

Cultivating Eco-Friendly Coffee in El Salvador



Since traditional coffee cultivation can harm the ecosystem, efforts have been made to develop methods that will help maintain biodiversity. Shade-grown coffee seems to be one answer.

As part of a Coffee and Biodiversity Project in El Salvador, a group of World Bank experts recently concluded that this type of coffee cultivation is not only a plus for the environment, but it can also be a profitable source of income for small and medium-size producers.

Some Salvadoran farmers recently switched to shade-grown coffee techniques and turned their agriculture project into a lucrative venture, placing their product on gourmet world coffee markets. The project has shown that a comparatively small investment, \$750,000 in this case, can have a significant effect, because the project can be extended and replicated in the future. As an outcome of the project, 224 coffee plantations will be certified with the ECO/OK seal, which the Rain Forest Alliance grants to farmers who cultivate coffee in a manner consistent with biodiversity preservation. Four coffee processing plants will be certified as well. There are more than 130 coffee species on certified plantations, while only five species have been recorded in areas where coffee is grown under the sun.

Producers who took part in the project had to satisfy a variety of criteria, ranging from shade density to a minimum number of trees, to receive their certification. They chose to participate in the hope that becoming certified would bring favorable economic returns, in addition to helping to preserve the ecosystem.

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