



USAID | NICARAGUA

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORY

Raising the Profile of Nicaraguan Coffee

Improved quality control opens new markets for small coffee farmers



Photo: USAID

Cuppers from Las Carpas, Nicaragua, learn their trade.

"The program taught me how to manage the lab and how to cup so that we could produce better coffee," says Lexania.

Telling Our Story

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Lexania Marín is a self-described coffee addict, who has been drinking coffee all her life. Now she gets to do it for a living. Through a USAID-supported program to boost Nicaragua's coffee industry, the university student from a small coffee farm in Dipilto Viejo, Nicaragua, has become a cupper — a specialist in evaluating the taste and aroma of coffee.

With a glut of low-quality coffee saturating the world market, coffee prices have plummeted. The specialty and organic markets, which often pay more than double the price of conventional coffee, offer farmers one route to increasing their incomes. To help farmers gain a foothold in these markets, USAID is helping seven producer groups improve cultivation and processing techniques to meet their higher standards. USAID has also established 21 laboratories to control coffee quality, many of which are located right on the farm, and trained 65 sons and daughters of coffee

growers as cuppers to monitor that quality.

To complement improvements in production and processing, USAID is also providing marketing training to show producer groups what kind of quality international buyers demand and what requirements must be met for a product to be certified as organic, Fair Trade or Rainforest Alliance coffee.

New market opportunities are already beginning to appear for Nicaraguan coffee growers. During the 2003-04 coffee harvest, farmers participating in the program sold 330,000 pounds of specialty coffee, including organic and Fair Trade, at premium prices to U.S. and European buyers. The farms have been consistently meeting international quality standards, and many won awards at the 2004 and 2005 International Cup of Excellence, a yearly event that is judged by internationally recognized coffee experts. And for both the 2004 and 2005 events, cuppers trained by USAID were selected to cup alongside distinguished judges from around the world — including Lexania Marín.

"The program taught me how to manage the lab and how to cup so that we could produce better coffee," she says. Now, Lexania can enjoy drinking her cup of coffee and get paid for doing it.