



**USAID**  
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**COLOMBIA**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Promoting Peace Amid Profits

### Farmers obtain organic certification, opening fields to new markets



Photo: Mikail Hook

Juan Avendaño is now growing lucrative organic coffee for export on land that was once used to grow coca.

***“Before, when we were producing coca, it was impossible to make money and not have problems with the illegal groups. Now ... it’s possible for us to make good money and plan for the future - but in peace,” said coffee farmer Juan Avendaño.***

Juan Avendaño is a small coffee producer on northern Colombia’s Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the world’s largest seaside mountain, and a pilot area for the Government of Colombia’s Family Forest Wardens program, which aids small farmers previously involved in illicit crop production to gain access to wider markets at home and abroad for legal products that they agree to grow.

In the Sierra, the program has focused primarily on improving product quality and introducing environmentally responsible organic production of coffee and cacao (the plant used to make chocolate). With USAID help, Juan, who has long been interested in organic production, became the first coffee grower on the Sierra to be certified in organic production, the culmination of a four year process.

Juan said, “At first I doubted the usefulness of all the training sessions, but I don’t anymore. I have 2.5 hectares (6 acres) of coffee. Before I was taught the composting and pest management techniques, I could only harvest 4,000 kilos (8,800 pounds) of coffee a year from my plants. Now, I can get over 10,000 kilos (22,000 pounds) from the same area, not to mention that I can sell them in new markets where they pay me more than triple the normal price.”

With support from USAID and the Colombian Coffee Federation, they have developed a new brand of organic coffee, Café Tima, and have forged marketing linkages with national and international buyers. With the Fair Trade label, they are now selling their coffee to international buyers in the United States.

Reflecting on these changes, Juan said, “Before, when we were producing coca, it was impossible to make money and not have problems with the illegal groups. Now ... it’s possible for us to make good money and plan for the future - but in peace, because the illegal groups aren’t interested in organic crops.”