



FIRST PERSON

Coffee Farmers Build a Quality Crop

USAID helps farmers in Timor-Leste sell a premium product in a competitive market



Photo: Lisa M. Rogers

Maria and her family grow coffee in the village of Raimerhei in Timor-Leste's central mountains.

“Coffee is a very good crop for us. We are members of the coffee cooperative, and they give us a good price. Because they buy our coffee fruit, we don't have to process it. We expanded our coffee farm two years ago, and we will plant more seedlings this year.”

— Maria Soares

Maria Soares and her family harvest coffee on their highland farm in the village of Raimerhei located in the central mountains of Timor-Leste, southeast Asia's poorest country. Their local organic coffee cooperative is part of Cooperativa Cafe Timor (CCT), the largest single-source producer of organically certified coffee in the world. With support from USAID, CCT began buying, processing, and marketing certified organic coffee in Timor-Leste in 1994, when it started with 800 farm families.

By helping farmers focus on quality and consistency, CCT commands a high price on the world specialty coffee market for its products. When farmers like Maria sell their ripe coffee fruit to CCT, they receive a premium price of between 40% and 75% more than they would selling their coffee to other producers in Timor-Leste. They also save up to two weeks' work needed to process coffee fruit into dried coffee beans, giving them time to harvest more of their crop.

CCT now has 20,000 farm family members and employs more than 3,000 Timorese in post-harvest work each year. CCT's USAID-supported activities include primary healthcare, agricultural extension services, vanilla crop and farmer-based cattle fattening projects to diversify exports, a tree nursery to provide replacement shade tree seedlings to coffee farmers, and a training center for cooperatives and small businesses.