer. The first shipment of coffee to Canada took place in Spring 1996.

Which ecosystem services (ES) were considered and how?

Ecosystem services are not directly and systematically considered in the value of Just Us! But, the coffee plantations of Mexico attract many birds and pollinators. Many birds migrate between Mexico and Canada, so having farms that do sustainable practices conservation is good for the birds in Nova Scotia.

What input was required for doing so?

In the initial stages, financing the process was a major challenge. But with the success of the business, Just Us! has built a strong financial base. The organization has a unique functioning model which works on a co-operative to co-operative level. Although Just Us! is a worker co-operative, not all employees are owners of the business. To be a worker-owner of Just Us!, an employee must work at least two years and invest \$2000 dollars in the company. These workers own the business and elect the Board of Directors, who in turn hire and assess the CEO. All the assets of the business belong to the workers – one member one vote. The members might be production staff, administration, sales or cafe workers.

An investment fund was also setup, which allows people outside the co-op to invest money in the co-op through their personal Register Retirement Savings Plan and receive an equity tax credit of 30 per cent. Investors get a tax credit and the Co-op gets access to capital.

Consequences and challenges

Fair Trade (on a local level)...Is an alliance between producers and consumers that cuts out the "middlemen." In the process, it empowers producers and gives them greater dignity and a fairer price for their products and it provides consumers with high quality products that they know are more sustainable from a social and ecological point of view.

- Just Us Coffee Roasters from Mazer, 2007

As a result of Just Us!, the Fair Trade movement is now better established for certain products in Canada and small scale co-operatives are able to operate on the local level in Mexico. Just Us! is a worker owned business and it shows the two way knowledge transfer and practice from the North to South and from the South to North. Just Us! Coffee Roasters endows the small marginalized producers the ability to organize and link up with local markets. The organization has also continued to grow in new markets across Canada expanding sales from 1 million dollars to more than \$7 million. It currently partners with over twelve producer co-ops around the world.

But, Just Us! is not just a traditional business. It has also created high quality local employment opportunities; it has increased the income of farmers in Mexico and provides Canadians with an ethically managed, quality product. Just Us! has become a model of how social and environmental responsibility can be merged with economic productivity and education for all.

The challenge now will be to not only maintain the relationship with the producers but also with the investors, the customers, the employees, and to help the Fair Trade movement to continue developing in the face of global economic forces.

References :

Mazer, Katie, International Partnership in Community Economic Development, Just US! Coffee Roasters Co-op,(2007). The Canadian CED Network, Victoria, Canada

Just Us! Coffee Roasters, <http://www.justuscoffee.com/AboutJustUs.aspx>. Last access June 18, 2010

Acknowledgement: Kaitlin Almack (kaitlin.almack@gmail.com) for compiling the case and Alan Warner (alan.warner@acadiu.ca) for reviewing the case



Picture 3: Unloading beans
Courtesy: Just Us!



Picture 4: Just US! Staff
Courtesy: Just Us!