**F8CF - Interview farmer #8 - coffee farmer large Armenia - 7-7-2022**

**You can start with a short introduction.**

About the crop?

**Yes, first personal, and then about that.**

My name is [name]. We are producers of *technified* coffee. We do the sowing, development, and production, and the entire process of drying, processing, and delivery. We deliver the coffee to cooperatives, and we do good pest management, and we are friendly to the environment. Do not apply... There are many bees, and many animals that favor us for pest control, so we try to protect them in the applications of fungicides and insecticides to control the borer pest (coffee berry borer / coffee borer beetle).

**So, you have said that you have 50 blocks.**

In this land, fifty blocks, yes.

**With 4,000...**

With 4,125 plants, I think they are per hectare, per block. Here we work based on blocks, and we have two varieties that are predominant in the area.

**Which varieties are they?**

They are the *Castillo* variety, and a very small part of *Catimor*, which have a very good production, which are the ones that give us a very good rate, of which we deliver coffee in futures, and all the coffee is cup-tested.

**Have you had this property for 7 or 8 years?**

Yes, the first one we planted is eight years old, and we have different ages there. In various ages, we have coffee.

**Can you tell a little more about your background and how you learned this job in the field?**

We have grown up in the countryside. We, from a very young age… We were born, and my father had properties and in which... Well, I have a high school degree, and I did property administration, so, well, I was a technologist in administration, and we have lived the entire property... All our lives, we have lived on agriculture. All our lives we have worked with coffee, with bananas, with citrus fruits, and with cattle. We have had the experience of working on it from a very young age. Everything at once.

**Did your parents have...?**

Yes, and all the grandparents, and everything. So, we insist a lot on the descendants because I have a girl, and she is also fascinated by this. That's where we are.

**I understood that before, everything used to be banana.**

Yes, we had bananas, but we got a bacterium called *moko*, and it hit us hard, it killed our crops. So, we had to start technifying the coffee. Remove the shaded ones because we see that the production is greater where there is no shade, and the fungi reproduce less, which is the coffee leaf rust, and it is the pink disease in the branches. Thus, the pink disease produces fungi, and all varieties get rust. That, widespread. It is said that they are not more resistant, but they are very few.

**Why coffee?**

Because we had two alternatives, either cattle or coffee. A property like this, with cattle, is handled by two people. And in coffee, in harvest, it has eighty, fifty, one hundred workers. There is more employment for people in the area.

**Was that the reason?**

And cost and benefit. Right now, because of the prices. We sold coffee at a loss of 30,000 pesos, and now there is a bonanza that is at a very good price.

**What is the price more or less?**

Now? Last week I sold 245,000 pesos an *arroba*. Dry parchment coffee.

**And is it a price...?**

Very good because expenses are already covered, and the supplies are very costly. A product for application to the soil, in 40 days, it raised more than 100,000 pesos. Hence, that was the hard part.

**How many supplies do you use? How many fertilizers?**

No. We work all the products. Currently, we have been working with a company for five years, with Yara. Everything with Yara at this moment, for fertilizers. For borer controls, we use another product, and for rust and pink disease, another product. There are around three basic products. We don't use anything else. And organic matter. We use that a lot because we get too much. So, we try to give it back to the coffee plantations.

**Are you a member of an association, cooperative?**

In cooperatives to deliver coffee. We have a futures contract. When coffee was very cheap, a futures contract was made. Now, as the price rose so much, negotiations had to be made to be able to deliver it not all at once because too much money is lost. It does not recover the investment.

**Therefore, you sell the coffee to the cooperative, and the cooperative belongs to the Federation.**

No, cooperative of coffee growers. The Departments have cooperatives of coffee growers. The Federation is already at the national level.

**Yes, but does the cooperative belong to the Federation?**

Yes, well, I didn't know how to explain it to you, but they work together. All the businesses, they buy their coffee, they deliver the coffee to cooperatives for futures, for everything.

**How does the cooperative work? With assemblies?**

Yes, they have meeting, they have the union, and they have points of purchase in all the municipalities, in which they receive the coffee and deliver it, either for themselves, or other companies to process it, also for the federation.

**Do you participate in these assemblies?**

No. No, they hold annual assemblies and appoint some representatives, which are the ones who make decisions. Likewise, one has the power to sell the coffee to other individuals who do not have a cooperative. If a private person comes and offers me more money for the coffee, I sell it to a private person. It is not mandatory to sell it to the cooperative or the Federation.

**Is it then for commercial reasons? To sell your product.**

Yes, but one plays with that, with prices.

