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Dispatches from the Field: Panama

Panama solidified its place on the global coffee map with the pricy actions of Boquete's geisha, and the country's specialty coffee growers are still producing truly unique coffees from the country's nooks and crannies of microclimates.

But the quality of Panama's coffee is not indicative of security. The coveted growing regions of Volcán and Boquete are shrinking with the continued influx of both foreign and domestic real estate development. Prized coffee land is valuable for producing an extraordinary cup, but it is exponentially more valuable for producing condos with stunning mountain vistas.

Voracious real estate and skyrocketing property prices are not the only peril facing Panamanian coffee. The arrival of the *roya* coffee leaf rust has hit Panama with as much force as the rest of Central America. Most farms and farmers battling *roya* are doing so for the first time; isolated growing regions and generally cool climates had previously exempted them from the leaf rust's destruction.

Because the Panamanian government has essentially no interaction with the coffee sector, there is no national plan to stop the *roya*'s spread or mitigate its effects. Organic and sustainable farmers are trying to halt the rust with aggressive applications of EM microorganisms to both soil

Many of Panama's coveted coffee-growing regions are shrinking with the surge of both foreign and domestic real-estate development.

and leaves. Conventional farmers are aggressively applying curative fumigants. Economically struggling farmers are either cutting out affected trees or taking a completely hands-off approach and hoping that the rust will run its course, leaving them with enough trees to yield a harvest of one quarter the average next year.

Panama's many indigenous farmers growing coffee on their land inside the country's *comarcas* are acutely suffering from the *roya*'s effects. Their already older, weaker trees are being devastated by the rust, leaving them to wonder if they'll ever see any coffee on their trees again.—RN

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