

Ramiro Ortiz

Nicaragua

Farm:	Finca Buena Esperanza
Region:	Matagalpa
Country:	Nicaragua
Association:	Rajuense Estate
Altitude:	1000 – 1200 masl
Varieties:	Marsellesa, H1, Red Catuai, Sarchimor, Parainema, Caturra, Starmaya, Pacamara,
Processes:	Washed, Natural, Honey, Anaerobic

Buena Esperanza was acquired by the Ortiz Stoessel family in November 2013. The land on which Finca Buena Esperanza sits was originally an American-owned timber operation. It began its transformation to coffee production in the late 1970s and early 1980s however, due to the political and social instability caused by the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979, progress was initially hard. Throughout the 12 years of conflict Nicaragua's agricultural economy was reformed, export avenues regulated, farms were seized and infrastructure destroyed, halting progression in the coffee industry across the country as a whole. Although the farm began to rejuvenate throughout the 1990s the social and environmental situation was in vast need of improvement when Ramiro Ortiz and his family took over in the early 2000s. Since then the farm has undergone huge transformation through significant restructuring and modernisation. Today the farm is an example of excellence in social and environmental standards and produces coffee in quality that equals the quality of life it aspires to for the local community.

Finca Buena Esperanza sits within a unique mountain valley in the centre of Matagalpa, a department in central Nicaragua renowned for quality coffee and wealth of agricultural capabilities. The farm is 845 hectares in size and has a huge diversity of both fauna and flora, as well as a rich variety of microclimates due to the varied topography that spans the land. Within the farm there are numerous ecosystems, which include rainforests, valleys, rivers and natural springs. The warm climate, fertile soils and an average rainfall of 3000 mm create ideal growing conditions for coffee. Upon taking over the farm Ramiro and his family began to engage with social and environmental regeneration, with respect to the natural land and local community. This included a renewal of all coffee plants, a reforestation programme and development of natural forest and spring protection strategies. During the initial three years of the regeneration program Ramiro replanted over 1,500,000 new coffee plants, using the farm's natural conditions to create the ideal conditions for his new coffee varieties. Today the farm is committed to preserving this sustainable footprint and 50% of the total farm is dedicated to protected natural forest environment and is certified Rainforest Alliance and Café Practices.

Empowerment is a key theme on Finca Buena Esperanza. There are numerous social initiatives on the farm that are geared around the empowerment of workers and local communities. Sandra Stoessel, Ramiro's wife, is a member of ANSPAC Nicaragua (the National Association for Self-Improvement), a program for women aimed at improving social, moral, and cultural engagement in Nicaraguan communities. Using her skills in community work, Sandra has helped developed several initiatives on Finca Buena Esperanza to empower the local community under a program called EDUCAFE, which focuses on providing tools and teaching non-traditional skills to better equip workers in generating income outside of harvest periods. The program includes classes and workshops based on the farm which engages with women workers to build wellbeing, self-esteem and skills to improve and better family relationships in the local community. Weekly workshops for whole communities are also run outside of harvest time at no cost to the workers themselves and children are accommodated during harvest periods in the farm's own school. To Ramiro and Sandra it is important that the children of workers are also included in the wellbeing workshops to improve livelihoods within all generations in the coffee community. A private banking agent has also been introduced to the main farm and a 'mobile wallet' has been developed to benefit workers and give them easy access to salary and withdrawals, promoting financial inclusion.

Through Ramiro's meticulous and structured approach on the farm each stage in the production process is geared around experimentation, quality and improvement. There are several varieties planted on Finca Buena Esperanza, such as Marsellesa, H1, Red Catuai, Sarchimor, Parainema, Caturra, Starmaya and Pacamara. Each variety is separated by lot and situated within a matching natural environment that has been determined to best suit the variety's potential, maximising cup quality and profile uniqueness. During harvest time, which usually begins in September or October, there are up to 1,200 coffee pickers working in the field. Maturation and sweetness of

specific lots is measured using Brix meters to determine the perfect picking time. A small team of highly skilled and knowledgeable pickers, usually consisting of around 60 women or older men, are then instructed to pick each lot individually, selecting cherries for their ripeness and size. These workers are rewarded for their picking quality, rather than the volume of coffee harvested, to ensure cherry selection is flawless.

Once picked cherries are processed initially in a wet mill located on the farm and, due to the humid climate, sent to a separate location for drying. Post-harvest processing is equally as precise as the harvest itself. Individual lots are separated by variety, location and picking day to ensure transparency and traceability throughout the whole process. Coffee is processed using the Washed, Honey or Natural method, depending on desired cup profile for each variety and picking day. More recently Ramiro has also been experimenting with different fermentation methods, such as anaerobic, to increase the uniqueness and diversity of his cup profiles with much success. Once processed coffee is dried on raised beds, turned frequently to maintain quality, until moisture levels reach the desired 11%. After drying is complete samples are then sent directly to the lab where a team of trained cuppers analyse the cup quality of each lot before feeding results back to the team in the field. This communication between the field work and cupping teams enables the farm to react to in real-time to data and results during harvest, enabling the workers to make any necessary adjustments to maximise the quality of coffee at the farm.