**How does this futures contracts work?**

That was something that they invented, in which they have taken advantage from us up to... Why? Because it made contracts. For example, we have a contract for 94,000 pesos, and we are fulfilling it. We had to do it all at once, but we had to do it in the long term for price reasons since we cannot sell coffee to them at 94,000 pesos knowing that it is at 250,000 pesos.

**So, do you have a contract that states that you will sell it next year?**

Yes, based on years, based on deliveries. We have to make deliveries. So, if an agreement was made with them to deliver so much each semester, for instance, 6,000 - 12,000 kilos, maybe you deliver coffee, you bring coffee, and you give them 500, 1,000 kilos, until you complete the entire delivery.

**What do you consider the largest challenges in the sector right now for producers? A challenge in this sector.**

No. The challenge is, at this moment, it is the inputs because if the price of coffee falls, practically all the coffee growers in Colombia go bankrupt as the inputs are not going to go down at once. Since the coffee goes down, they cannot pay at once. There might be a crisis, but widespread throughout the country. That, currently, the most important thing that can happen in coffee is that, to bankrupt the country's coffee growers again. It already happened once, here in Colombia.

**Thus, the supplies...**

The supplies are very expensive. Awesome.

**What is the price now? What costs do they have?**

They are very high, they are high. To produce an *arroba* of coffee, it used to cost 65,000 – 70,000. Now, it can cost 120,000 – 130,000 pesos to produce an *arroba* of coffee. Dry parchment coffee.

**And the price you get is like 200,000?**

230,000. It also depends on the price, the quality of coffee. On how it is drilled, how much defective coffee is there, on bad grains because the grain has to be perfect, there cannot be non-uniform grains, burned, or oval, or crushed. Nothing. The grains have to be perfect. And they evaluate it. On that, they take the average, so they know how much the coffee can be.

**You have said that at harvest time there can be 80, maybe even 100 workers. Do you have fixed contracts?**

No. Everything is up-to-date.

**Up to date?**

Yes, up to date. If a person does something bad, he goes out today, and they collect from Monday to Friday, and the one who collected well can come the other week. The one who does not, leaves.

**Do you pay by quantity of harvest?**

Yes. All per kilo.

**Are they people who come from this region?**

From the region, yes, from other Departments, but usually, they are from this area. There are good employees because there are still good people. Nationals have priority here, but not Venezuelans, who are now in the region. But we here have priority in the people of the region.

**Do they also live here on the property?**

No. They all come from outside. They come every morning, and they leave in the afternoon.

**Is it easy to find them?**

Sometimes it is hard. It seems very difficult to get so many people. It is not easy to get so many people. And that it is not one, there are four lands, and there are also eighty there, and in the other there are one hundred.

**Thus, what you have in total, is it on different lands?**

Here are four lands in coffee. Here, right away there is another, further up there is another, and there in front of the town there is another land that we are sowing at this moment. It's a new coffee, small.

**Do they take everything here for processing?**

Yes, this is the collection center for the processing of coffee.

**And how do you transport it?**

In the car, and another truck comes.

**What distance, more or less?**

No, well... The one right away is one kilometer away, the other is two, and the other one is also about a kilometer away. They are so close together.

**They are close, yes. Are most of the workers men?**

Women as well. Lots of women.

**Do they do special tasks, or do they do the same as men?**

No. Just harvest.

**What do you do now with the by-products? We have noticed that you have such a quantity...**

The coffee cherry, well, for the soil, and there are also people who come from the region to apply it to banana trees. So, they are sold. And the husk is already brought from the Federation to thresh the coffee. One buys it again and brings it to carry out the processing of drying the coffee.

**Do they bring it here?**

Yes, because they have nothing to do with it. They thresh the coffee, gigantic […], and sell it. They sell it to them.

**And do you use it?**

For drying coffee. The husk of the almond, of the parchment. The husk of the parchment is what is used for drying the coffee, and what is the husk, the pulp, that already goes to composting.

**Why do you do it this way, as compost?**

Because it is to be able to apply something to compost it, fertilizer. Likewise, you can water it directly on the soil, you can water it, but there is more danger of burning the plants because it heats up, it gets very hot.

**What are the challenges in terms of sustainability in the sector?**

Everything is about prices. Prices. If it goes down, we are out. If it is sustained... And increasing production is already difficult in *technified* coffee. It is hard. When one is below, yes, the challenge is to produce more, reach more, but we are good at production.

