



EL MERCADO JUSTO FAIR TRADE
PEOPLES
COFFEE



Peoples Coffee Cafe, Newtown



Matt Lamason, Director, Peoples Coffee



Coffee beans going through cooling process after roasting



Coffee bean farmer, Peru

For the love of coffee...

Peoples Coffee has great knowledge of its product, from the mountains of Peru to the shelves of a Wellington supermarket. And the small coffee roasting company is enthusiastic about sharing that knowledge with the latte drinkers of Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Indeed, the Peoples Coffee's approach to business gives a whole new meaning to "traceability". As part of the global fair trade movement, the company is committed to promoting the visibility of growers in Peru, Colombia and other coffee-producing nations – and to ensuring fair market returns in support of farmers' economic development.

For Peoples Coffee director Matt Lamason, connection back to the farms that grow the coffee going into his Wellington roasting factory is very fundamental to the business. "We're producing fantastic coffee for people who love drinking it and also like the sense of solidarity with growers through their support for fair trade," he says.

Supermarkets

And Matt sees a fast growing market of such coffee drinkers in New Zealand. Having just expanded its roastery, Peoples Coffee is about to begin supply of packaged whole bean and ground coffee products to New World supermarkets in Wellington – and the company has joined GS1 New Zealand

for the bar coding needed to make that important step.

"We're putting a lot of thought into the packaging which needs to help keep the product fresh for as long as possible, while also getting the fair trade story out into the market," says Matt. He also aims to use recyclable paper or other bio-degradable materials for consistency with the Peoples Coffee brand.

The product will carry the company's distinctive earthy, brown and green branding onto supermarket shelves. It's a visual identity already used on two cafes operated by Peoples Coffee in the inner city suburb of Newtown and on an information-rich web site (www.peoplescoffee.co.nz). Work is also underway on opening a third café in the city.

Politics

Matt Lamason got his start in coffee working as a barista over five years. For much of that time, he was also a student at Victoria University from which he eventually graduated with an honours degree in Political Science. He launched Peoples Coffee in October 2004 after an initial career as a Parliamentary official – a change of direction that combined an academic interest in international development issues with a love of coffee.



...and fair trade

Peoples Coffee is, in fact, one of around 15 coffee roasting businesses in New Zealand – all sourcing significant amounts of their raw product through Trade Aid Importers Ltd, a local company that trades with grower cooperatives throughout the developing world. Roasting is a delicate process of heating green beans at 220 degrees C for a brief time, after which they are rapidly cooled and bagged (staying fresh thereafter for 7-10 days).

Certification

Peoples Coffee is a fair trade product and an organic one as well. Its status is certified under an international scheme (www.fairtrade.net) that involves registration of every qualifying farm which is then subject to regular third-party audit. Companies that source beans from certified fair trade suppliers contribute 2% of their sales to maintain the scheme.

Matt says New Zealand demand for fair trade organic coffee has been growing rapidly – sales are up nationally by around 400% over the past two years. That's good news for Peoples Coffee, but there can be no let up on maintaining and developing the fair trade connection between farmers and coffee-drinking consumers.

Each year, Matt joins a Fair Trade Delegation to meet farmers in producing nations. In May 2007, it was a trip to

Peru and Colombia – and not just to an air conditioned meeting room. "I went up into the mountains and walked around farms ... we talked to people about what's really going on," he says.

Development

Much of the focus is on the development of farming communities, with cooperatives in the fair trade network committed to investing a portion of their sales income in health, education and other social programmes. For Peoples Coffee, these trips also yield new information to be shared with New Zealand consumers, on the company website, in its cafes and, soon, on packets of product sold through supermarkets.

We learn, for example, that the Peoples Coffee "Columbian Excelso" blend comes from beans grown at an elevation of 1400–1900m, and harvested between April-June. The beans are produced and sold by Empresa Cooperativa del Sur del Cauca, a co-operative established in 1993 and now representing 1090 farmers. This blend, according to Peoples Coffee, is "soft with a round body, mild acidity and mellow oaky tones".

Matt says his new supermarket range – complete with such detailed information and GS1-complaint bar coding – will include single-source coffees and blends, with a choice of ground product or whole roasted beans. And with each cup, the drinker can be assured of a fair return to the families who tended and picked the crop.