



# Hives of

The Colombian region of Cordoba is slowly coming out of its years of guerilla warfare. To encourage the return of peace, the UN is installing beehives. The idea is to help coca growers become beekeepers. The Veolia Foundation supports the initiative.

**B**eekeeping for peace. The image is symbolic, and yet this insect, known for its peaceful and industrious nature, is indeed used as a means of professional reintegration, of environmental recovery and of fighting against drugs and violence. For the last three years, under the aegis of the United Nations, Colombian farmers have been replacing the illegal growing of coca with the production of honey. The Veolia Founda-



**A *cocalero* (coca grower) earns about 220 dollars net per month, per hectare, working full time, after the cost of the revolutionary tax, seeds and chemicals. With 20 hives, a farmer is ensured an income of about 173 dollars a month ...**

# Peace

tion has just contributed to the expansion of this initiative with a donation of 100,000 euros to purchase 1,000 hives for 50 families in the region of Córdoba, in the north east of the country.

"This project is part of the program of shared responsibility between the coca-producing countries and the cocaine-consuming countries, in which the latter help the former," explains the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Bogotá, which leads the project.

Since 2005, similar actions have been launched in some 15 regions of Colombia. The farmers who grew coca are encouraged to produce fruit, coffee, milk or even craft objects, while respecting the principles of fair trade.

There are many advantages to these alternative trades. Primarily the fight against the production of drugs of course, but they are also beneficial for the environment, a point that particularly interested the Veolia Foundation. ...



... using barely 70 m<sup>2</sup> of his farm and investing only one-tenth of his time. He can earn up to 780 dollars a month if he combines various crops on his land (for an average farm of 3 ha).

●●● Growing coca requires using an increasing amount of fertilizers. Furthermore, the manufacturing of the base paste, prior to the cocaine stage, requires numerous chemical products, such as sulfuric acid, acetone and ammonia, and leads to thousands of gallons of toxic liquids being dumped in the forest each year.

Finally, the coca plants are destroyed by aerial fumigation. This represents some 17,460 hectares, the equivalent of 51 times the size of New York's Central Park, that goes up in smoke.

"It's ultimately not that hard to convince the families," specifies Thierry Rostan, a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime official. "Not only are the farmers tired of war, but fumigation destroys the only possession they

**“ The families can expect to earn more than 300 dollars a month. ”**

have, their cultivable land. Coca doesn't actually bring in that much money." The average monthly income made from this crop is 225 dollars. Take away the tax they pay to the guerilla and the cost of the seeds and the chemicals needed for manufacturing the base paste.

"The only advantage is income security, as the market is guaranteed," adds Thierry Rostan.

So in order to fight with equal arms, the emphasis was put on the financial opportunities. The alternative productions are marketed by three

supermarket chains, including Carrefour Colombie and Exito, a local brand of the Casino group. Furthermore, the US government has agreed to commercialize coffee, chocolate and honey produced by the Colombian farm-



ers. "The families can expect to earn a little more than 300 dollars a month," proudly states Manuel Barrera (see inset opposite), which is much better than the income generated by growing coca.

"This project encompasses the three missions of the Veolia Foundation: environment, solidarity and professional reintegration. It therefore meets our criteria perfectly," states Marie-Laure Buisson, Deputy Executive Officer of the Foundation. She met Thierry Rostan on a trip to Colombia. "He presented us with three projects. The sponsor, Manuel Barrera, helped us choose the region of Cordoba, because it was the easiest in terms of support and monitoring," she explains. The first hives were installed last winter, with a first harvest expected in June—about four gallons of honey, which for fifty families represents a new life and hope. ■

### **Manuel Vicente Barrera**

**Director of Institutional Relations of Proactiva Colombia, sponsor of the "Colombian Apiculture Substitution" project**

"Colombia has been stigmatized internationally by the drug trafficking problem. You could almost say it is each Colombian citizen's duty to support, according to his own means, any initiative that may have an impact on or bring added value to the solution to this drug plague.

This project is therefore very important for us Colombians. In fact, Colombia would like companies to make even

stronger commitments. For us, the commitments of Veolia Environment and Proactiva Medio Ambiente make them socially responsible companies, restoring moral and ethical principles while giving farmers the possibility of sustainably developing a fully legal agricultural activity. This will give this country the possibility of seeing a future without violence, and bring about the peace that we all hope for."