

NW Life

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INVISIBLE BRACES BRING SMILES > M8



The Seattle Times

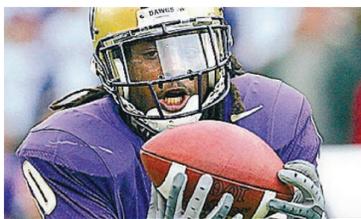
Sunday

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

SEPTEMBER 19, 2004

\$1.50

seattletimes.com



SPORTS TICKER

UCLA runs wild; Dawgs run out of time | Ichiro: 1 hit

\$250,000 check targets lands official

ELECTION 2004

Seattle environmentalist funds campaign drive to unseat Sutherland

BY DAVID POSTMAN
Seattle Times chief political reporter

A wealthy Seattle environmental activist is giving \$250,000 to finance a campaign to unseat state Lands Commissioner Doug Sutherland, saying he wants better management of state-owned forests and tighter regulations on private timberland.

On Wednesday, Peter Goldman wrote one of the largest checks this year to help a single candidate, giving it to an independent group he helped form called Citizens Protecting our Water and Forests. The group mailed its registration Friday to the state Public Disclosure Commission.

"I have personally witnessed an attack on the public interest — a building-industry and timber-industry feeding frenzy in Olympia," said Goldman, who runs a nonprofit environmental-law firm.

Goldman, one of the top Democratic donors in Washington state and a major environmental philanthropist, has battled Sutherland in court and before state boards as Goldman has pushed for tighter environmental protections on state-owned and -managed

Please see > RACE, A9

Shifting fortunes | Pain and gain in the global economy

Cup by cup, coffee fuels world market



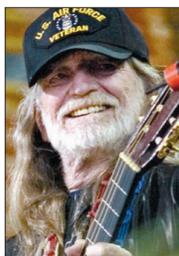
Gourmet beans from Bella Vista Tres Rios in Costa Rica are sold to Starbucks.



BETTY UDESEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Pickers for Bella Vista Tres Rios head into the morning sun to fill their baskets with coffee berries during a long, 85-degree day. An estimated 25 million farmers around the world make their living from coffee beans.

Farm Aid delivers



Willie Nelson brought his popular benefit concert to the White River Amphitheatre yesterday, and it was a huge hit. **Local, B1**

Newsline

A quick look at today's news

Campaign: John Kerry has adopted a tough new tone in response to political attacks. > A6

After Ivan: Rivers were rising in several states, while along the Gulf Coast, residents continued to assess their losses. > A12

Iran: The U.N. nuclear agency issued a warning but set no deadline for Iran to halt uranium enrichment. > A18

Sudan: The U.N. Security Council launched an inquiry into atrocities. > A18

Iraq: Captors threatened to kill two Americans and a Briton. > A26

Merger: Talks between Swedish Medical Center and Northwest Hospital have collapsed. > Local B1

Killed in action: A Marine from Lynnwood died in fighting in Iraq. > Local B5

> News updates
seattletimes.com

SEATTLE TIMES SPECIAL REPORT | America's dependence on foreign workers is as basic as our morning cup of coffee. And nowhere is coffee more a part of daily life than in Starbucks' hometown of Seattle. With every latte, consumers become players in the global economy and influence livelihoods and government policies around the world.

BY JAKE BATSELL
Seattle Times business reporter

TRES RIOS, Costa Rica — As morning breaks, scores of pickers dash into lush rows of 7-foot trees and begin tugging at branches laden with ripe, crimson berries.

José María Solano — along with his wife, daughter and three grandchildren — starts picking on a sultry Saturday in late January. The 66-year-old quickly strips the slender branches of their berries, filling the wicker basket strapped around his waist.

Those strong, weathered hands may well have picked the beans that flavor your morning jolt of caffeine — a cup of coffee brought to you by a global

economy that links 25 million coffee farmers and legions of consumers.

Because coffee grows mostly in warm climates of Latin America, Africa and Asia, everyone who drinks it depends on workers from those regions to satisfy their fix.

