



Navigating Origins

H A I T I



HAITI FACTS

Name Republic of Haiti

Location Caribbean, western one-third of the island of Hispaniola, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. Shares the island with Dominican Republic, which covers the eastern two-thirds.

Area 10,569 square miles

Capital Port-au-Prince

Languages French and Creole are both official languages.

Monetary Unit Gourde

Population 8,121,622 (as of July 2005)

Terrain Mostly mountainous; highest point is Chaîne de la Selle at 2,680 meters.

Climate Tropical; semi-arid in the east, where mountains cut off the trade winds.

Agricultural Exports Coffee, mangoes, cocoa and essential oils.



HAITI, a small country occupying the western section of the island of Hispaniola, is no newcomer to the coffee industry. As early as the mid-1870s, coffee made its way to Haiti—and it wasn't long before Haiti made itself known in the coffee industry. The country quickly became the world's largest coffee producer. "At that time, the island was supplying half of the world's coffee, becoming the number-one exporter," says Stéphén Jean-Pierre, an agricultural economist and the business manager of Fédération des Associations Caféières Natives (FACN).

But, as is often the case in countries plagued by political and social unrest, the success didn't last long. Dictatorships, violent uprisings and a lack of internal infrastructure all took a heavy toll on the coffee industry.

Still, Haiti managed to hold on to some semblance of a coffee market, selling mostly to Italy and France. Then, a U.S.-led embargo against the prevailing dictatorship in the mid-1990s caused the market to take another fall.

Despite Haiti's dark history with coffee, the past few years have been good to the country's coffee industry. New programs and projects have boosted the quality and consistency of the coffee, as well as the marketability of the Haitian brand. The additional bonus of having a large in-country market (only about 10 percent of the coffee is exported), makes Haiti seem well on its way to reclaiming its coffee glory days.

Coffee

Haitian coffee is 100 percent arabica and almost entirely typica. Haiti is a varied country in the geographical sense, with several microclimates. Coffee characteristics vary greatly, depending on the altitude and climate of each region. When properly harvested and processed, the flavors can range from sweet nuts and citrus to dark chocolate and peanut.

"On the same mountain you can have high-bodied low-acidity coffees at the bottom—around 600 meters—with a chocolaty flavor and at the top you will have high acidity coffees with citrus-berry flavor," says Jean-Pierre.

Cultivation

Small farms are the norm in Haiti—a quarter of a hectare on average. The majority of coffee is grown under shade and without the use of chemicals, and all of the farmers practice multi-cropping. "There are no farmers in Haiti who only cultivate coffee," says Jean-Pierre. "It is always a mix of different cultures like bananas, citrus, corn and beans, the combination of which is beneficial to the ecosystem."

Coffee is both wet- and dry-processed, with wet processing being reintroduced about 15 years ago. The majority of coffees are naturals, mainly due to a lack of wet-processing infrastructure. This is changing, however, thanks in part to the Haitian Bleu project through USAID. "The reintroduction of washed coffee in Haiti with the Haitian Bleu project was accompanied by a series of measures, such as wet mill construction and training, which permitted the farmers to produce a high-quality washed coffee and enter the specialty market."

Progress

Haiti has made a lot of progress in recent years, much of it thanks to programs such as the Hillside Agricultural Program of USAID, which helped build coffee processing mills and coffee nurseries, offered training on growing, harvesting and processing, and developed a marketing program for Haiti's first specialty coffee brand, Haitian Bleu.

"The program was designed to teach Haitian coffee farmers in certain areas how to grow better, increase yields and have better production practices," says Gary Talboy, cofounder of Coffee Bean International and one of the original members of the Haitian Bleu project. "When we created the Haitian Bleu logo and brand franchise, our dream was the Haitian Bleu would be a symbol that stood for the highest-quality coffee being produced in Haiti. The idea was that if we could produce a star coffee, it would pull the values of all the other Haitian coffees up."



So far, the program has had great success. The brand name, which is owned by the producers, has become a symbol for the extended cuppings, physical evaluations and quality product the program is producing. Now, roasters can buy into a long-

term relationship with Haitian Bleu producers, ensuring they will receive high-quality coffee from Haiti while guaranteeing producers a fair price.

Additional projects such as the recent \$800,000 grant from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) also aim to boost the quality of Haitian coffee and create increased access and demand. The IDB project is designed to benefit Haiti's small and medium producers, strengthen the Haitian Coffee Institute and increase the quality of the coffee.

"What they are looking to do is general things, like improving the national laboratories, gathering statistic about sectors, provide training for cuppers and so on," says Diego Arias, of Inter-American Development Bank. "We're also putting together a national competition in Haiti—we will start by advertising locally to exporters and roasters and see how it goes. After that, they'll try to go international and have an auction site."

Hurdles

Overall, and especially outside of the Haitian Bleu project, Haiti's biggest challenge is still consistency. "The quality of Haitian

naturals is variable due to the fact that it is produced by thousands of small farmers independently and there is no control over quality and no infrastructure to process it," says Jean-Pierre.

In a larger sense, Haiti's political situation also makes the coffee industry a difficult one to be in. "This situation has greatly affected the economic situation of the farmers who generally will put emphasis on cash crops like corn and peas at the expense of coffee which takes four to five years before they can harvest," says Jean-Pierre. "The interest generated by the new markets and the reorganization of the industry has helped reduce the destruction of coffee farms and the shade trees."

With all the forward progress that is already happening, it is easy to imagine that Haiti will overcome these challenges, as it already has so many others. "I think that the Haitian coffee industry has a future now, where it had no real future before, but it still requires people to invest in it," says Talboy. "The Haitian people have very few things they can be proud of. Now, they can have pride in what they produce, what they stand for."



HAITIAN COFFEE AT A GLANCE

Coffee Arabica, 90 percent of which is typica

Flavor High-grown washed coffees have a sweet nutty and citrus flavor. Naturals have a dark chocolate or peanut flavor.

Elevation 300–2,000 meters

Farms Small family farms, typically poly-cultivated with bananas, cocoa and vegetables

Flowering January–March

Harvest August–March

Shipping October–August

Processing 90 percent dry-processed, 10 percent wet-processed

Main Buyers France, Italy, Belgium, U.S., U.K. and Japan

Resources

Fédération des Association Caféières Natives (FACN), founded in 1994. The largest federation of producers in Haiti; www.haitian-bleu.com

Haiti Hillside Agriculture Program, a USAID-funded agribusiness development project implemented by DAI in conjunction with PADEF, Fintrac, the University of Florida, and CIAT; www.haitihap.org

Reseau des Cooperatives Cafeieres de la region Nord (Recocarno), a coffee export business founded in 1997. Owned by seven co-ops, it represents more than 4,500 Haitian farmers; www.recocarno.com.

