

# Origin trip: Graham Mitchell in Colombia



*Graham Mitchell, UTZ CERTIFIED Good Inside General Manager for North America traveled to Colombia in November. He shares his impressions from the meetings with the producers, exporters and traders in this travel report.*

## From Boston to Cartagena

### Travels and Impressions of Colombia's Coffee Regions

Last November I had an opportunity to travel to Colombia and see first hand the challenges faced by the country and the coffee industry. Arriving in Cartagena, for ASOEXPORT Assembly, the independent Exporters conference, I was treated to a cultural and historical gem. Cartagena sits majestically on an isthmus and forms a natural port that export over 50% of Columbia's coffee. We toured the coffee warehouses of FNC, saw their highly efficient quality, security, and packaging procedures and saw two loading centers for bagged and bulk packaged coffees (below). Historically Cartagena was the safe house for shipping gold from the interior of South America to the Spanish coffers, and the historical center is surrounded by solid walls, large fortresses, and museums.



ASOEXPORT Assembly was held at a historic hotel in the center and featured speakers such as Nestor Osorio, on progress in coffee production worldwide; Tim Sharrer from Starbucks, discussing Starbucks Café Buying Practices and contribution to "RED" addressing AIDS in Africa; Bill Cortner, presenting the new Folgers owner: Smuckers Brands. The FNC, which was hosting their Congress in Bogota this week, spoke about their sustainability programs and production improvements in the field. Although the common question remained "where is all the good Colombian coffee going?" A splendid coffee break was organized by Francisco Bustamante who made everyone feel "Good Inside" with Hacienda Venecia's splendid coffee.



### Impressions from the field and cup

Next stop on our travels was Manizales where we visited two very nice coffee farms Hacienda Venecia and Finca La Manuela. The Colombian coffee plant can be in different stages of flowering, and ripening all at the same time; allowing for two harvest seasons (September- December and March- May); and plants that can be harvested every two weeks on a rotating schedule. Add to this years season with 50 % more rain than average, and heavier, less predictable rain patterns; and you begin to understand the challenges associated with running a farm professionally, drying parchment in a quality process, and keeping it dry to prevent mold and preserve flavor. The empowerment and organization of our UTZ Certified – Good Inside farms, with owners who are committed to quality products and operations ; area managers having their own homes, family services with running water, separate housing for seasonal workers, and local collection points for coffee showed a lot of care for people, planet, and better businesses. There are over 120 species of birds (some of them migratory species) on our UTZ farms that are kept safe with careful minimized pesticide use and tree maintenance practices. Intercropping with corn to provide a cash crop while coffee fields were reaching maturity or with plantains to provide a source of nourishment for



workers and families was a constant theme on our farm

operations. I was impressed by the coffee quality and knowledge of our producer partners; Juan Pablo Echeverri coffees from Hacienda Venecia were fabulous in an espresso with fruity, tropical notes. Elizabeth and Mauricio Gomez at Café Lucero sent me off with a freshly roasted bag of their Supremo 18 which I enjoyed for its intense herbal fragrance with a balanced



acidity and body.





**Coffee Cupping at the AGRADO, FNC quality training center in Quindio region.**



We met up with Jaime Raul Duque Londono. Jaime is Director of Sustainable Coffee Program at the Quindio Coffee Growers Committee, "El Agrado" is a center that specializes in all best practices coffee production: tree and varietal research, breeding and selection; agronomy methods; combination tunnel and heated drying; storage and processing : roasting; cupping and sharing this knowledge within the region of Quindio. The research center has an area with coffee plants

from around the world; combined with coffee drying and processing research, and cupping center where farmers are mentored on how to recognize and grow better quality. Farms are smaller in the Quindio region and appreciate the resources and support brought to them by the center. The Research center has created a nature park (bamboo/ guadua) to inspire discussions on coffee and how to integrate agriculture with the forest environment!

