

international agro consulting

Coffee Growing Evaluation in Ranquitte, Haiti

Report and Recommendations

March 10 - 19, 2009

Christian Flights International & Eco Caf  Haiti

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Objective of Ranquitte Visit

- Evaluate the potential for coffee production in Ranquitte on behalf of:
Christian Flights International
Eco Café Haiti
- Present and aid in the design of a processing plant
- Visit local producers and growing gardens. Learn about Haiti Coffee Production
- Formulate Strategy towards improvement of local coffee growing
- Present Report of Findings

Summary

Mr. Tom Durant from Eco Cafe Haiti and Christian Flight International invited Dan Kuhn from International Agro Consulting to accompany him and Mr. Douglas Cochrane to Ranquitte, a town in the North Province of Haiti. Tom Durant has been involved for several years with Christian Flights International; an organization operates a school for 1400 Haitian children with a health clinic in Ranquitte.

The needs in Haiti are enormous, for simple things such as outhouse construction or chicken husbandry. The list is endless. Douglas & Gerry Cochrane have provided some funding for a program spearheaded by Tom Durant called Eco Café Haiti, a community based economic development program. Eco Café Haiti employs a group of 25 permanent workers plus 13 summer students who farm a food program for the school and the community. Eco Café Haiti has also been active with terracing participating farmsteads to reduce erosion and flooding. On the economic side Eco Café Haiti is involved in creating a cash economy in Ranquitte by developing coffee crops, coffee processing and sales. In the past year about 10,000 coffee seedlings have been raised and transplanted on participating farms.

The community relations are excellent both by Christian Flights International and Eco Café Haiti. They have benefited the community for the past many years with the school, health clinic, well drilling and now with the coffee development. More can be seen on their website www.christianflights.org and www.ecocafehaiti.org.

The program has advanced to the point of seriously engaging the coffee growing and processing concept with possibly purchasing land and setting up a processing and facility near the town of Ranquitte. 300 farmers have expressed interest in participating in this program.

The purpose of this trip is to evaluate the viability of coffee growing and its potential. The donor community may need to review the suitability of investing considerable amounts of money into this development concept. Several pieces of land were examined for suitability.

As a whole, coffee has a good chance for success. The local coffee “cupped” pleasingly, full bodied with chocolate notes, surprisingly good. There are existing coffee trees dispersed throughout



Tom Durant with some of his Ranquitte friends

the region. The existing coffee is overgrown, tired and needs revitalizing. An agronomist employed by Eco Café Haiti is working with local growers to teach them how to prune, compost, and fertilize their trees.

A coffee growing and processing enterprise is possible and can be accomplished especially because of the groundwork and goodwill instituted by Christian Flight International, Eco Café Haiti, and the willingness of the donor community to finance this program.

The coffee “Haiti bleu” which is the result of an existing cooperative has made a name for itself again and has established a name for Haitian coffee. Interesting to note, that in the 17th century Haiti was the “Pearl of the Antilles and exported over 60% of all coffee imported into Europe. It exported 50% of all sugar imported as well. Haiti has a history of coffee and can revitalize its allure and aroma again with the assistance of the above organizations.

Observations

Haiti is a land by itself. Problems seem part of everyday life. There is no such thing as getting supplies from the local hardware store. There are no hardware stores and a 60 mile trip on a major road can take 6 hours of driving. The most obvious impression is the poverty that exists in the rural areas. People have to grow their own food or go hungry. There is no electricity, sewer or water supply. If it was not for the numerous faith-based missions that operate in Haiti, life for the common people would be close to unbearable.

Other impressions:

- Flying into the inner regions of the country shows the extent of deforestation.
- The water supply is precarious. Wells with hand-pumps drilled by missions supply some of the water. The rest comes from infested creeks that run dry during the dry season.
- The need for simple things is overwhelming.
- Livestock production (which could be very helpful) is practically non-existent due to competition with scarce resources for human consumption
- Many more lacking items

Coffee observations:

- Existing coffee trees are “hungry” and not well tended
- Coffee production is opportunistic (when there are cherries and the price is right it will be harvested)
- Existing coffee is allowed to grow in shaded ravines, probably leftover from earlier better times (as far as coffee price is concerned).
- Trees are tall with production on top of the canopy. People are hesitant to cut or prune because they will cut next year's production.

- Coffee trees are planted or let grow random without spacing or organized access between trees
- Coffee is dispersed among other crops growing under shade trees.
- Coffee cultivation is shrinking due to less revenue as compared with sun grown food crops resulting in elimination of shade trees as well.
- A functional cooperative which has trademarked “Café Haiti Bleu” is exporting good quality coffee from Haiti.
- Coffee is prevalent in small segments throughout the region and points to a past where coffee was an important part of the economy.

Conclusions

- Based on cupping results from the area it seems possible to produce a “Specialty Coffee” that has the ability to gain a specialty status; with higher than world pricing (NYC price).
- The ability of the project to raise funds from an existing donor community makes this development possible.
- The past and present effort by Christian Flight International and Eco Cafee Haiti are critical in community relations. Long standing positive community interaction make this project a possibility.
- Incremental development based on actual growth will help to keep the investment at reasonable levels.
- Revitalizing coffee growing with a managed approach is necessary for growth and sustainability.
- Shortcuts in the production of specialty coffee have to be avoided and all effort have to focus on quality.
- Integrating a roasting facility in the US with targeted marketing towards “faith based” communities would make financial sense.
- There is risk in this project but it appears manageable for the above reasons.