***Technified* coffee, what does that mean?**

The technology refers to sowing, having it well in terms of nutrition, and in pest and disease control. If you have that... As you saw at the entrance, the man has a little property there, which is full of stubble and stuff, he does not apply fertilizers or anything, so he does not progress.

**Therefore, if you don’t have that amount, it's not profitable.**

No, it is not profitable.

**What are the challenges in the environmental issue?**

Taking care of all the beneficial ones, bees, ladybugs, all the beetles that are beneficial for the coffee plantations that control pests. Sometimes, there are people who release some wasps that control, and fungi that control the borer, but it is very mild. It needs more power, that's why there are specialized insecticides to control the borer.

**So, here is the process from sowing to parchment coffee?**

In parchment

**Do you sell it?**

Yes, that’s it.

**We have heard that there are many projects to roast coffee and sell that...**

I have done it, but from batches that we have, but for our own consumption. In treacle... I produce a lot of coffee treacle for us.

**For consume?**

Yes, for our homes.

**But not...?**

We don't sell treacle, no. That trade is very saturated. Very saturated. Only for others.

**Do you have such certifications? Like best practice or something.**

Those certifications are for small farmers. For very small farmers. I took all the courses and everything and, no, it doesn't work for UTZ, for RainForest, no... In terms of volume, no. It is hard. It is not difficult, but no, that's for small farmers because you can earn 3,000 – 4,000 pesos, but one, in a volume of these, no. I tried when I took courses, I attended to all that, I took all the courses, no. We realized that it was not for the volume of coffee that we have. Then, for a small farmer.

**I would like to show you something we are working on. The idea is this concept, the BioHub, a cluster in which there are different communities that can produce biomass, such as agricultural waste, for example, and that can be transported to a biorefinery, where the biomass can be converted into four different products, first it is a biocrude, which finally can be used...**

I think that this can be done with the pulp because it produces too much energy due to the amount of sugar. Coffee mucilage is excessive, they use it for many things.

**Yes, and well, if this biocrude is like that, it can be converted into biofuels, but also into bioplastics.**

It has too much fiber.

**And what we want to understand in this study is whether it is possible to create a value chain from this waste, and how it can be organized so that it is beneficial for that region. I would like to ask you if there is the possibility of selling or transporting the pulp.**

Yes, that becomes a problem. It becomes trouble in the sense that, in a year, one takes out 80 dumper trucks from there, one does not know what to do with them, where to put them because one cannot saturate the soil with it either because it burns the plants. So, where there are big productions, it would be nice that you buy it from them, and it would be excellent.

**Really? Would you be interested in that?**

Of course. Likewise, a company was interested in that, but they didn't buy, only a very small amount. And at the end, they already said that it was not about buying, but donating it, and I told him yes, and it didn't work for them either. I didn't know what it was for. That was what the cooperatives were doing, but in the end, they didn't come up with anything.

**Under what conditions would you be willing?**

Oh, no, it all depends on the economic factor, and how much... One cannot do it with a fixed contract because nobody knows how much the production is due to the weather. If there is too much rain, the blooms are suddenly lost, and the production decreases. So, I can't say “I'm going to deliver 100 dumper trucks”, if only 50 come out. Thus, there, one can deliver what is being produced.

**Yes, so long-term contracts are...?**

No, not contracts. You can't make a contract because no. And if one renews the coffee plantations, the production drops, then one cannot have a contract that you are not going to deliver well later because the coffee plantations are like that. And the next year there may be 100, or 150, or 200. Therefore, there is no fixed part in that. For example, these two months, which are of minimum harvest, there are hardly any coffee cherries, but after a month it begins to be full of that, to be full of coffee cherries.

**Now, how is that pulp transported?**

Mainly in dump trucks because they are leachates that they release and if you throw it in the car, it rots, destroys it, oxidizes it too much. Instead, the dump truck loads it up and does so. Thus, there is not that... But it is a liquid, it is strong. The leachate is strong, rather strong, and produces quite a bit of heat. It is hot that, the steam is high.

**Hence, is it hard to work with that?**

It is because of the amount of sugars it has. It's just that there's too much, and there's all the potassium, all the fertilizers, they are practically remaining in all those liquids and stuff.

**Then, now do you use it as compost?**

One can still compost it with bacteria, with EM, with Bacton. That is applied, and you have to carry out some palletization processes, and cover them, and turn it into compost to apply it to the plants, or take it for vegetables, for bananas, for something else, use it in other things, but it's already an step more, yes, and it's something else because it requires time, people, another infrastructure.

