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Sustainability work by Gold Mountain Coffee Growers

Let's face it, most farming in the world does not tread lightly on watersheds and ecosystems. Gold Mountain Coffee Growers in Nicaragua is taking actions to grow coffee in as sustainable a way as possible—and for those actions they were rewarded the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe's Excellence Award for Sustainability. Here's some of what they're doing:

- **Rainforest:** They bought a rainforest just to protect it! Seriously! With no direct economic benefit to themselves. They're not growing any coffee there, and they patrol the rainforest with security guards to prevent deforestation, at their own expense. This rainforest has natural springs and streams that supply various communities below with water. It contains natural pollinators and the cool breeze from the forest helps keep the coffee next door cooler, acting as a natural air conditioner. This helps lengthen the maturation cycle of coffee beans, giving them more time to absorb natural sugars and organic material—which results in more complex and higher coffee cupping scores (AKA great taste).
- **Volcanic filters:** Gold Mountain Coffee Growers' farm, Finca Idealista, built volcanic filters to clean water after it is used to wash coffee, before it returns to the watershed. Water used to wash coffee goes through filter after filter, through rocks and sand from a volcano, followed by an oxidation area where naturally-occurring enzymes eat any organic material left in the water.
- **Water recycling system:** Gold Mountain Coffee Growers' farm, Finca Idealista, built enormous water tanks to catch clean rainwater to be used to wash coffee (instead of taking it from a spring-fed mountain stream). A second tank catches coffee washing wastewater to use it a second or even third time for the purpose of moving coffee pulp into their coffee cherry composting area.
- **Chickens!** Yes, you heard right. Gold Mountain Coffee Growers' farm has a chicken house above its compost area so that the chickens' droppings infuse the compost with nitrogen. This natural fertilizer is then used to keep the soil rich and thereby requires using less petroleum-based fertilizer on the farm. That's a good thing for preventing carbon release in the world and also for preventing unnatural fertilizer runoff into the local watershed.

- **Chicken dropping trips:** At least once a year we make a trip to the capital to bring about 8,400 pounds of composted chicken droppings to our farm to naturally add nitrogen to the soil. We're hoping it will help improve the soil and boost production.
- **Machetes, not herbicides:** Gold Mountain Coffee Growers' farm, Finca Idealista, uses machetes instead of herbicides to control weeds on the farm. Heard about glyphosate recently in the news? Using machetes instead of glyphosate-based weed killers means more sustainable coffee and also keeps the soil rich with living organisms while preventing chemical runoff into the watershed.
- **Coffee borer beetle:** Coffee borer beetle can eat coffee only because of a bacteria in its stomach that processes caffeine for it. Gold Mountain Coffee Growers uses a mushroom diluted in water and sprayed on coffee trees to attack that bacteria, without which the borer beetle cannot survive. They also use traps made with soda bottles to capture the beetles.
- **Access to credit:** In Nicaragua, saying credit is hard to come by for coffee farmers is an understatement. Many farmers' only option is loan sharks. Gold Mountain Coffee Growers brings farmers in its group zero or low-interest loans to finance their crops each year and has even assisted farmers in buying more land to expand their farms.
- **Computer classes for girls:** GMCG offers girls from coffee communities free computing classes so that they can have life skills, whether those skills be used for their families' farms or to pursue their education and career further. The classes are for girls to try to change a male-dominated society.