

ANGLAIS SUJET

HOLDING BACK THE BEANS – TO PERK UP THE PRICE OF COFFEE

An international plan by coffee-producing countries to hold back 20 per cent of exports seems to have done nothing to convince coffee traders that world prices could soon be back on the boil.

5 The price of the best coffee bean, arabica, has halved on world markets from 126 cents to 63 cents a pound, the lowest for a generation. Robusta beans, used for blended and instant coffees, now stand at around 30 cents.

10 Last October, members of the Association of Coffee Producing Countries (ACPC) agreed to retain a fifth of exports in order to raise prices, which they claim are too low to provide an economic return. Vietnam, the world's second largest producer, last week backed the plan and will hold back 2.5 million 60 kg bags – the standard measure for coffee and amounting to 150,000 tonnes – from the market. (...)

15 Brazil, the largest producer, accounting for more than a quarter of world output has so far retained 2.2 million 60 kg bags, more than 10 per cent of its exports last year, Colombia 600,000 bags and Mexico 90,000 bags. "I'm confident that as stocks decrease in consuming countries, so we shall see a recovery in world prices" said the ACPC's secretary-general, Roberto Silva.

20 Yet, despite the mushrooming of coffee bars in the high streets of western countries, supply still exceeds demand. The International Coffee Organisation estimates that production in 2000/2001 will be 113 million bags, of which nearly 11 million will remain unsold. (...)

25 But the retention plan requires discipline on the part of producers. Holding back exports leaves unsold coffee in producing countries, which growers may be tempted to dispose of in "back door" deals at low prices rather than see it rot. Burning the surpluses is one option. (...)

30 The tragedy for most of the 10 million people who grow coffee is that, although higher world prices will benefit the ACPC, on the ground they could make little difference. Most coffee is traded down a line of dealers before export and can change hands as many as 150 times. The growers' returns will remain meagre. A sustained period of low prices in the early nineties left many growers destitute ; some lost their land while others neglected their crop.

35 But around half a million coffee growers are now receiving more than three times the world price in an alternative market. They are those who grouped together in farmers' organisations to sell directly to coffee roasting companies who have been awarded the "Fairtrade Mark". (...)

40 But outside of this system, for consumers as for growers, changes in world price make little difference. Although it has halved in the past year, there has been little change in shop prices. "The price of the beans is a very small part of the cost of a jar of coffee" said a Nestlé spokesman.

40 That so much is spent on packaging, marketing and distribution can be of little comfort to those at either end of the chain.

Travail à faire

I. COMPREHENSION DU TEXTE (sur 40 points)

Answer these questions briefly and completely, quoting precisely from the text when possible and explaining when necessary.

1. What countries produce most of the coffee sold around the world ?
2. What happened to the arabica and robusta beans in the last few months ?
3. What action did the ACPC decide to take in October 2000 ?
4. What immediate consequences of this decision are revealed by this article ?
5. What is the aim behind this action ?
6. What might happen if growers and producers are not disciplined enough ?
7. What benefits will coffee growers derive from this action ? Why ?
8. What do the growers in the alternative market do ?
9. What advantage is there for them in this system ?
10. Will someone drinking coffee in a coffee bar pay less if the world price of coffee is lower ? Why ?

II. VERSION (sur 30 points)

Translate the following passages :

1. *From "The International Coffee Organisation..." (l. 18)
to "... remain unsold." (l. 20)*
2. *From "A sustained period of..." (l. 28)
to "... others neglected their crop." (l. 30)*
3. *From "Although it has halved..." (l. 36)
to "... in shop prices." (l. 37)*

III. EXPRESSION (sur 30 points)

How does a natural product become an exported and marketed product ? Starting from what can you learn from this text about coffee (from the bean on the farmer's land to the drink in a cup), comment on other similar developments.