

Catadores Estrellas (Star Cupper) Screening
Guatemala and El Salvador
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Chemonics International Inc.
CA DR Specialty Quality Coffee
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Final Report

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Executive Summary

A screening test was given to candidates for the “Star Cupper” program in Guatemala and El Salvador on October 1 & 2, 2003. The 3-part screening included several cupping and tasting segments, a written exam and an interview. The results of the cupping and tasting segments are the subject of this report.

The test was designed to detect both ability in two areas – cupping & sensory analysis. Cupping can be defined as tasting & evaluating coffees; sensory analysis is more general and refers to the ability to discern and rank differences in flavor, regardless of the product.

Guatemala fielded 14 candidates; El Salvador sent 22. **In each country only 2 (two) candidates excelled in both areas, which is statistically appropriate given the nature of the test.** In a world of many cuppers, there should only be a very few “stars”. There were other candidates who excelled in one area or the other; the detailed analysis at the end of this report will indicate the appropriate weight to be given to these results and a recommendation for those candidates.

This report recommends the inclusion of 3 candidates from Guatemala and 3 candidates from El Salvador to the Star Cupper Program. An additional 2 candidates from El Salvador and an additional 3 candidates from Guatemala could be included if they did extremely well on their written testing and interviews. The results of those tests are not known at this time.

At least 60% of the testing pool in each country did NOT achieve a score high enough to be considered a good candidate for intensive training. Several candidates tested very poorly, equivalent to the novice level.

The difference in point totals between Guatemala's top copper and El Salvador's was only 2 points (420 & 422 out of a possible 516 points), with El Salvador providing the highest scorer.

Of note was the fact that many of the larger exporting companies and cooperatives did not send coppers, it is conceivable that other qualified candidates in each country exist but have not expressed an interest to date.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Position: Final Screener for Star Cupper Training Program

Background: Chemonics International, working under contract with the United States Agency for International Development USAID/Guatemala, is assisting in the implementation of the project entitled Central American and Dominican Republic Quality Coffee Program (CADR – QCP). Chemonics is working with USAID/G-CAP to help the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic compete in the upscale segments of the coffee market. The comparative advantage of Central America and the Dominican Republic is in producing high quality coffee. The overall strategy for USAID’s work in this sector is to promote rural prosperity by increasing the competitiveness of small and medium producers of quality coffee, and by diversifying the rural economy. Enhanced quality and productivity, improved business linkages, market-oriented policies, and sound environmental management are essential elements of the program.

The first year workplan for the CADR - QCP has recently been completed. Within that work plan, the Chemonics team has outlined its planned core activities for each country in the regional program. In addition to these core activities, the project is expecting to carry out a coffee quality development aspect of the project entitled “Maximizing the Cup Profile”. This part of the project will focus on developing the quality of the coffee produced by the direct beneficiaries of the project. In addition, a group of Star Cuppers in each country will be trained on all aspects of the coffee market. These Star Cuppers will be trained over a period of 18 months with an intensive curriculum that will prepare them for taking an international grading exam for the “Q” Contract currently being developed by the Coffee Quality Institute. These cuppers will not only become eligible to grade coffee destined to auction but will also become trainers for less experienced cuppers in their home countries.

Technical Responsibilities: The Final Screener of Star Cupper candidates will be in charge of testing and evaluating the proposed candidates for the Star Cupper Training Program in Guatemala together with the director of the Maximizing the Cup Profile portion of the CADR project. This will include developing the testing standards and procedures for the final screening and administering the test in Guatemala & El Salvador.

RESULTS

The consultant delivered the following items and outcomes during the assignment:

1. A curriculum and agenda for screening potential candidates
2. Supplies and testing sheets for the conduct of the screening
3. On-site facilitation and implementation of the screening in both countries
4. Grading of test papers and results, analysis of results.
5. Final Report

Curriculum

A 5-part test was developed, designed to test the candidate's ability to discern subtle differences in flavors, and also to discern where their "minimum thresholds" were with regard to flavor detection. The 5 parts were:

- 1. Wide spectrum triangulation.** 3 coffees from distinctly different origins (example: Kenya, Guatemala, Sulawesi) are arranged in 6 groups of 3 cups, within each group are two cups from one origin and one from another, the participant must identify the odd cup.

