

SAFE-World Project/Initiative Summary

Country: Mexico

Project/Initiative Title: UCIRI, Chiapas

Nos. farmers: 4,800 Hectares: 4,800

Agro-Ecological Zone: XIII

Improvement types

1x	2	3x	4	5x	6x	7	8	9x
----	---	----	---	----	----	---	---	----

A. Key Impacts

A1 - Productivity

	Before/Without	After/With	% change
Coffee	300-600 kg/ha	600-1200 kg/ha	100

D. Contact Point for Project/Initiative

UCIRI

Apartado Postal 60, CP 70110
Cd. Ixtepec, Oaxaca México
Tel (971) 3 1365 Fax (971) 3 0426
email: uciri@antequera.com

E. Project Narrative

The Union of Indian Communities in the Istmus Region, Oaxaca State, Mexico

The Union of Indian Communities in the Istmus Region (UCIRI) was organised by farmers from three communities in the state of Oaxaca in 1982. The area is mountainous and coffee is grown mainly on slopes, with maize and vegetables on the flatter lands. The altitude is some 400 to 1250 metres; the soils volcanic; and the rainfall some 800-1900 mm between May and September. A common characteristic of the coffee farmers is their dependency on intermediaries, who control credit, buy the coffee, and supply the basic necessities. The basic family income is only US\$ 250-450 per year.

The basic aim of the UCIRI was to find ways to commercialise the coffee themselves, obtain better prices, and take more control over their own livelihoods. In 1985, the organisation decided to move from traditional to organic agriculture. This was partly a political decision to reduce dependency on credit, but it was also hoped that yields would improve too. Contacts with so-called 'fair-trade' organizations supported these goals, as they offered received a premium on the organic coffee. Now, some 3000 families in 37 communities are members of the Union.

Organic coffee cultivation demands more active management and a higher labour input from farmers. Coffee is grown in the secondary forest, and farmers leave leguminous trees that are beneficial to the coffee. It is planted on the contour, and slashed weeds and pruned branches are laid on the contour too. Half-moon shaped terraces are constructed for each coffee tree.

Formerly the coffee beans were depulped into waterways, causing significant water pollution. But now organic farmers return the pulp to the fields through composting. Other materials used for composting include animal manures, lime and green plant material. Mulches are used to protect the surface of the soil from erosion.

The organic farmers using this improved system produce 600-1200 kg/ha of coffee beans, an improvement of 30-50% compared with their earlier practices. These yields, though, are not as great as those on the large coffee estates. Most farmers also now cultivate their maize and beans organically.

The Union has been able to build up its own infrastructure for the transport, storage, processing, and export of its coffee. The premium received for the organic coffee from the fair trade organisations is used for a range of social and economic purposes, including for improving the educational systems. The Union also runs a public transport system into the mountains and a medical insurance systems, and owns several shops from which local people can buy basic necessities.

Source: UNDP, 1992

Data for this project is in hard copy format and is not currently available electronically. If you would like further information please contact UCIRI.