

## The Story of Coffee

### Some History:

The effect of coffee beans on behavior was noticed by a sheep herder from Caffa Ethiopia named Kaldi as he tended his sheep. He noticed that the sheep became hyperactive after eating the red "cherries" from a certain plant when they changed pastures. He tried a few himself, and was soon as overactive as his herd. The story relates that a monk happened by and scolded him for "partaking of the devil's fruit." However the monks soon discovered that this fruit from the shiny green plant could help them stay awake for their prayers.

### The Process:



A Coffee Plant – these are ripe coffee beans. They can be harvested when they turn red. The coffee bean is inside a husk and is covered in *miel*, a sticky and sweet juice. The coffee bean is white at this stage. If you peel off the husk and suck on the bean, it is very sweet and has LOTS of caffeine! Workers who pick these beans are paid by how much they pick, so often there is a lot of green coffee mixed in with the red since they are picked so fast.



This is a *sun-grown* coffee plantation – this coffee was developed in the 1970's so that production could be increased to satisfy the world market. This way of growing coffee relies on heavy pesticide use, because it is a *monocrop*. A monocrop is when only one type of plant is grown on the land, so it can very easily become infested by insects and other things that will hurt the crop.



Most coffee is grown in very steep areas because it likes high elevations and cool, but tropical weather for growing. When pesticides are used in areas like this, they run downhill to where the people live and get into their water sources. By removing the large trees that once grew here, *soil erosion* also happens very easily, causing landslides and loss of soil. During Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua, many people lost their lives as a result of soil erosion.



Once the beans are picked, the husk is peeled off by machines and workers spread them in the sun to dry. The beans must be processed the same day they are picked or they will rot.



The dried coffee is sent to roasters in sacks. Most of the beans are sent to the US or Europe and then roasted at local roasters. Europe gets the best “Grade A” coffee and the US gets the second best. The local communities end up with the leftover coffee; the smaller, misshaped beans that cannot be sold on the international market.



The Final Product: Coffee as we know it, roasted in different ways to make French Roast, Dark Roast, etc.

Alternatives:

So...what is the difference between sun grown and shade grown coffee?

Compare the next picture with the other photo of a coffee plantation – what are the noticeable differences?



This is a *shade-grown* coffee farm. By planting other trees and plants along with the coffee, pesticides do not need to be used as much, if at all. Tropical birds have a forest canopy to live in as they migrate. Large trees hold the soil in place and help stop soil erosion from occurring.



*Look for the label!*

Many shade-grown and cooperative coffee farms are now part of the Fair Trade label. This is what the Fair Trade label looks like. You can find it in many stores and coffee shops – it means that the coffee you are buying was grown in an environmentally responsible way (fewer or no pesticides, shade grown plantations) and that the workers were paid a fair price for their work.