Farmers, pickers, processors, importers, shippers, roasters, grocery clerks and baristas on six continents all have a hand in \$70 billion of world coffee sales. Many of those who pick and process the beans have never tasted espresso, and their daily earnings amount to the cost of a few double-tall lattes.

The beans Solano picks on Bella Vis-
Please see > COFFEE, A22



Coffee picker José María Solano works six days a week during the three-month peak of the harvest season.

ABOUT THE SERIES |

This is part of an occasional report on globalization and Washington's trade-dependent economy. This week, we take you from the fields of Central America to the coffeehouses of the Puget Sound area.

THE JOURNEY FROM FIELD TO CUP, PART 1: > Today

DO LABELS MAKE A DIFFERENCE? PART 2: > Tomorrow

THE BAINBRIDGE-NICARAGUA LINK, PART 3: > Tuesday

> The series and slideshow online:
seattletimes.com/shiftingfortunes

Guard unit to deploy from lockdown to war zone

READINESS | Battalion's troubles — accelerated training, lack of cohesion, flagging morale — reflect challenges facing other Guard and Reserve units cobbled together and headed into danger.

BY THOMAS E. RICKS
The Washington Post

FORT DIX, N.J. — The 635 soldiers of a battalion of the South Carolina National Guard scheduled to leave today for a year or more in Iraq have spent their off-duty hours the past two weeks

under a disciplinary lockdown in their barracks.

The trouble began Labor Day weekend, when 13 members of the 1st Battalion of the 178th Field Artillery Regiment went AWOL, mainly to see their families again before shipping out.

Then there was an ugly confrontation between members of the battalion's Alpha and Charlie batteries that threatened to turn into a brawl involving three dozen soldiers and required the base police to intervene.

Please see > GUARD, A24

FORECAST
Cloudy, with showers throughout the day.
High 60. Low 49.
> LOCAL B6

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60% of The Seattle Times newsprint contains recycled fiber. The inks are also recycled.

Shifting fortunes

Pain and gain in the global economy

Around the world, coffee beans provide a living for about 25 million farmers, many of whom have never tasted espresso. Their daily earnings amount to the cost of a few lattes.



María Alice Molina Acuña, and her husband, José María Solano, prepare to turn in their harvest at Bella Vista Tres Rios. The family earned a little more than \$20 for this day's work.



Julian Mendoza Blandon, 85, from Nicaragua, sorts coffee berries at Santa Elena Farm in Costa Rica's mountainous Terrazu region.



At day's end, pickers hoist their buckets of berries to a truck at Bella Vista Tres Rios, one of Costa Rica's oldest coffee farms. Bella Vista's washed arabica beans are sold exclusively to Starbucks.

< Coffee

FROM A1

SEATTLE HELPS FUEL A WORLD MARKET

Rising demand has been catalyst

At Tres Rios farm make their way through an elaborate international chain of commerce that begins in the fields of Costa Rica, continues on container ships bound for Seattle and ends in more than 4,000 company-run Starbucks stores in the U.S.

Americans' coffee obsession fuels more than a fourth of global coffee sales. Specialty coffee — made by carefully roasting the highest-quality arabica beans to yield richer flavor — has grown to claim about 40 percent of the U.S. market. Starbucks has parlayed coffee into hundreds of millions in profit for its shareholders: Since the company went public in June 1992, its stock value has risen more than 3,200 percent.

The craze for gourmet coffee has become a small but significant player in global economic politics. Rising demand has sparked calls for social and economic change in the developing world. That demand has helped specialty-coffee farmers and workers in developing countries maintain their way of life and has become a weapon in the fights for environmentally friendly farming.

It also has brought together communities that are worlds apart to enrich each other culturally, socially and economically.

The coffee crisis

Coffee is the world's No. 2 commodity, after oil. The most recent annual harvest produced 6.7 million tons of beans.

Arabica beans — the higher-quality ones preferred by specialty coffeehouses — require higher altitudes, temperate climates and nutrient-rich soil. They grow well on the fertile slopes of volcanoes in tropical Costa Rica. In the U.S., Hawaii and Puerto Rico grow the only coffee sold commercially.

