

Immigration Law \cong Foodservice

Just Coffee: Coffee and US Immigration Policy

by Becki L. Young

Can coffee help solve the United States' illegal immigration issues? Café Justo (www.justcoffee.org), a coffee growers' cooperative based in Chiapas, Mexico, thinks so.

In the 1990s Mexico's agricultural economy suffered heavily as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) allowed cheap American corn to flood Mexico, undercutting small farmers. At the same time large international coffee conglomerates cut their prices, driving small growers out of business. Mexicans began fleeing north into the United States, in search of better economic oppor-

tunities. According to the Migration Policy Institute (www.migrationinformation.org), the undocumented population from Mexico increased from two million in 1990 to 4.8 million in 2000 and to 5.3 million in 2002.

So how can coffee help?

In 2003, with a \$20,000 micro-loan from Presbyterian border ministry Frontera de Cristo, Café Justo was established. According to its Web site Café Justo is "a grower cooperative based in Mexico, formed to address one of the root causes of labor migration from Mexico to the USA." The company's mission is to deliver the highest quality, organic, environmentally conscious fresh roasted coffee to customers at a price that is fair and just.

Café Justo produces coffee that is not

just "Fair Trade," but "Fair Trade Plus." A February 8, 2007 article in the Tucson Weekly explains the difference: Regular coffee, which comes through channels dominated by large coffee companies, may only fetch 40 to 60 cents per pound. Fair Trade coffee (raw beans) go for \$1.25 to \$1.50 per pound wholesale. Fair Trade Plus (which includes roasting, packing, and selling the coffee) nets \$5-6 per pound.

Because Café Justo earns a sufficient profit for its Fair Trade Plus coffee, it can pay a fair price to its growers and a fair wage to its workers, thus significantly reducing the incentives for economic migration to the United States. In addition to providing training and jobs to the local population, the company's operations have already had a multiplier effect on the resources coming into the community.

Café Justo has amassed substantial support from local church and justice groups on the U.S. – Mexican border, through which it sells much of its product.

The next strategic step in the company's growth is to make the jump to regular retail sales. The coffee has been featured at the Tucson Culinary Festival, and the company is working on a marketing plan to get its coffee into the critical grocery and restaurant markets.

The U.S. retail/ foodservice coffee market represents a huge opportunity for Café Justo and other Fair Trade/ Fair Trade Plus producers; according to www.coffee-research.org: In 1999 there were 108,000,000 coffee consumers in the United States spending an approximated 9.2 billion dollars in the retail sector and \$8.7 billion dollars in the foodservice sector every year. It can be inferred, therefore, that coffee drinkers spend on average \$164.71 per year on coffee.

The National Coffee Association found in 2000 that 54 percent of the adult population of the United States drinks coffee daily. They also reported that 18.12 percent of the coffee drinkers in the United States drink gourmet coffee beverages daily. In addition to the 54 percent who drink coffee everyday, 25 percent of Americans drink coffee occasionally. As Café Justo continues to expand its business, it will increase its ability to address the root problem behind illegal immigration: economic inequality.

The U.S. currently spends billions of dollars each year on border enforcement, with limited success. The human tragedies caused by the current flow of illegal migra-



tion from Mexico to the U.S. are immense – families split, and migrants dying trying to cross the desert.

According to a recent (April 16, 2009) article in the Tucson Weekly: *Just Coffee has taken a small but profound step toward easing immigration tensions in the United States. "It always seemed reasonable to use the coffee-cooperative idea to address migration," Bassett says. "And, in fact, over 70 people from Salvador Urbina who were working in the U.S. in a nonofficial status have returned home. The community has grown—the schools are actually too small now, because the kids don't have to work in the coffee fields anymore. They can go to class instead. They have clean water to drink, and they get to stay in their village."*

Isn't it time to take a closer look at the Café Justo model?

For more information, see www.justcoffee.org; or check out the book *Just Coffee: Caffeine With a Conscience*: "a moving, colorful and refreshingly optimistic primer on how to solve the poverty that drives illegal immigration, one village at a time."



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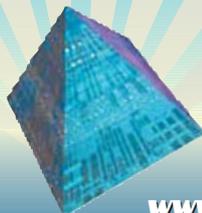
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