**Why do you think it's a problem when there is an opportunity to sell your pulp? Then you don't have compost?**

Yes, then compost is no longer made, a person would remove it and bye. I would put it in a processing plant, I don't know.

**That is not a problem?**

It's not a problem, no.

**For you, what benefits can this system generate? What do you want it to generate?**

There is a lot of benefit, yes. Well, if one had someone to sell it to, then it would be another economic benefit. Have another added value. Sure, yes, it is something else. But a lot of work to do something else. Yes, sure, yes. Small farmers do it easier because they make a small drawer/crate, they do everything there and that's it. However, in one of these volumes you have to create an infrastructure, warehouses, drawers, you have to do something much bigger.

**So, what are the challenges in that?**

No, it is another challenge. That would be another challenge. It's like setting up another company, another job. No, we already did that, and we quit. We did it for chicken manure, with the leftovers from the broiler chicken sheds. And we gave up. Also, difficult.

**Really?**

Yes, because handling it becomes very difficult.

**So, the changes are...?**

Yes, it's time to make changes because if one stays in one thing, no. And if you see that there is a problem, and you are going to continue it like this by force, then stubborn, but no.

**What obstacles do you see to implement something like this?**

Workforce.

**Why?**

Because you have to... Looking for a specialized company is expensive, and not specialized, they make too many mistakes, and mistakes are paid with money, and the money belongs to the company. And when you work so that everything goes well, and a person who does not have the resources, or the training, or anything like that makes a mistake, and even if they have it, they make a mistake, the one who pays is me.

**Therefore, the problem is more like worker training?**

Yes. Here in Colombia, we have a problem that is that in the countryside, there is too much illiteracy, there is ignorance of things that can be good, and people go for money. Not because I learn, no, it's for money. Everyone looks for money, to see how it can be earned, to see how it can be... So, the one who invests is held back a lot by getting more hands on it, making prices higher. There is no such culture here, and with people from the countryside it is difficult. It is very difficult. You snooze, you lose. And you see it there.

**Do you see that feasible?**

Regarding the pulp? I have insisted a lot to the INA, that all that of industrial engineering, why don't they do something to implement with something that can process that pulp. Because if there were machinery, if there weren't so much labor, it would work.

**We also wanted to understand how the different actors who have a role in the sector now, and who may also have a role in a new value chain. We want to understand what their position is in terms of power and interest are. Here we have a graph with all the different actors, and position in power, whether it's high or low, and whether their interest is high or low. So, here are the actors that we now think of as having high power, and high interest, here high interest, but low power, here high power, but low interest, and here, well, everything low. I would like to ask you how you see this picture and also, the position of the different actors, from your perspective.**

Well, everything can be achieved, but what happens is what I tell you, if it is not technified, if it is not with industry reducing the workforce, no one can reach an agreement on this. It cannot be achieved because one fails, and a mistake is worth money. Because here everything is expensive, too expensive, iron is expensive, to build a warehouse, to do all this. Thus, if you make a very large infrastructure for this, you lose it.

**How do you see, for example, the position of coffee producers? Here we have put as high interest and power, well, as medium power. Or low? How do you see this?**

Yes, no, it's low. Low is the interest not only from us, but it is also low if it is not with industry. Look at the silo. If we didn't have the silo, we would be... and already with the silo we grew more.

**So, what is necessary? Which industry? Should we have a larger scale?**

Yes, larger scale because if you start doing that in a small way, it doesn't work. It doesn't produce. If it were a company here, that they set it up, and could collect all the pulp from the region, and start processing it to remove the sugar, to produce... I don't know what they will produce, ferments, to produce alcohol, to... they can do, but setting it up as such on a land is difficult because creating an infrastructure to deliver a liquid to you and for you to process it, and for me to go, and what do I do with it? So usually, we all take care of that. One says: "Yes, I'm going to get involved, of course", but it is preferable to get involved to deliver it and that someone else processes, does everything than to do it yourself.

**Therefore, is it a prerequisite for that?**

Yes, to be able to get into that because, one loses. One loses the entire investment.

**For example, the position of the governments, national, regional government, how is their relationship?**

At this time, it is not known, it is not known because of politics. We come from very corrupt people, and we end up with even more corrupt people. There is a tension in the area right now because we don't know what is going to happen.

**Because of the new president?**

Correct. If one invests more, or we stop investing... So now, it is not possible. No one can predict what will happen. And it is not now this year, nor the other, it is the last two years, which is the maximum because we have the example of Venezuela, of everything that is happening in South America, Brazil, Argentina... And now, currently, United States, that everything is out of control in the United States; for meat, gasoline, supplies... Everything. And we don't know if we are going there or where we are going. Right now, it is hard.

