

Fairtrade: a World of Difference

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Apicoop, Chile, Honey & Dried Blueberries



Photos: Traidcraft/Richard Else

Apicoop

Apicoop (pronounced Apee-co-op) is a bee-keeping co-operative based in Paillaco, a town in the Valdivia province of Chile, about 850 kilometres south of Santiago. Apicoop beekeepers are spread over 800 kilometres. Apicoop was established as a beekeeping project in 1981 by the church Diocese of Valdivia which promoted rural development. The fact that the church was the supporting body was especially important during the military dictatorship when farmers groups and trade unions were persecuted. Often the activities undertaken by these organisations could only be continued under the church.



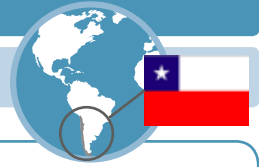
Apicoop became an independent co-operative in 1997 and brought a honey processing plant. The number of members increased and the co-op became self-sustaining.



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There are currently 350 beekeepers involved in Apicoop. Most of them are small-scale with 15-20 hives or medium-scale with 100 – 200 hives. Some individuals have more than 300 hives. Additionally, Apicoop has a yard of 500 hives. For many Apicoop members, honey is their only source of cash income.

Without the support of Apicoop, which buys and sells their honey, many families would struggle to make ends meet. Apicoop has used the Fairtrade premium to invest in equipment to improve efficiency and to ensure they comply with international export standards. It has also paid for training and supplies to farmers.



Up to 70% of a family's income can come from bees but relying on just one product is a risky business. This is why Apicoop decided to diversify by growing and exporting blueberries in 2006.

Traidcraft supported the project by providing a grant to buy the blueberry bushes and agreeing to buy the products for their new Blueberry Geobar (now Mixed Berry Geobar). The blueberries are grown on about 21 hectares of land. Apicoop has become the only source in the world of dried honey infused blueberries for export. 10 tonnes of dried blueberries are expected to be bought by Traidcraft in 2010 (the first harvest). About 4.5kg of fresh blueberries are needed to make 1kg of dried.



"I really hope that we can create the same spirit of fair trade within the blueberry fields."
Chino Henriques,
Apicoop, Chile