

DEL CIELO

COFFEE MAGAZINE



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VOL
01

SPILLING THE BEANS - ABOUT COFFEE, SUSTAINABILITY AND RISKING CHANGE.

What could be better than the smell of freshly ground coffee or the sound of a portafilter machine? That's right: nothing. But what is actually behind the liquid gold that has become so common for us on a daily basis? We met with Luisa Meija and talked about her coffee company "Café del Cielo". In the interview, you can find out how her coffee is produced in Colombia, what she achieved with her company and how you can become part of it.

You founded Café del Cielo. Where did the idea for it come from?

Starting a business was not my intention in the first place. In 2017, I decided to return to my roots in Colombia and visit my family. While I was there, I learned about a small coffee farm that was for sale. Secretly, I had always dreamed of owning a farm in this area, because the region is above the Andes and is incredibly beautiful (smiles). So when I heard about the farm, I thought to myself, "This can't be a coincidence!" With some courage, I bought the small farm. But at that time I wasn't even interested in coffee and only knew that I liked to drink it black.

What changed then?

After the first visit to the farm with Francisco, my cousin, and William, our first employee, I became interested in coffee and its production. I looked at how the farmers around me were working with coffee and noticed that they were using a lot of chemicals and that, as a result, the biodiversity of the animals had greatly decreased in recent years. As a result, I decided to grow coffee sustainably on our farm without harming nature or people.

What's your vision behind Café del Cielo?

With Café del Cielo, I have the vision to create a product that protects nature, that can be grown in harmony with it, that is respectful towards the coffee farmers, and that gives the people working with it a new perspective on life. Our idea is not only to change the way we grow and process coffee for ourselves, but also to transform the mindset of other coffee farmers. We want to help them take the leap to sustainable cultivation and support them in the process. Because with the right knowledge and support,



Image rights: Luisa Meija, Café del Cielo

Luisa Meija is a native Colombian and currently lives in Kiel, Germany. She is the managing director of Café del Cielo and also works as a researcher at the Institute for Medical Informatics.

change is possible despite long-learned environmentally harmful practices.

In the second step, we want to open up access to the international market for the coffee farmers so that they can sell their coffee directly to Europe. This way, they get much more money for their coffee and can live a better life. Part of our vision is also to make consumers aware of how their coffee consumption affects farmers' lives and the environment.

How did you go about setting up your coffee farm?

In the beginning it was very difficult for me. Right at the beginning, I had to make the decisions to cut off 70% of the mature plants that were already bearing fruit. The reason for this was that the plants that used to grow on our farm were not resistant against diseases. This meant that in the face of climate change, we would have had to spray a lot of pesticides to keep them alive. We all knew that it would take up to 3 years for new plants to grow before we could harvest again.

I still decided to continue because I knew that we could not create a sustainable future without risking this change. After cutting down the old plants, we were able to grow a new plant variety that is much more resistant.

After three years of waiting, we had our first harvest. It was an incredibly beautiful moment when we received the results of this harvest and realised that it was of good quality.

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Luisa Meija

Can you give us some insights into the coffee market in Colombia?

With the produce from our first harvest, we did our best to sell our coffee directly in Colombia. But unfortunately, the small farmers there are dependent on middlemen and the stock exchange, and the achievable price is usually not even enough to cover the production costs.

Production according to our standards costs us 10 € per kilo of coffee. But because of the middlemen the yield on the local market per kilo was only 2 €. This was not an option for us, so we decided to sell the coffee in Europe. For the first time I became aware of the miserable situation of the coffee farmers, because I understood how desperately they have to fight for their existence. Many families fall into poverty because of these circumstances and have to turn to other products like avocados, which are bad for the environment. This realisation broke my heart.

What has your business changed in terms of the environment, people and your coffee farm?

The first change I see is in our staff. Their lives and health have improved a lot in the last few years since the transformation of the farm. I am so grateful that we can offer our staff health insurance, pensions and holidays, which is almost unique in the region (visibly moved). And in the meantime, our employees even come up with sustainable solutions in pest control on their own, which shows that their mindset has changed enormously.

In terms of nature, it is amazing to see that our plants are much more beautiful and hardy than those of our neighbours. In the last five years we did not have to spray any of our plants.

In addition, many animal species have returned to the area of our farm. We even have a very rare bird on the farm again, which is actually threatened with extinction. I also chose this bird for the picture on our coffee packaging.



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What can consumers do to make coffee consumption more sustainable?

When you buy coffee, you should not buy it from a big supermarket. There is a lot of suffering and poor quality behind these cheap prices. I heartily recommend that you buy your coffee from a small roastery.

Furthermore, it is very important how we consume our coffee. We should drink coffee consciously and not as a mass product. Be prepared to pay a little more money for your coffee and drink a really special coffee in return. Two to three cups of coffee a day are absolutely sufficient.

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What opportunities are there to become part of the Café del Cielo vision?

What helps us a lot is buying a subscription. Our farmers need a salary every month, but sales can be very erratic. Therefore, subscriptions are a lifesaver for us.

Secondly, we want to build a team. To make a widespread change in the coffee world, we need more people to join our movement. We are currently looking for support especially in the area of social media and marketing. We are looking forward to anyone who is willing to work together to change the coffee industry in holistic sustainability!

Find us on:
Website: delcielofarm.com
Instagram: [@cafedelcielofarm](https://www.instagram.com/cafedelcielofarm)