

The Earth's Choice Women in Coffee Microfinance Program has been a transformative solution for hundreds of low income women in the specialty coffee industry in origin countries. Women producers typically do not have access to affordable credit and lack the business skills to manage a loan and grow their operations. While an important contributor to their household earnings, the coffee forests alone do not provide for a consistent year-round income.

Earth's Choice is pleased to announce the launch of its newest program, to benefit women coffee farmers in Honduras. In conjunction with the San Diego Downtown Breakfast Rotary Club and Rotary International, a \$200,000 global grant (#1873008) is planned in 2018-19. Earth's Choice was asked by Rotary to prove its program's viability and has, to date, launched six successful microfinance initiatives in five Central America countries, creating more than \$100,000 in capital for women in coffee. Along with Rotary, these programs have been supported by coffee companies and individual donors.

Microcredit for the impoverished is not a new idea. Earth's Choice takes a different, and transformative, approach through its "Learning Loan," created for women who are entrepreneurial but not business savvy. Earth's Choice gives women the necessary skills and experience to successfully manage a loan, with the support of a group of community members who are invested in their success. Once a woman repays her loan (100% have so far!), she can qualify on her own for additional credit. Each participating country establishes the loan parameters while Earth's Choice maintains quality control. Women gain crucial knowledge and skills and can support themselves, and their families, on their own terms. The community also benefits.



The Earth's Choice Learning Loan program is styled after the Grameen Bank group loan model. Typically these loans are to acquire assets and start or expand a business. While Earth's Choice shares some of Grameen's basic tenets, there are distinct differences to better accommodate each country's needs. The program was designed to be flexible and continues to evolve.

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Here is a brief description of the typical loan protocol:

- Earth's Choice Learning Loans are strictly for smallholder women of coffee. As long as a woman is growing specialty coffee in her own name, there are no age restrictions.
- A woman who has never had a loan in her name only must begin as a member of a group to whom credit is extended. Some countries have given larger loans to a single woman depending on her ability and the size of their portfolio.
- Earth's Choice in-country Partner must make an in-kind contribution to the project. Typically, they provide a "loan officer" and trainers in financial and business literacy.
- The in-country Partner opens and manages the Learning Loan bank account and sends quarterly financial and activity reports to the Earth's Choice Executive Director.
- Interest rates are determined within each country and are usually an average of typical in-country MFI rates.
- The program must become sustainable for the in-country Partner over time, as defined by the individual country. After two cycles in which loans are made and repaid, the grant money is turned over to the Partner, in accordance with Rotary Terms and Conditions. Earth's Choice is no longer an active participant in the program, but remains available for consultation.



With the Earth's Choice Learning Loan program, real impact is measurable, and the outcomes support achievement of the ultimate goal: eliminating poverty. Won't you join us in support of Honduran women in coffee?

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Visit the District 5340 webpage: www.matchinggrants.org
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