



UNECAFE, Lachao Oaxaca, Sierra Sur, Lachao, Mexico

Partner since: 2017

Traceable to: 32 Members

Altitude: 1700 - 1900 MASL

Varietals: Typica la Pluma and
Mundo Novo (less than 10%)

Processing: Home processed;
cherries are pulped, dry
fermented for 24-30 hours and
washed before drying on raised
beds that are either under shade
net, or built under tree shade
(pine trees)

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. If you follow these ranges south of Oaxaca city towards the coast you find a unique climate – soft, pine-filled forested mountains that give way to

steep, craggy coffee fields as you head into the heart of La Pluma. This is the district of Sierra Sur, and home to the coffee that made Mexico famous. La Pluma Hidalgo is a region within Sierra Sur, and the namesake for the La Pluma varietal (a type of typica). Before La Roya hit, this region was filled with buyers. With easy access to buyers and premiums, most farmers did not organize – and those that did had a hard time surviving the crash that came. The result is a mountain full of independants knit together by family relationships. Strong farmers in the region collect from their neighbors, separate tops out for us, and help us to get from 6 bags per family up to truck-load levels. Yet Joaquin Santana bucks this trend, andnd many other conventions, in the face. He is head of UNECAFE – Unidad Ecogica para El Sector Cafe Oaxaquesos. This 48 member group is held together by Joaquin’s will, appeal to the benefits of cooperation, and incessant cell use. While the group only meets a few times a year, Joaquin tours the different stations once a month to drink coffee with members, trade tips and talk shop. He is one of the few Spanish speakers in the group, and one with a phone, a car, and enough space in his house to stage coffee for pickup during harvest. But, aside from his personality, the proof is in the pudding.

The group’s success is apparent – since forming in the early 90s, members have grown to have an average of 5 hectares per person, each hectare of which produces 800-1200 pounds of export grade coffee (3-4 times the average). This is due to aggressive organic practices, constant pruning, and the continual investment in new trees. This is the heart of La Pluma, and there is pride that comes with planting this specific varietal.

All in all we see why they refer to themselves as a toda madre.



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.