The coffee market is dominated by lower-grade unwashed arabica and robusta beans, which are combined to make some canned blends and instant coffees. Robustas grow in hotter, wetter, lower-altitude regions and yield more beans than arabica plants.

In the late 1990s, Brazil and Vietnam began flooding the market with cheap beans, causing a nearly 5-year-old global coffee crisis that has forced scores of Central American arabica-bean farms to shut down and has destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of growers and workers.

The glut sent prices plummeting on world commodities markets: Coffee that sold for nearly \$2 a pound wholesale in 1997



BETTY UDESEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

These pickers from Panama traveled four days by foot, ferry and bus to reach Santa Elena farm in Costa Rica. The workers told the farm's owner, Luz Marina Trujillo, that they want to return for next year's harvest despite the arduous journey.

sold for less than 50 cents in 2001 and 2002.

In Central America, it costs between 60 cents and 90 cents to produce enough beans for a pound of specialty coffee, according to the Specialty Coffee Association of America. In Costa Rica, costs can top \$1 a pound, some farmers say. As prices fell below production costs, farms in Central America began to fail, cutting jobs or shutting down altogether.

Small-scale farmers and those who produced lower-quality arabica beans faced little or no demand for their crops. In Nicaragua and Honduras, countries hit hard by drought and food shortages, farmers and pickers fled to cities in search of food and jobs.

Over the past year, prices have recovered somewhat on the exchanges. Cold weather in Brazil ruined some crops and reduced the overall coffee supply, sending wholesale bean prices to between 70 and 80 cents a pound.

Even at that price, growers struggle to make a profit and must weigh whether to abandon coffee.

The steady demand for gourmet coffee in North America, Europe and the Far East has sustained workers at farms like Bella Vista, which sells its washed arabica beans exclusively to Starbucks.

"Buying that latte is the difference between day and night for the producers," said Alfredo Robert, whose Alsacia Coffee Estate in Costa Rica grows coffee for Starbucks and Peet's Coffee & Tea, among other chains. "It's as simple as that. Don't go farther."

The tradition of coffee

Coffee is a tradition in Tres Rios, where generations have grown up picking beans at Bella Vista, one of Costa Rica's oldest coffee farms. About 30,000 of the country's 4 million people are coffee farmers, and about 500,000 or so — many from neighboring countries — pick and process beans.

Coffee has long been Costa Rica's most famous export, once accounting for nearly one-third of the nation's gross domestic product. While it now claims less than

5 percent of the national GDP — giving way to microchips, textiles and medical devices — coffee remains central to the country's identity.

Most of Costa Rica's presidents have been descendants of the coffee elite. When the seven-month picking season peaks — from December through February — an economic ripple effect swiftly spreads through the region.

"Small business sells when the coffee is picking," said Robert, formerly Costa Rica's minister of agriculture. "The economy moves because of the coffee."

Generations of Tres Rios children have grown up picking coffee, a tradition that stems not only from workers' limited day-care options, but a desire to instill a lifelong work ethic.

"If you don't teach the kids to work, they will be alcoholics and go to drugs," said María Alice Molina Acuña, Solano's wife. Now 67, she began picking coffee at 13, working beside her mother in the same fields she picks today.

Regardless of their current social standing, most Costa Ricans

have some connection to coffee. For generations, picking coffee has been something of a rite of passage.

"When you talk to people in Costa Rica, most of the people, they've been pickers," said Luz Marina Trujillo, a native Colombian who owns the Santa Elena coffee farm in Costa Rica's mountainous Terrazu region. "Even if they have money or something ... they grew up in the coffee fields. It's incredible."

Solano, who moved to Tres Rios from a nearby village when he married Acuña 40 years ago, says he has picked coffee all his life. He works as a gardener in the off-season, and Acuña cleans houses year-round to help make ends meet. During the peak of the coffee harvest, Solano picks six days a week. Acuña joins him when she isn't cleaning.

In January, when school is out, the couple's daughter and grandchildren often go with them to the fields to earn extra money. Although public schools in Costa Rica are free and among the best in Central America, families must

buy uniforms, books and supplies.

