

# Oscar Jimenez

# Nicaragua

Farm(s):	Finca Nuevo Pacto
Region:	Wiwili, Jinotega
Country:	Nicaragua
Association:	Sajonia Estate
Altitude:	1250 – 1250 masl
Varieties:	Maragogype, Catimor
Process:	Washed. Wet milled, fermented for 15-40 hours and sun-dried on patios or raised beds

Oscar Jimenez's farm Nuevo Pacto, which translates as 'new agreement', is in the Wiwili municipality in the department of Jinotega in north central Nicaragua. The farm sits inside the Cerro Kilambé Natural Reserve, one of 78 protected reserves in Nicaragua, close to the border with neighbouring Nueva Segovia. Finca Nuevo Pacto is a member of the Los Campesinos project, a regional smallholder engagement initiative developed by Sajonia Estate in nearby Matagalpa that focuses on increasing quality, support and financial remuneration for regional smallholder coffee producers located in Nicaragua's areas of natural reserve. The project provides micro financing, agronomical assistance and post-harvest support for producers to provide access to quality premiums and markets, whilst protecting the natural forest ecosystems. There are two recently established collection agencies near to Oscar's farm, in the towns of Wiwili de Jinotega and Plan de Grama. These are used as a hub to support farmers like Oscar who have farms within the natural reserves in the field and as a local station for smallholder to deliver coffee.

Finca Nuevo Pacto has been in the Jimenez family for 10 years. Oscar inherited the farm from his father and now runs it with his family, alongside his two eldest sons, the third generation of Jimenez coffee producers working on Finca Nuevo Pacto. The farm is 35 hectares in size, however 20 hectares of this land is left untouched as natural forest. Coffee is cultivated on the remaining 15 hectares. Like all of Nicaragua's reserves, Kilambé is renowned for its biological diversity as well as its socio-cultural and environmental significance to the communities living within the area. Despite its environmental and cultural importance, Kilambé is threatened with deforestation and soil degradation and is currently considered an ecosystem that is in danger of extinction. Farmers like Oscar, who manage their land in harmony with the natural forests, are important to keeping the natural ecosystems alive. The farm has excellent environmental management, with surrounding natural jungles that protect and support a rich diversity of both fauna and flora.

The farm's microclimate and diverse flora creates a unique environment for coffee to grow, whilst increasing the stability and capability of the farm itself. The natural forest creates shade for coffee plants and prevents soil erosion, whilst maintaining nutrient cycles and climatic stability for the coffee, essential in creating microclimates in the low altitude coffee-growing regions of Nicaragua. The farm has a sandy loam soil system which is excellent in retaining nutrients and water, annual rainfall of 2000mm and a temperature ranging between 10°C to 30°C. Oscar intercropped additional trees such as banana and citrus fruits to provide extra shade for the coffee and food for the family and workers. Food crops such as beans and corn are grown alongside coffee to provide wind shelter and additional sustenance. At Finca Nuevo Pacto almost 100% of the coffee grown is grown in shade conditions. This enables the coffee to mature more slowly, sugar content to increase in the cherry, providing a sweeter, more complex cup profile.

The farm is worked mainly by the Jimenez family, however during peak harvest Oscar employs an additional 30 workers to assist in the picking of coffee. These workers are provided with free accommodation on the farm and are transported to and from their homes in the family's pick-up truck at the beginning and end of each working week. In addition to their wages, which are paid in accordance with the local wage table, workers are provided with free meals throughout the day and a small plot of land to plant and cultivate grain, to be used either for extra income or food. Pickers are paid each week each *lata* of coffee picked, which is a local measurement volume of 10" x 10" x 12.5" that equates to around 20 litres, or 14kg of cherry.

The two varieties cultivated on Finca Nuevo Pacto are Catimor (90%) and Maragogype (10%). Catimor plants, which are hardier and more resilient than the large-bean Maragogype variety, is planted at 3500 plants per hectare. Maragogype, which needs a little more room to develop, is cultivated in a less dense environment of around 2500 plants per hectare. The farm produces around 600 quintales of coffee each harvest, which equates to around 27,600kg of coffee. All coffee grown on the farm is processed using the Washed method. This is due to the high

humidity levels which create challenges for producers in the area to dry Naturally processed coffees successfully. During harvest coffee is handpicked by lot, which are kept separate throughout the harvest and post-harvest process to ensure traceability, with the ripest cherries selected for their colour and maturity. Once picked coffee is delivered to the farm's micro mill where it is washed, floated to remove any underripe cherries, and milled to remove the outer skin and pulp. The resulting parchment and sticky mucilage is then fermented in tanks for anywhere between 15 to 40 hours, depending on the variety and ambient temperature, before being washed again and taken to the nearby collection agency for drying. As humidity is high in the natural reserves, although some producers fully process their coffee on-farm, it is challenging to properly dry Washed coffee at Finca Nuevo Pacto. The high humidity can easily create defects in the cup. Therefore coffee is sent to the Sajonia Estate dry mill in nearby Matagalpa on the same day it reaches the collection agency for drying. As coffee arrives to Sajonia each lot of coffee delivered to Sajonia Estate is checked for quality, cupped, scored and assigned either as a regional blend or separated as a micro lot. The mill has recently developed an open-source mobile software traceability system for producers in which coffee results are inputted and published in real-time, creating immediate feedback for producers and supporting agronomists during harvest. Here coffee is then dried on either raised African beds or patios until moisture levels reach 11%.

The challenges Oscar faces, much like other coffee growers in Nicaragua, are those of low coffee prices and lack of access to credit. The political situation in Nicaragua has created a reluctance from local banks to release pre-finance with additional high interest rates. This interest, alongside the low prices, means the farm is unable to make enough money to reinvest in its crops or infrastructure. Sajonia's Los Campesinos project has enable Oscar to access credit through the Local Development Fund and agronomical assistance with the help of the Nitlapan UCA Research and Development Institute, enabling him to better invest in his farm infrastructure and develop quality through good farming practices. This has meant he is better equipped to produce high quality microlot coffee, access new markets and receive better remuneration for his output. Through this partnership the resilience of Nicaragua's coffee-growing communities and ecosystems are strengthened and protected, safeguarding the country's coffee culture for the future.

