

Rotary Club of Lismore West Inc.
Timor Leste Coffee Project

In April 2003, the Consul General Timor Leste, Sr Abel Guterres visited the Lismore region for discussions with local coffee growers on techniques for rejuvenating old coffee orchards and the factors effecting quality. Following that visit, the Rotary Club of Lismore West became involved, assisting the project through the supply of some pruning equipment, training and assistance with travel. Subsequently, in September 2003, some pruning saws were sent to SAME, Timor Leste in the care of Jenni Kanaley, an Australian woman who has been a regular visitor to Timor Leste over a number of years, who first recognised the need, and who organised the project on her own volition. Jenni was given training in pruning coffee and carried out some pruning trials in the SAME area with selected growers.

From 6-18th April 2004, following the wet season, Jenni returned to Timor Leste together with Rotarians Grant Love and Rod Fayle to review the trial, supply some further pruning saws and give some hands on training to the participating growers and some students from the local agricultural college. Training covered the subsequent care and maintenance of the pruned coffee plants. Detailed discussions were also held on the many aspects of improving quality in coffee production. Most of the coffee was growing on very old plants (up to 50 years +) and these plants were often 4 or 5 metres high and very sparsely foliated. Production volume was very poor and of low quality. In addition, harvesting was difficult, resulting in most, or all cherries being picked at the one harvest round, with a mixture of green, yellow, red and black cherries. Plantings were often very small (1 or 2 Ha) and coffee was usually grown interspersed with other crops and under large shade trees. The extent of the shading seemed to be a problem and was likely to be the main reason for the poor performance of the coffee.

The September 2003 trials were very successful. Approximately 20% of a small holding was pruned by cutting the main stem of the plant at about 600mm above the ground (stumping) and allowed to sucker. About 50% of the dense shade was removed but the large tree dappled shade was not touched. No plants died and most produced a healthy crop of suckers. We demonstrated removal of unwanted suckers with the aim of having 3 or 4 of the strongest suckers growing on to form the new plant. As anticipated, flowering and cropping recommenced in 2005.

Another quality issue was pulping. Coffee cherries need to be pulped within 24 hours of being harvested. This was not happening. Fermentation, washing and drying were also discussed at length and problems identified. Subsequently, a local grower and educator was sent to Vanuatu for a season of on the job training at a similar scale low technology coffee plantation and a detailed coffee production manual produced and translated. The manual includes drawings for simple structures and equipment required for small scale, low technology quality coffee production. The huge task of setting up, typing and producing this manual into the local dialect in East Timor was carried out by PP Keith & Judy Parry.

Our club has continued to support the project as follows:

- a. the regular re-supply of further new pruning saws;
- b. monitor and advise on the progress of the trial through Jenni Kanaley;
- c. assist in the training of Timor Leste growers including the production of the detailed coffee production manual.

PP Rod Fayle
