



**Jose Vasquez,
Huerta del Rio**

**Oaxaca, Sierra
Mixteca, Santa Cruz
Tutiahua, Mexico**

Partner since: 2017

Traceable to: 122 Farmers in 1 region (Putla)

Altitude: 1800 - 1950 MASL

Varietals: Typica la Pluma and Bourbon (90%), Caturra and Mundo Novo (less than 10%)

Processing: Home processed; cherries are pulped, dry fermented for 12-18 hours and washed before drying on patio or roof (alongside chilis)

Harvest: December January February

Booking: March April May June

Arrivals: May June July



Oaxacan coffee is grown on small plots spread over a large, diverse range. Well, three ranges

actually. Oaxaca is where the Sierra Madre del Sur and Sierra Mixteca ranges come together to form the Sierra Madre Occidental as it heads north. The town of Putla sits in a valley right at this intersection, right on the border between Oaxaca and the State of Guerrero. The coffee grown along the valley walls is kissed by the Pacific mists every morning, baked in hot sun during the day, and chilled at night – it's perfect coffee climate. Huerta del Rio means 'garden of the river', a name that nods to the many mountain rivers that run down this steep slope in Sierra Mixteca Alta. Rain clouds rise up the mountain in the morning, fed by the Pacific Ocean less than 100km away. By midday they've fallen again, giving coffee farms in the area a short but strong stint of direct heat before fogging up again in the evening.

If you make your way to the mountain pueblo of Santa Cruz Tutiahua (tooti-ah-wha) you will find Jose Vasquez, and his wife Marcelina Mendoza Vasquez, at the center of nearly 130 farming families in the region. This group gets together once every 2-3 months to trade tips, labor, and equipment – they are committed to organic practices, promote composting, the sludge from which is sprayed on to younger trees. This type of cooperation is rarer than you might think, and testament to the personalities of Jose and Marcelina.

This is the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, a place where farms are small (no more than 3 hectares), yield low (300 lbs of parchment per hectare // 2.5 KG cherry per tree). They have a strong tradition of selective picking, but no direct access to customers. In part this is due to geography – to get to these farms you have to drive over what is known as the 'devil's backbone', a very dangerous mountain pass. And part of it is cultural – most farmers in this region speak some form of Mixteca, and rely on families like Jose and Marcelina Vasquez as a connection to their Spanish-speaking countrymen.



Mexico is for coffee lovers. Few origins offer such variety, such competency, and such short flights to the farm. While often overlooked by their neighbors to the north, Mexico is the world's 7th largest coffee producer, the largest exporter of organic coffees, and a fast-growing consumers of specialty coffee.

Seventy percent of Mexico's crop comes from larger estates, concentrated around Veracruz, with the remaining thirty percent coming from 2 million smallholders, spread around the country but mostly in the Southern States of Chiapas and Oaxaca.

This is also where we find most of Mexico's indigenous population, communities who moved higher

and higher up-mountain, onto smaller and smaller plots of land, first to get away from colonial Spain, and later pushed by larger landowners during decades of highly political land reforms. In this way Mexico's agrarian, coffee and Puebla movements are intertwined.

Though coffee arrived into Mexico two centuries earlier, it did not take off until the late 20th century. In the 1970s a farmer friendly government came to power and encouraged smallholder production. Coffee exports skyrocketed nearly ten-fold over the next two decades. However, in the middle of this growth the government had to default on debt, cut back programs, and end a decade of federal support for smallholders. Price, markets and credit dwindled to drips – and on top of that – we got some Roya too. Oh, and did we mention the condition of the peso?

Into this distressed situation we see the rise of the coyote; middle-men who build truckloads of coffee up from 1-5 bag household level. Still today, buyers look for points of aggregation that can cut out middle-men but still give them access to volumes.