

Fairtrade Bananas

Valle del Chira is a cooperative of 182 small-scale banana producers based in the Piura region of North West Peru. The farmers have been selling to the fair trade market since October 2002.

Manuel Castillo was a founding member of *Valle del Chira*. "I used to sell to an export company but they didn't treat us fairly. We farmers weren't organised in any formal way; we just sold the fruit."

"So we joined together to form *Valle del Chira*. We formalised our situation. Then we started working with Biorganica [a fair trade exporting company]. We're working well with them. Biorganica pay us on time."



Manuel Castillo
Photo: Geoff Crawford

"The price is better now. Weekly, we harvest our bananas and we get paid every Saturday. We also have technicians who come and help us. They teach us how to cut the leaves and how to farm better."

For Manuel and his family, the higher price has brought many benefits. "With the better price, I've bought things to better my home: a stove, bicycles for my sons and a battery-powered TV. We are better off now. Before having a stove, we used to use kerosene and wood. My sons are able to get to our plot of land on their bicycles. Bicycles get them to where they need to go."

The farmers have used the additional premium that Fairtrade producers receive to buy a computer, desks, accounting books and a phone line for the cooperative office and to improve the roads around their plots of land. José Alama, a fellow member of *Valle del Chira* explains the importance of this: "Before, when it rained, we couldn't transport our bananas from our fields. With the improved roads, we can."



Manuel's sons: Faustino and José Vilchez
Photo: Geoff Crawford

Biorganica also arranges training for the farmers. Manuel explains: "We have technicians who come and help us. They teach us how to cut the leaves and how to farm better."

Carlos Malaver Sanchez is the President of *Valle del Chira*. He described the benefits of Fairtrade: "The main impact of Fairtrade has been the social impact – the betterment of the social conditions of the producers. A better income means better food."

And Manuel's hope for the future? "I hope that my children will be able to raise their children with a better education than I was able to provide for them."