**How does this affect you?**

To all. To them, to all. They themselves ask you what is going to happen because right now, we have minimal employees, and they don't know what is going to happen. Of course, if we have to go through the same as Venezuela, we are screwed. We are screwed.

**Now do you receive any help or support from the government?**

No. There is nothing there. They can say yes. At this time, they have mess it up a lot by giving a subsidy to many people so that they do not work. Those subsidies that they are giving, the people... whoever claims it doesn't come to work, he stays at home, until his money runs out. He comes, works for a week, while he comes back and gets the other subsidy.

**How do you see the position of the Coffee Federation?**

I have not agreed with them because once it happened to us that, because of them, the crisis was brutal; loss of land, loss of housing, loss of everything.

**How was it? Can you explain it?**

That was when Gaviria was there, and Jorge Cárdenas, director of the Federation. They… We, the coffee growers of Colombia, broke. So, it has been a very long process to regain confidence, and this happens to us.

**And what happened?**

They... The coffee was going up, and everything. When they were in government, all the coffee growers were bankrupt. All credits. A credit of 20 million became 200. That was it. And then most of the people, it happened to us firsthand, having to sell all the properties, sell everything, to pay for houses, everything, because everyone was to be seized. All the big ones filled up their pockets, and they were part of the big ones because they had all the economic power, and they seized more than half of the population.

**Hence, you are not very confident…**

No, the truth is that no because if the same thing happens to us again… It is already very hard because there are already many people working outside the Federation, that is an advantage, that many people, outside the Federation, are selling coffee, marketing coffee, processing coffee. It is no longer just the Federation. Before it was just them.

**Are there more options now?**

There is more option, but we don't know what will happen to the government, and so that's where we end up. Until now, we have August for this man to position himself, and then to wait. He is not so ignorant because he has companies and all that, but...

**And how does it affect then? Does anybody make investments?**

All investment is half stopped. People are investing, but gently. No one is investing big, as they used to do. Colombia was one of the countries that was most, in South America, in all this part of the continent, it was upwards, and since the day of the election everything is at a minimum.

**Let's wait...**

Yes, of course, many people begin to withdraw capital from the country and all that, so we agree that coffee is lost, this is lost, the coffee plantations are lost, plants, they do not produce. Everything comes there.

**Do you have dreams? Are there things you would like to accomplish?**

Of course, like everyone, we want more. We all want more.

**More what?**

Of everything. One lives well, works, travels, knows. A crisis like that happens, and everything ends. The dream of having a house, for the other to have a motorcycle, for the other to have a car, for the other to dress better, for the other such... So, all that. That is happening to all of us. The employees of the services, those of the industries. Imagine that industries close, what will people do? Going home, and there is no bed for so many people. And we have half a country here, from Venezuela. That's another problem; in the workshops, in the bakeries, in the restaurants, in everything. One is Colombian, the other is Venezuelan.

**And do you live here on the property?**

No, we live in Armenia.

**Do you come here?**

Yes, I come every day. There are many properties, I take the cattle out, I buy citrus... We have more.

**Therefore, you are not fully dependent on coffee for your livelihood?**

No.

**So, do you have citrus, livestock...?**

Citrus, livestock, and coffee. And pulp.

**And what are the residues? For example, do citrus produce waste?**

No. They take everything.

**And the cattle?**

Neither. They take everything. One has to come to town.

**So, the pulp is the main one.**

Pulp. In coffee, it is the pulp. The pulp is the only residue left. The pulp and the mucilage.

**What does it do with the mucilage?**

It leaves with the coffee, with the pulp. It stays mixed with the pulp. Maybe there is a company that collects that because it collects from several people, and with that, they produce fertilizers, but no more.

**Well, thank you very much. Those were my questions. I don't know if there is anything you would like to say more.**

We even come to politics. Yes, it is an uncertainty. We are all affected.

**And is it always like this with a change of president, or is it worse now?**

No. It hadn't happened to us.

**Because he is the first president of...**

From the left-wing. Yes... I said that there could be a left-wing president here, but that he would not have been a graffiti artist, or a kidnapper, or all the atrocities that this man did. A person on the left who had had that would have ended up with everything. That this has happened in other countries, that people from the left have risen, but that they have never had the atrocities of this man. Thus, that's the uncertainty. Well, done.

**Thanks.**