Without coffee, the Solanos might clean or garden full-time or pick other crops such as bananas. They could work at microchip plants or at the detergent factory up the hill.

But Solano prefers picking coffee, which he says puts his mind at ease. And the job's physical demands — picking, sorting and hauling coffee for hours on end amid 80- to 90-degree heat — are second nature to Solano, who earnestly maintains that it "isn't hard work."

A look at the harvest

Solano rises early on a Saturday as the picking season draws to a close. He leads his family on a two-mile walk to the fields, joined by his wife, daughter María, 29; and three grandchildren — Andrea, 11; Junior, 9; and Josué, 3.

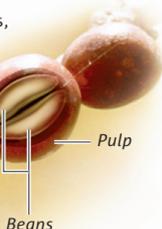
As their mother and grandparents hurriedly fill wicker baskets with coffee berries, the children intermittently pluck berries and drop them into plastic pitchers and bowls. Each contribution

From field to cup

A coffee bean goes through a complex sequence of harvesting, processing and roasting before it reaches your cup. Here is an overview of the "washed" wet-milled method of processing arabica beans, the type used to make gourmet coffee.

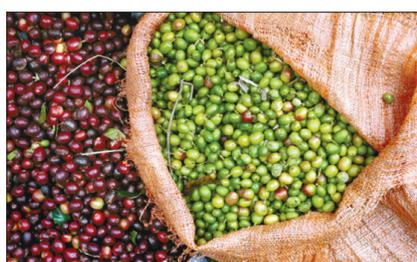
1 Picking

Coffee berries, also called cherries, are stripped from trees and dropped into pickers' baskets. Each cherry has two coffee beans, surrounded by fruity pulp.



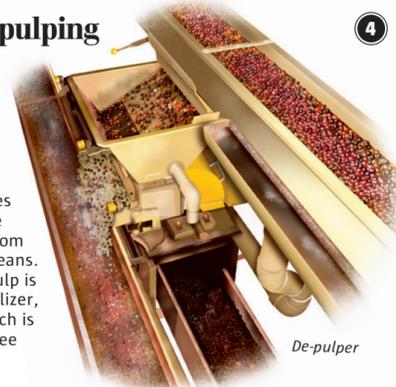
2 Sorting

At end of the day, pickers sort cherries according to their ripeness. The green cherries, not fully ripened, produce lower-quality coffee and are set aside for domestic consumption.



3 De-pulping

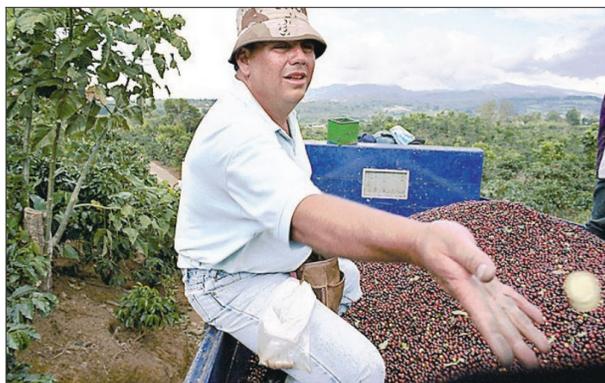
Cherries are placed in channels of water that lead to de-pulping machines. The machines separate the outer skin from the coffee beans. Discarded pulp is used as fertilizer, some of which is used on coffee crops.



4 Fermenting

De-pulped coffee beans are placed in fermenting tanks where enzymes and bacteria loosen what is left of the pulp.

For generations of Costa Ricans, picking coffee has been something of a rite of passage, regardless of their social standing.



As payment for the day's harvest at Bella Vista Tres Rios, Costa Rican colónes are tossed into the pickers' buckets by supervisor Edwin Villalobos Sánchez. Workers earn \$5 to \$15 a day.



Her hands sticky and blackened from the miel (honey) of the coffee berries, Andrea Cano Solano, 11, spent a Saturday working at Bella Vista Tres Rios with her family.



