

# COSAGUAL

Situated in the mountains of western Honduras, the COSAGUAL cooperative produces premium quality Fair Trade Organic coffee amidst Honduras' most celebrated indigenous heritage. Just outside the cooperative's home town of Guacince, the Piedra Parada, or 'Standing Rock', stares down on the rolling hills covered by coffee farms as a monument to the struggle against Spanish occupation. It was on this site in 1536 that the indigenous revolutionary leader, Lempira, held his last stand and fell at the hands of Spain's soldiers.

Today, throughout these same mountains bordering El Salvador, the members of COSAGUAL carry on the coffee farming traditions of the generations before them. These farming families produce typical and cultural varieties of Arabica coffee under natural shade canopies at altitudes ranging from 1200 to 1800 meters above sea level. Using only the highly labor intensive techniques of organic farming, COSAGUAL members fertilize their farms with compost and combat plant pests and diseases with natural remedies. Each year, farms are inspected to insure compliance within USDA organic standards.

From December through March, families collect their ripe red coffee cherries during three to four sequential manual harvests, before milling the fruit at family operated stations. Families then individually ferment and wash their coffee beans four times, before sun drying them on patios. The cooperative has recently installed a centralized milling station, which will be functioning during the 06/07 season, to economize on the labor intensive procedures of milling, washing, and drying coffee. The centralization of processing will also allow COSAGUAL to invest in the specialized training of mill operators in order to assure a standardized and consistent premium quality coffee.

Following in the footsteps of his father, Dennis Cruz, a 30 year old farmer leader educated as an agricultural engineering, is currently leading COSAGUAL as the cooperative's president. Under the guidance of Mr. Cruz, COSAGUAL members are maintaining the solidarity of their cooperative and reaching financial empowerment through Fair Trade sales to importers. Reaching Fair Trade and Organic premiums through the import of their certified coffee is providing COSAGUAL families not only with improved prices for their coffee harvests, but also access to reasonable pre-harvest financing rates, otherwise unobtainable inside the usury circles of local lending.

*"With coffee, my husband and I have been able to educate our children.*

*I left school after the third grade and my husband after second grade, but my children have completed their studies.*

*One with a high school computer program, one with a degree in agricultural engineering, another in business administration, and another is now a lawyer working for the state in El Progreso."*

*— Dona Eva Alvarado Castillo*

