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## Producer Portfolio

# INTEGRAL AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE CHICOJ, RL IN GUATAMALA



## Forests, coffee and tourism in Guatemala

The Federation of Unions of Verapaz (FEDECOVERA), founded in 1976, is a collective of 38 cooperatives, of which 29 perform forestry activities. The Federation benefits over 65,000 people from the Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' ethnic groups. These people, who descend from the ancient Mayan culture, live in the departments of Alta and Baja Verapaz in northern Guatemala.

For many years, FEDECOVERA's member cooperatives were mainly engaged in agricultural activities: the production of coffee (*Coffea arabica*), tea (*Camellia* spp.), cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomun*), ranching and the production of grains for subsistence agriculture. But a financial crisis in 1995 led to economic problems. To overcome these challenges, the government allowed some of FEDECOVERA's cooperatives to establish around 4,000 hectares of pine plantation.

## The Chicoj cooperative

The Integral Agricultural Cooperative Chicoj is one of the cooperatives operating under FEDECOVERA. Founded in 1969, the cooperative is located 1,300 meters above sea level, near the small town of Coban.

The small cooperative – it has 257 members – is known for its high quality coffee, which has a fruity aroma and taste. Chicoj was one of the cooperatives that embarked on tree planting. They now sell wood from their FSC-certified plantations alongside their coffee production.

Both trees and coffee plants are thriving under the Chicoj cooperative's management. These combined efforts have increased the value of its production and created more jobs for people in the region. The cooperative has also shown its commitment to protecting the nature that surrounds them by growing both trees and coffee sustainably. For example, Chicoj's members are proud to actively protect their local water sources and the soil on which they farm. Furthermore, FSC certification has also enabled them to learn how to care for their workers. Protective equipment is readily available to ensure safe working conditions and prevent serious accidents. Members have also learnt to dispose





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of waste products from the farming in the right way, in order to comply with FSC standards.

### Ecotourism: A natural benefit

This impressive approach to forest management has helped the cooperative to obtain a solid reputation for environmental credentials, which has attracted many more customers. And due to their focus on sustainable forestry and coffee production, they have attracted the attention of ecotourists – adding yet another business to their portfolio. The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) and the National Coffee Association (Anacafe) have supported them in this venture

And the tourists have been delighted to see how the cooperative produces high quality products while preserving the nature that surrounds them. They get to see how the cooperative grows coffee among the trees and are shown how it works to preserve biodiversity in their forest. Visitors also get a unique view of the local culture and traditions in the area where the Maya Q'eqchi' minority make up most of the population.



The main challenge for the Chicoj cooperative is the poor forest roads in their region, which mean they can only transport logs during the summer. Luckily, their additional income from coffee and tourism sustains them during the winter, while they work to improve the roads.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### FACTS

**Certificate Holder**

Federation of Cooperatives of the Verapaces, RL (Integral Agricultural Cooperative Chicoj, RL)

**Certificate code**

RA-FM / COC-004240

**Size of certified area**

323.37 hectares

**Tree species**

Pinus maximinoi

**FSC-certified products sold per year:**

- Round Wood logs 2000 m<sup>3</sup> (local and national buyers)

**Approved to yield**

5000 m<sup>3</sup> per year