Alvaro Azofeifa Fonseca, 67, shovels coffee beans from one pile to another on a patio at Bella Vista Tres Rios to ensure they dry evenly. His take-home pay is about \$80 a week.

adds to the family's earnings.

At the end of the picking day at Bella Vista, workers empty their baskets into burlap sacks that weigh nearly 100 pounds when full.

"Buena cogida," Acuña says. Good picking.

As Acuña takes her grandchildren to wash their sap-blackened hands and faces in a nearby stream, Solano and his daughter feverishly sort ripe red berries from unripe green ones and pour them into burlap sacks.

Solano, whose sinewy build belies his 135 pounds, hoists each sack and carries it the length of a football field. He empties the sacks into several plastic buckets, and his daughter hands them up to workers in the bed of a truck. The beans are poured from the buckets into smaller metal bins, and pickers are paid based on the number of bins they fill.

For the Solanos, who picked enough coffee to fill nearly 26 bins, that means about 9,000 colónes, or a little more than \$20, to divide among Solano, his wife and their daughter. Bella Vista pays 350 colónes, or about 78 cents, for a bin of berries, the minimum wage set by Costa Rica's government.

Edwin Villalobos Sánchez, a Bella Vista supervisor and agronomy (crop-production) engineer, carries a plastic sack filled with coins to pay workers. He tosses coins into the emptied buckets as they're handed back down to the pickers.

Clink by clink, another day in the coffee fields comes to a close.

Migratory pickers

Miles away in the Terrazu mountains, a group of Panamanian Indians typifies the migratory workers who pick coffee all over Central America. The group traveled four days to reach Santa Elena, which supplies beans to Seattle's Best Coffee, now owned by Starbucks.

Group leader Dionicio Quintero Rodríguez, 30, described how he, his wife and 20 companions spent a day walking in rubber boots from their village in northern Panama to a ferry landing on the country's Pacific coast. The next day, they rode a ferry to Costa Rica, followed by another daylong walk to catch a bus headed for the vicinity of San José, the country's capital.

At Santa Elena, the Panamanians stay for several weeks in temporary housing provided by the farm. The corrugated-metal buildings have concrete floors, full-size bunk beds and rooms lit with a single bulb. Pickers at Santa Elena earned 400 colónes (about 90 cents) for each bin of berries, slightly above minimum wage.

Rodríguez is happy enough with the wages and housing. He vows to bring 100 workers to next year's harvest.

Sitting under the shade of eucalyptus trees after a day of picking



BETTY UDESEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

María Alice Molina Acuña and her husband of 40 years, José María Solano, have harvested coffee since childhood. Solano says today's earnings will go mainly toward tomorrow's food. They are among about 500,000 people who pick and process beans in Costa Rica.

coffee on the mountains' steep slopes, Rodríguez and his wife, Rufina Diguison, sorted red berries from green while keeping an eye on their three young children. Diguison intently sifted through her pile of berries with one hand while holding and nursing her 8-month-old daughter, Anelsa, with the other.

The chain of coffee

After the day's harvest, trucks overflowing with picked coffee deliver the berries to Bella Vista's *beneficio* — a mill that turns the ripe red berries into smooth unroasted beans.

Coffee berries — also called "cherries" — have two beans in the middle, surrounded by a fruity pulp. The berries are dumped from the truck into a water tank with channels leading to whirring, churning de-pulping machines that separate the pulp from the beans.

Once the de-pulped beans have been fermented and washed, they are carried to concrete patios to be dried in the sun. These sun-drenched patios are the domain of workers such as Alvaro Azofeifa Fonseca, 67, who spends 10-hour days shoveling mounds of coffee beans from one long, narrow pile to the other.

Fonseca, a gregarious man whose mustache, tanned arms and wiry frame bring to mind the hero of Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," begins

shoveling at 6 a.m. His work ensures that beans dry evenly.

His only respites are 30 minutes for lunch and the occasional 15-minute break for — what else? — coffee. Fonseca drinks the lower-grade coffee sold for domestic consumption, brands called *Rey* and *Dorado*.