Purpose: This is a large-aperture filter that will screen out novice cuppers. This should be a fairly easy exercise for a good cupper.
- 2. Basic Sensory Skills Test.** 9 samples of water-based solutions are presented to the candidates, consisting of 3 major groups (Sweet, Salty, Sour) in three intensities (Least, Medium, Most). The students are told which major group each sample falls into; they must then rank them in order of intensity.

Purpose: As above, this test quickly determines who has basic tasting ability. A low score here indicates that the candidate will have difficulty ranking multiple coffees next to each other.
- 3. Sensory Skills 202.** 9 samples of water-based solutions are presented to the candidates, consisting of 3 major groups (Sweet, Salty, Sour) in three intensities (Least, Medium, Most). Candidates must first identify the group of each sample, and then the intensity.

Purpose: While an extremely low score here is worrisome, of more interest are those who score very well. These candidates show true natural ability and immediately mark themselves as potential candidates. They have not only demonstrated basic tasting ability but also the ability to rank samples amongst others of their kind, which is an advanced skill.
- 4. Tight angle triangulation.** 3 coffees from the host country (example: Genuine Antigua, Frijanes & HueHueTenango) are arranged in 6 groups of 3 cups, within each group are two cups from one origin and one from another, the participant must identify the odd cup.

Purpose: This is an advanced test – those who score well here demonstrate an ability to discern very subtle differences in coffees that are very similar. A low score on the 2nd triangulation with a high score on the first indicates that the participant may benefit from training, especially if coupled with good scores on the 1st and 2nd sensory tests. A high score here coupled with a low score on the first triangulation indicates a "one-trick pony", in other words the cupper is too close to the coffees from his origin and needs to be exposed to much more of the coffee world. Without good natural sensory skills, this would not be a good candidate.
- 5. Advanced Sensory Skills Test.** 8 samples of water-based solutions are presented to the candidates. Each sample is a blend of EITHER two OR three samples from the previous tests. The candidate is not told if a sample has 2 or 3

parts. The response must include which major groups are represented in each sample, AND at what intensities.

Purpose: This is a very advanced test; low scores typically dominate this exam. The sole purpose of this test is to detect “superstar” tasters – a score of 70 or higher immediately indicates someone with advanced tasting ability. Scores on this test can be raised through training, assuming the candidate has good basic sensory skills.

Notes on test implementation

In each country, the testing proceeded without any consequential technical issues. Care was taken to insure that all samples were “blind” – randomly numbered cups were used, and students were kept away from the triangulation samples until after the water was poured, in order to eliminate any observation of slight differences in color during the roast.

Of note in each country was the disturbing trend on the part of the candidates to rush through each segment of the test. Despite several slow spots in the implementation (breaks for cleaning and resetting, waiting for water to heat, etc...) the participants finished early. It is possible that some scores could have improved if more time was taken. It is unclear if this is a cultural issue or simple one of overconfidence, however the effect on test scores is clear. In no case was a participant asked to finish before the allotted time, however when all students indicated that they were finished the facilitator moved to the next item on the agenda.

However, patience and care are both characteristics of good cuppers, so a re-take of the test is NOT indicated in this case.

Test Results

Guatemala – Raw Data (Sorted by Overall Point Totals)

	Empresa	T#1	T #2	S#1	S#2	S#3	TOTAL	
1	Cesar Eduardo Ambrocio	Anacafe	100	85	100	77	58	420
2	Jose Roberto Stahl		100	50	66	100	54	370
3	Carlos Roberto Munoz		85	50	66	100	62	363
4	Jose Conrado Vargas		85	85	100	66	25	361
	Miguel Angel Turcios	Fedecocagua						
5	Perez		85	85	100	56	25	351
6	Jorge Manuel de Leon		100	15	100	77	42	334
7	Amilcar Mendez Tobias		100	100	33	56	42	331
8	Jose Umberto Pena		100	30	66	77	58	331
	Gustavo Adolfo Galicia	Fedecocagua						
9	Torres		85	30	100	66	48	329
10	Guillermo Federico Huevo		50	30	100	77	70	327
11	Juan Antonio Silvestre		70	50	100	33	58	311
12	Arturo Rodriguez Hevia		30	50	100	89	42	311
13	Jose Arnaldo Padilla		50	15	100	56	42	263
14	Jorge Agustin Figueroa		30	15	33	56	42	176

