



Cafédirect in action:

Organic Conversion in Mexico: Más Café

Don Toño, 68, sits happily on his front porch, surrounded by grandchildren. He is a founding member of Juan Sabines Gutierrez, a co-operative of 800 small coffee farming families in Chiapas, Mexico, and one of the co-operatives that make up Más Café. And he is part of a pioneering wave of farmers who are again producing organic coffee.

Between 1983 and 1990, the Mexican government distributed chemical fertilizers and pesticides to farmers who for decades had grown coffee naturally, organically. The government assured improved yields and quality for food crops. Adoption was widespread, and short-term yields did increase.

But the lasting effect was much different: deteriorating soil, polluted water, and decreased production.

Hugo Reyes Alvarado, president of Juan Sabines, has seen the changes: *“The yields in this region have halved compared to 15 or 20 years ago. Wildlife that used to live here has disappeared. We have to find change, otherwise in the future we will have to find another job.”*

Don Toño agrees. *“I am convinced that organic production creates a future for us. We need to conserve the land otherwise we won’t be able to produce any coffee.”*

The farmers of Juan Sabines too are aware that organic agriculture creates a means to protect the environment. This ‘new’ way of farming involves proactive soil conservation measures, like working with organic compost, terrace building to avoid erosion, protecting water sources, and planting native species of shade trees.

Hugo explains the challenges of convincing farmers to embrace organic production. *“The problem is that to produce coffee organically, it takes a lot more effort and time, and in the beginning yields aren’t as high as when you apply chemicals. So farmers who already have to fight to survive and pay for basic needs still prefer a higher yield.”*

Knowledge and capacity building are essential in helping farmers understand why using chemicals is damaging in the long run. Through support from Cafédirect and Twin, the co-operative has developed methodologies that are highly practical and less theoretical. This approach is very important for farmers, as many of them have received very little formal education.