Fonseca shuffles his way up and down 30-yard stretches of drying beans, methodically scraping his shovel along the patio as he lifts beans to the top of the next heap. The work is long and tiring, but easier on his hands than his previ-

ous job of milking cows. His take-home pay is about \$80 a week.

As Bella Vista's shovelers work into the late-afternoon twilight, the faint chiming of church bells wafts over from the nearby town center: "The best bells in Costa Rica," Fonseca says.

After the patio-drying process, the beans are machine-dried at low temperatures to reach the target moisture content of around 12 percent. Once fully dried, beans are sorted by quality and bagged in burlap sacks, Bella Vista's destined for the Port of Seattle.



THE SEATTLE TIMES

Costa Rica at a glance

Profile: Costa Rica, considered a developing nation, is the political and economic star of Central America. It has a century-old democracy and the region's highest per capita gross domestic product, \$8,300. By comparison, the U.S. GDP is \$37,600.

Population: 4 million

Literacy rate: 96 percent, almost as high as the U.S. rate

Per capita income: \$4,193 a year in 2003, compared with \$28,605 a year in the U.S.

Major industries: Agriculture, technology, tourism

Geography: The country, whose coastal plains are divided by mountains and volcanoes, is slightly smaller than West Virginia.

Climate: Temperatures average 65 to 85 degrees year-round.

Major crops: Bananas, pineapples, coffee

Source: CIA World Factbook, U.S. State Department, Bureau of Economic Analysis

clinking into the pickers' buckets will quickly circulate throughout Tres Rios, underscoring the far-reaching economic effects of coffee.

Consider the pickup-truck driver who charges 500 colónes, or about \$1.12, for each daily round-trip from nearby Cervantes to the farms of Tres Rios. Or the snack vendor in Bella Vista's coffee fields who sells banana chips and fruit juice for about 25 cents a pop. Or the merchants in Tres Rios who sell standard-issue school uniforms — white shirts and navy-blue skirts or pants — for about \$4 each as the coffee harvest and upcoming school year combine to spur a wave of spending.

"All the stores are asking me how the picking is, because it affects the economy," Sánchez said.

Later in the afternoon, Solano and Acuña return to their one-bedroom house. Others in the row of small homes belong to other family members.

The homes, colored in pastel blues and reds, are bare-bones by Western standards — electricity but no hot water, portable plug-in stoves, metal roofs, concrete floors, small dirt yards. Solano has applied for a \$3,000 government loan to add a ceiling and tile floor.

Solano says coffee provides him a life he's content with. He lives within doors of his closest family members, and his neighborhood often rings with the laughter of his grandchildren.

Still, it's not an easy life, not by a long shot. For coffee pickers, part of the routine is uncertainty. Solano says today's earnings will go mainly toward tomorrow's food and the grandchildren's school uniforms, and whatever's left will go toward his family's meager savings.

"They give you money now ... but the money they give you, you're going to spend it immediately," Solano says through a translator. "It's not like a salary, that you know that every 15 days or a month you have a salary."

Come Monday, Solano must return to the fields for next week's subsistence.

"When you pick the coffee," Solano says, "you live day by day."

Reynaldo Matamoros Sánchez worked as Spanish translator in Costa Rica. Jake Batsell: jbatzell@hotmail.com Betty Udesen: budesen@seattletimes.com

PART 2:

Fair Trade, fairly traded ... deciphering the labels.
> *Tomorrow in The Times*

Q&A ONLINE: Join reporter Jake Batsell for a Q&A Wednesday at noon. Send questions to: liveqa@seattletimes.com. < Noon to 1 p.m. Wednesday at seattletimes.com/shiftingfortunes



5 Sun-drying

Workers move mounds of beans from one side to the other so the beans dry evenly.

6 Final drying

Beans are then put in mechanical dryers to achieve a final moisture content of 11 to 13 percent.



Dried beans

7 Final sorting

They are then sorted by machines or by hand according to quality.

8 Shipping



Packed into export bags and loaded in container ships, the beans head to their destination.

9 Testing

The bags are taken from port to the coffee roaster's warehouse, where the beans are tested for quality and roasted.



10 Brewing

The roasted beans are put into bags and sent to coffee bars and grocery stores.