

## COLOMBIA

### ACDI/VOCA Helps Colombian Coffee Growers Enter into Specialty Coffee Markets

About two hours outside of La Plata, in the southern Colombian department of Huila, down a treacherously curvy dirt track riddled with potholes, lies Montserrate, a charming pueblo perched dramatically on the spine of a ridge.

This isolated village changed in November of 2005 because two volunteers from ACDI/VOCA, Kelly Peltier and Craig Holt of Atlas Coffee Importers, spent two days there to learn about local coffee growing and milling practices and to share their expert opinions on the coffee markets in North America, Europe and Asia. Montserrate was the first stop on their visit to coffee producer-groups in the department of Huila (population 760,000 distributed over 7,500 square miles). Peltier and Holt took the time to answer questions from local growers about milling, marketing and gaining access to international specialty coffee markets.

On the world stage, the Colombian Coffee Growers Federation's "Juan Valdez" has been a huge success over the last several decades, creating a clear, global brand identity for Colombian coffee. But now, with expertise from ACDI/VOCA and funding from USAID/Colombia, some small-volume producers of top-grade specialty coffees are moving "beyond Juan." They want to win a share of the premium coffee market, gain higher prices for their best products and become players in the future of direct-relationship specialty coffee, where local growers are connected directly to the global market.



To make this possible, the participants have received much-needed equipment, including de-pulping machines, fermentation tanks and drying patios. The ACDI/VOCA Specialty Coffee Program has also provided instruction on use and maintenance of new equipment to maximize the quality and consistency of the coffee. Volunteers like Peltier and Holt, whose market insight helped commercial growers in Montserrate, play a vital role in empowering change.

Gabriel Gil, Montserrate leader of the producer group, said, "The visit from Kelly and Craig demonstrated their interest in our coffee and in our way of life despite the difficult security situation of Colombia. It was a marvelous experience. In this particular case it is true that USAID's resources come 'From the American People' to cooperate with and assist Colombians.

"We received a message of friendship and optimism about our future," Gil said. "Now we know that we have the opportunity to produce and sell our coffee at a premium and the possibility to establish relationships with our friends and customers abroad. We are learning that in trade relations, both producers and customers are more than just names. We must work together in order to achieve success, and in particular we the producers hope to increase our income and to improve our quality of life."

Peltier and Holt's tour culminated in a "cupping," or formal tasting, of coffees from the areas visited. Coffees from all the producer groups cupped well and showed great promise for the specialty market.