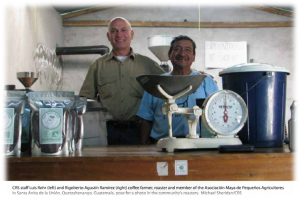
In-country Day 1:



Luis, the friendly gentleman we’ve spoken so many times with over the phone welcomed us and set to work shuttling our group to the CRS headquarters in Guatemala City. The CRS team in Guatemala is truly amazing. We met the director for CRS Guatemala and Mexico. She was about 5’7 in height, but somehow carried an aura of calm and collectedness. She was an incredible conversationalist and soon, we were collectively blown away by the breadth of experience she has had. She’s worked for 19 years, across multiple countries and functions. She and her team of 78 in Guatemala support multiple projects and partners in the region. She introduced us to the project and the legendary bishop who has been a driving force for change in the region.

Bishop Bio:

“he is widely known here in Guatemala for his role in helping to establish the [Chajulense Association](http://www.asociacionchajulense.org/index/) in the late 1980s when he was the parish priest in Chajul.  The organization was the result of his accompaniment of a community ravaged by violence and targeted by the military’s counter-insurgency campaign during the country’s civil war. Today, Chajulense is one of the oldest and strongest community-based farmer organizations in Guatemala.  It exports roughly 40 containers of sustainable and specialty coffees and is widely regarded as a model for cooperative development in Guatemala.  In summarizing the experience, he said humbly: “Un pueblo se dignificó”, which roughly translates into: “A community asserted its dignity.”  Notable in everything about the Bishop — his casual dress, his warm personal engagement, his clear commitment — was the absence of self-reference.”

* The bishop has previous experience – he started another association in the Quiche region that had various projects:
  + Food safety (income generation and food production)
  + Construction of a dry coffee mill (90% ready)
  + Coffee export
  + Honey production for farmers to generate extra income:
    - Open market in Germany
    - Only need very small lots

Insights from Luis on our drive from Guatemala City to Zacapa:

* There is a large distribution center outside of Guatemala City and the prices for bananas are determined there early in the morning depending on the demand that day
* There is an Italian couple living in the Jalapa region that are the agricultural experts for the cooperative
* Organic bananas are worth $10 more/quintal on average - 50 co-op farmers have been certified organic – it would cost the co-op 4-5 thousand to get organic certification
* There is a processing company called Tropilight that produces 20-30 truckloads/wk. of banana baby food.
* The Bishop was first a priest in the Quiche region and led a fair trade co-op – he is known in the whole country for fair-trade.
* Co-op manager is mostly interested in improving crops and transportation
* Not as interest in exports and processing or savings