

PILLAR 3

Agriculture for Environment

Strategies for Sustainable Coffee

Coffee is a forest crop: it thrives naturally in the shade of a diverse forest ecosystem. Coffee is also a smallholder crop: it is the primary source of revenue for an estimated 25 million farm families who produce coffee on small plots.

Coffee production is important to both the economies and ecologies of the regions in which it is produced. Effective support for coffee-based livelihoods can both foster human development and preserve biodiversity in coffee-farming communities.

Market-based approaches

Farmers can earn premium prices in the rapidly growing “sustainable coffees” segment of the specialty market: certified organic and Fair Trade. These market-based incentives align livelihoods and conservation agendas.

Organic Certification

Brings significant market premiums to farmers and guarantees the consumer that the farmer is:

- using only organic, nonchemical inputs in food production
- not using any genetically modified products
- diversifying crop production
- putting into practice soil and water conservation techniques

Fair Trade Certification

- Guarantees a minimum “fair” price to small farmer cooperatives
- Requires buyers to pay a “social premium” to cooperatives that invest in social, environmental, or economic development initiatives at the local level
- Includes environmental requirements, labor standards, and occupational health and safety requirements

How do we promote sustainable coffee production?

- Technical assistance helps farmers learn improved tree pruning, cherry picking and de-pulping, washing, fermenting and drying of coffee
- Investments in water-efficient wet mills help farmers reduce their water consumption by more than half and also improve primary and secondary grain separation, reducing both labor costs and defects in exportable coffee
- Farm diversification (cocoa, fruit, and honey) creates more sustainable farm systems, promotes coffee quality, and provides alternative income opportunities
- Effective shade management improves coffee quality and creates access to niche markets for “shade-grown” and “bird-friendly” coffees.



- CRS has promoted sustainable coffee agroforestry in Nicaragua since 2002
- Over 1,200 farmers have entered the growing market for “sustainable coffees”
- Farmers sustain biodiverse farm systems
- Farmers increase incomes



Photos: Michelle Frankfurter