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tions and needs versus current production and forward outlook.

The conference focused on the rising concerns of how to improve sustainability both in the tea-growing lands and their environments as well as in the domain of social responsibility. The huge share of small tea farmers worldwide was assessed to the amount of about 73 percent of the people involved and 60 percent of the production. A primary goal is keeping the farmers fully involved through better status and better wages. One of the challenges is coping with the threat of global warming and increasingly erratic weather patterns by taking urgent steps towards improved Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) protocols.

One of the resolutions discussed was implementing measures to endeavor to “go back to nature” by restoring the environment in the best possible way, namely through soil improvement, water management and irrigation, integrated pest management, the further planting of shade trees and complementary crops and moving forward in a constructive way by sharing science and experience through globally available protocols.—BD

Best of Panama Cupping Competition and Auction

The Specialty Coffee Association of Panama, Boquete, Panama, will host the 18th Annual Best of Panama Cupping Competition, May 7-10th, with an auction of winning lots to follow on June 24th.

The Specialty Coffee Association of Panama (SCAP) was founded in 1996 by a group of coffee producers in the highlands

of the country’s western Chiriquí Province bordering Costa Rica. The year following its inception, the SCAP held its first cupping competition to draw attention to what was then a little recognized origin and promote a better understanding of external markets and buyer preference among producers. Eighteen years later, the Best of Panama is an event much anticipated by all members of the coffee community hungry for the next gems emerging from Panama’s unique terroirs.

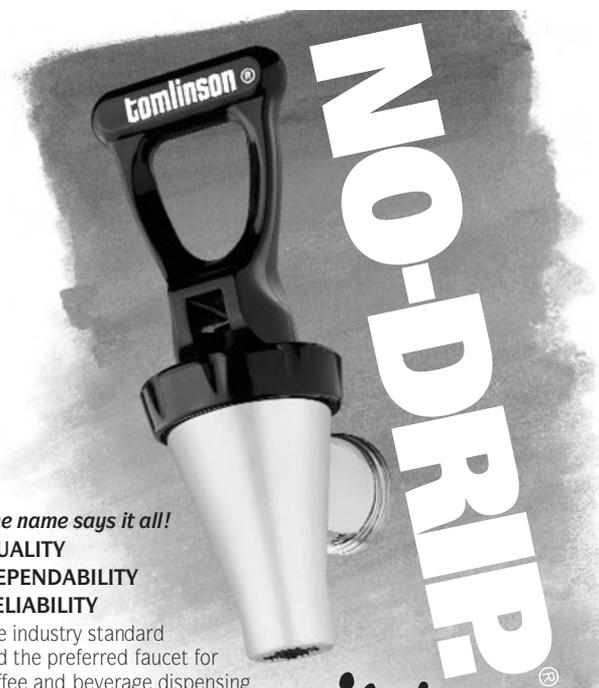
Panama has a tiny land area cultivating coffee compared to other producing nations, but it sets itself apart through distinctive, high-quality microlots. This year the Best of Panama competition will feature four categories: Traditional Washed, Traditional Naturals, Washed Geishas and Natural Geishas, with one category being judged each of the four days of the competition at the SCAP’s cupping lab and event space in Boquete, one of the country’s principal coffee-producing regions.

Ricardo Koyner, SCAP member and owner of Boquete’s Kotowa Coffee, looks forward to the diversity of coffees producers will submit this year. “The national jury screens the best 20 coffees of each category the week prior to the competition to let the international jury, composed of judges from Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, Europe and USA, narrow it down to the best eight that will go into the finals.”

The nationalities of the jurors correspond to Panama’s biggest markets. The fruity, floral and tea-like attributes of Panama’s coffees have long been attractive to buyers in Korea, Taiwan, and Japan who are eager to pay exponential premiums to secure the winning Best of Panama lots, ranging from several hundred to several thousand pounds. The premiums winning producers earned from previous Best of Panama competitions allowed growers to make necessary preventative investments against diseases. As a group, Panama’s specialty farms suffered minimal leaf rust damage during the recent epidemic because they were in an economic position to take precautions, thanks to the income earned from auction lots.

This year, producers submitting coffees in all of the competition’s four categories are eligible to participate in the first ever “Panama Cup,” a recognition “that will be awarded to the producer who collectively scores the most combined [cupping] points across all categories. The idea is to recognize the producer who submits the most winning coffees overall,” said Koyner.

Similar to the Cup of Excellence, the Best of Panama competition and auction promote goals of improving the quality of production throughout the country and introducing buyers to new flavors coming from small-holder farms and estates.—RN



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