	Triangle	Sensory	RECOMMEND	
	Subtotal	Subtotal		
1	Cesar Eduardo Ambrocio	185	235	YES
2	Jose Roberto Stahl	150	220	YES
3	Carlos Roberto Munoz	135	228	TBD
4	Jose Conrado Vargas	170	191	NO
5	Miguel Angel Turcios Perez	170	181	NO
6	Jorge Manuel de Leon	115	219	TBD*
7	Amilcar Mendez Tobias	200	131	NO
8	Jose Umberto Pena	130	201	NO
9	Gustavo Adolfo Galicia Torres	115	214	NO
10	Guillermo Federico Huevo	80	247	YES
11	Juan Antonio Silvestre	120	191	NO
12	Arturo Rodriguez Hevia	80	231	TBD
13	Jose Arnaldo Padilla	65	198	NO
14	Jorge Agustin Figueroa	45	131	NO

***For TBD Candidates, the results of the written test and interview should be the deciding factor, the candidate has potential but perhaps not as much as the other recommended candidates.**

Guatemala Star Cupper Screening

Notes:

Candidate 7 knows how to detect coffees but not how to rank them, nor how to discern different basic flavors. An interview result that indicated that he is open to lots of training would change the recommendation.

Candidate 9 is on his way to becoming a solid cupper but is not at the level of the upper candidates.

Candidates 10 & 12 clearly are natural born tasters. Unless their written test or interview indicates otherwise, they would benefit from extra training. Candidate 10 was the only one to pass all 3 sensory tests.

Basic Decision making criteria is that the candidate should have a passing score on the triangulation (140+) and score at least 220 points in the combined sensory tests. If a candidate places in the top 2 for sensory skills points, extra consideration should be given.

Test Results

El Salvador – Raw Data (Sorted by Overall Points)

	T#1	T #2	S#1	S#2	S#3	TOTAL
1 Ernesto Velasquez Zarco	100	70	100	100	52	422
2 Juan Menendez Arguello	100	50	100	100	46	396
3 Aldo Ruffatti Lopez	100	70	77	44	75	366
4 Jorge Alberto Villacorta	85	85	66	88	33	357
5 Hulme Clemente Molina	70	70	100	66	48	354
6 Jorge Escobar Borja	100	50	100	55	48	353
7 Oscar Alberto Machuca	100	70	77	55	48	350
8 Carlos Portillo Santamaria	85	50	100	66	44	345
9 Jose Ramirez May	100	85	66	33	52	336
10 Marcelino Samayoa	30	70	100	77	50	327
11 Jose Henriquez Guerrero	85	70	77	44	40	316
12 Dora Alicia Ramirez	50	50	100	44	69	313
13 Manuel Enrique Godinez	50	50	100	44	56	300
14 Luis Aguirre Najera	85	50	66	66	33	300
15 Rafael Sandoval Revelo	85	30	100	55	25	295
16 Emilio Lopez	30	15	100	77	64	286
17 Fredy Arbizu Pena	50	50	77	55	46	278
18 Luis Ramirez Ramos	70	30	100	44	33	277
19 Boris Elias Fernandez	85	15	77	55	40	272
20 Ricardo Serrano Mendez	100	30	66	44	29	269
21 Jose Margarito Gomez	70	30	22	33	38	193
22 Ramon Davila Bonilla	30	15	66	33	29	173

El Salvador – Subtotals and Recommendations

	Triangle Subtotal	Sensory Subtotal	RECOMMEND
1 Ernesto Velasquez Zarco	170	252	YES
2 Juan Menendez Arguello	150	246	YES
3 Aldo Ruffatti Lopez	170	196	NO
4 Jorge Alberto Villacorta	170	187	NO
5 Hulme Clemente Molina	140	214	YES
6 Jorge Escobar Borja	150	203	NO
7 Oscar Alberto Machuca	170	180	NO
8 Carlos Portillo Santamaria	135	210	NO
9 Jose Ramirez May	185	151	NO
10 Marcelino Samayoa	100	227	TBD
11 Jose Henriquez Guerrero	155	161	NO
12 Dora Alicia Ramirez	100	213	NO
13 Manuel Enrique Godinez	100	200	NO
14 Luis Aguirre Najera	135	165	NO
15 Rafael Sandoval Revelo	115	180	NO
16 Emilio Lopez	45	241	TBD
17 Fredy Arbizu Pena	100	178	NO
18 Luis Ramirez Ramos	100	177	NO
19 Boris Elias Fernandez	100	172	NO
20 Ricardo Serrano Mendez	130	139	NO
21 Jose Margarito Gomez	100	93	NO
22 Ramon Davila Bonilla	45	128	NO

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