

Darrell G. Moen, Ph.D.

Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

SANTIAGO'S STORY: Fair Trade Coffee

Source: [Fair Trade @TransFair USA](#)

(2000: 15 minutes)

Transcribed by: Darrell Moen

Overview

Paul Rice (Executive Director, Transfair USA): Transfair USA is the leading force in fair trade licensing in the United States today. By fair trade licensing, we mean Transfair is monitoring and certifying companies that practice according to fair trade criteria. Currently, we're focused on coffee. There are more than 500,000 [sic] small coffee farmers worldwide in Latin America, Asia, and Africa who are selling to the fair trade market and gaining a fair price for their product as a result.

The essence of fair trade is helping those farmers and their families to get a decent price for what they produce, to get a decent price for the excellent coffee they sell to us in the United States. By allowing them to get a decent price, we really help them to help themselves to improve their incomes and to make small but very important gains in their living standards. I've had a chance to work with many fair trade coffee farmers, including one you're about to meet named Santiago Riviera.

Somoto, Nicaragua

Santiago Riviera: There have been real changes. Before, we were very poor and often we just ate tortillas with salt. Now, we always have beans and rice. This has been a great achievement for us. We live from what we grow on this farm. We can't grow a lot of grain here, so coffee is our only source of income to buy clothes and shoes for the children as well as our food. And this helps us.

Santiago's wife: We didn't have our own land. My mother was all alone. We had to buy everything. We couldn't afford to grow anything. I didn't have a chance to study. My mother was very poor and had seven daughters. One of my sisters studied all the way to

sixth grade. I was only able to study up to second grade, but I didn't learn that much because I was always getting sick when I was little.

Santiago Riviera: Before, we used to sell our coffee very cheaply. Now, we sell our coffee to PRODECOOP, our own export company. We see a great difference between the low price we got before and the good price we get now from PRODECOOP.

We didn't used to have mules on the farm, but a few years ago, when we started to sell at a good price through the fair trade market, we started to change things. We used to carry the sacks of coffee down the hills on our backs; it's really hard work. Now, we've got mules and the mules bring the coffee down.

One always wants the best for one's kids, but it's very difficult because we don't really have the resources. Every father wants his kids to have good clothes and a good roof over their heads; everything. Of course, you need a lot of money for all that. But I'm hopeful.

Santiago's oldest daughter: My name is Yolanda Francesca Riviera. I am 16 years old. I'm not studying because we really don't have the means for me to study. That's why I didn't keep studying; that's why I'm working here at home in the kitchen. I would like to continue studying, I'd like to study, I'd like to read.

Santiago Riviera: Science is a great thing. In the old days, we used to pulp our coffee by hand. You would really have to work hard. Now, we have a gasoline motor and in just a few minutes we can pulp 100 cans of coffee. So, we can really see a big change in the farm and the way we work.

There's a saying, "You've got to think about tomorrow." I think about ways to continue developing the cooperative in order to benefit the family. Plant more coffee, plant more beans, participate more in the cooperative, get better organized.

Santiago's wife: Before, life was really hard. We had to work really hard just to survive. Now, things have changed; we feel happy now with this farm. With the fair price we get for our coffee, things have changed a lot.

Santiago Riviera: We feel really proud of our coffee. We deliver really good coffee to PRODECOOP; coffee of the highest quality. All our coffee is grown under the shade and it's all organically grown. I feel proud because when the workers receive our coffee at the dry mill, they always say, "Santiago brings in a great bag of coffee." The coffee [you see] here is from the highest part of the farm. It is a larger bean and of a higher quality.

Summary

Paul Rice (Executive Director, Transfair USA): I think that one of the most important gains from fair trade is the fact that Santiago and his community have now been able to get organized; they've been able to organize their cooperative; they've been able to organize their own export company, PRODECOOP. They've taken control of something which historically only middlemen were able to do; they've taken control of their own marketing. And this is largely due to the help that fair trade has given them.

One of the things that I find so impressive about fair trade is that it's not based on charity; fair trade is not a hand out. It's, on the contrary, an exchange. Small farmers give us excellent coffee and we pay them, in turn, a fair price for their product. Fair trade is a consumer movement, a market, and a cutting edge concept for change. It's some of the best coffee in the world, at a price that's fair, to both farmers and consumers.

Unfortunately, Santiago and his cooperative can't sell all of their coffee at fair trade prices. The fair trade market simply isn't big enough yet. We're really only just getting started with fair trade coffee in the United States; we have a long way to go. I'd like to invite you to help us with that. I'd like to invite you to buy fair trade coffee wherever you can find it, and to help support the fair trade movement. When you see our fair trade label on a bag of coffee at the store, you know it's great coffee and that the farmer got a fair deal. So please, look for the label.