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Cooperative Spotlight: Coopedota R.L.

Posted on [August 28, 2011](#) by [Rayna](#)

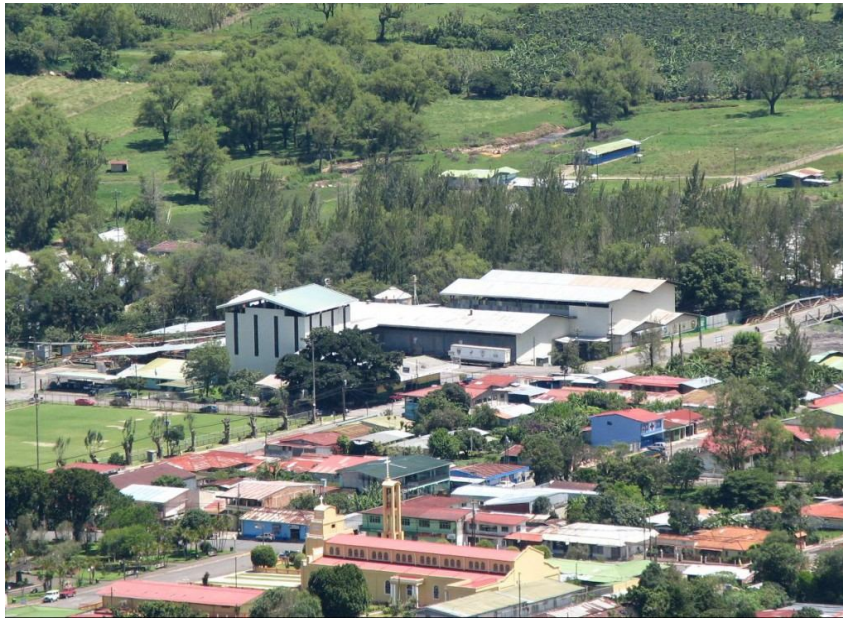


Image courtesy of [coopedota.com](#)

This blog post is a spotlight on a contemporary example of one large and hugely successful worker's cooperative hailing from Costa Rica's Dota valley. Coopedota is a great model for the communal developments that can arise from a spirit of mutuality and the desire for autonomy. Read on for a glimpse of an inspiring and charming community that knows how to reward the genuine hard work of its constituent members!

History



The Cooperative de Caficultores de Dota R.L. started out in 1960 by 96 coffee producers with an initial capital of 116,000.00 CRC (roughly equal to 230.00 USD) and an initial output of 3,900 fanegas (a spanish unit of volume, usually of dry goods). Today the coffee coop has about 800 members and produces something like 65,000 fanegas in a time span of three harvests. That's progress, and unlike the progress of many coffee farming operations, this success belongs to and is owned by every coffee cultivator in the coop who works for it.

Before the inception of Coopedota R.L., the valley's coffee producers had two crippling problems. One, they had no experience in agronomics (the economic ins and outs of agriculturally produced

goods) and two, they did not have easy access to the facilities they needed to process their own harvests. Indeed, the closest wet mill was located a long way from the coffee farm. For this reason, the original coffee producers in the region sold their harvests to expensive middlemen who milked and absorbed the immense profits to be made by such an international delicacy as regional-specific coffee beans.

Today the Dota region specializes in the production of fine, world-class coffee. Production and exporting of excellent coffee is their sole economic pursuit, and they're not doing too poorly, either. Coffee production is not only the main source of income for well established farmers and the region at large, it is also their culture. The cooperative ethos in the Dota Valley makes for a rich and engaging social atmosphere of communal assistance and support.

Coopedota today

Unlike the precepts of free market capitalism, where profit is maximized and anything subtracting from that expansion is deemed an erroneous expenditure, the politics of Coopedota R.L. are based on cooperative principles.

These principles revolve around the concept that the region should be maintained and manicured with the best interest of it's coffee producers in mind. All activities related to the production, harvesting and industrialization of coffee should be developed so as to obtain better services and benefits for the members of Coopedota. The coop produces, manufactures and purchases the raw materials it's members need to produce coffee (no extraneous middlemen!). They propel the development of any program or activity aimed at meeting the needs of it's members, irrespective of the profit motive, in order to provide them services and facilities. My favorite principle of the company/cultural hub, verbatim: "Promote the spirit of mutual help among its partners."

Some of these principles manifest themselves as policies for social and environmental progress. Unimaginable to me as an American with two part-time jobs and hence no affordable option for healthcare, the workers and owners of Coopedota are offered such assistance as information training and health insurance that covers everything from financial aid for accidental deaths to orthopedic care.



A man employed as a coffee cherry picker in the Dota region earns wages commensurate with the intense task of turning a raw natural material into the finely-crafted coffee beans that are well-reputed worldwide.

Carbon-neutral coffee: an environmental precedent

Because the coop's operation is suited to the interests of the people who make their living in the region, it condones only environmentally sustainable practices in the cultivation and processing of coffee plants. Make no mistake about it: practices that support the integrity and sustenance of our natural environment have a *modus operandi* of improving the conditions of living for the people who live on and make their living off of the land. Such environmentally-sound standards as the use of recycled water, banned agrochemicals and an extremely-centralized area of production have literally neutralized the coop's carbon footprint. The greenhouse gases that are emitted in the farming, harvesting, and processing of Coopedota's main and only export are offset by their standards and practices to such an extent that they result in zero net emission.

The delectable intersection of social, environmental and economic principles in this ultra-clean operation was summed up beautifully by Coopedota's Sustainability Manager, Hortensia Solis: "Climate-smart coffee is about our bottom line and our continued existence. The market for low carbon products will grow as consumer's worry more about climate change. We want to capture the value for sustainable purchases and pass it on to our farmers, many of whom have been affected by climate events." So there you have it. Our hats are off to a cooperative movement that both encapsulates and reflects the communal culture of the once-small farmers and coffee producers who created it in the first place.

In response to the difficult economic times in which we find ourselves, Co-soap hopes that you will continue to support [small, locally-produced products](#). We all need to get clean, and we are here to offer you an even cleaner way to do so. The bottom line of our own existence as a healthy, thriving community is cooperation amongst all, the advantaged as well as the disadvantaged that constitute our home. The demand for socially and environmentally conscious products will hopefully continue to rise as conscientious consumers realize the powerful reality that can result from a simple dream like being able to feed, clothe and care for the individuals that comprise our communities (An absurdity, right?).

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