

## **Some Regions Report Early Bloom for Costa Rica's 2008-09 Coffee Crop**

*By Marvin G.*

March 24 (CoffeeNetwork) Buyers of Costa Rican coffees may be in for an early harvest this year, as recent unusual rain in parts of the country triggered an early bloom, which could speed up collection for the 2008-09 crop, according to local sources.

Recent rains ushered an earlier-than-usual flowering in parts of the West Central Valley region of the country, known as Valle Occidental, where high-altitude grown coffees are the prevalent type. And although news of the early bloom portends a good harvest, the situation could bring labor challenges to growers.

The early bloom on the West Valley which typically occurs in April-May might coincide with flowering on the lower-altitude areas, bringing the crop at the same time.

The Central Valley is one of the seven coffee producing regions of Costa Rica.

Because coffee pickers move from area to the next one as beans are ready to be picked - spreading the use available for the sector - there could be a shortage of hands if harvesting takes place simultaneously by October-November in both areas.

Typically, coffee workers move from the low-lying areas, where coffee is picked October-November, to medium altitude areas – Nov-Dec – and then to high altitude areas Dec-January.

Coffee plantations in the municipalities of Turrialba, Juan Viñas, Orosi, and Pérez Zeledón have early maturation (Oct-Nov), while Atenas, San Ramón and Palmares in the West Central Valley (Valle Central Occidental) have maturation peak between Nov-Dec., so both regions are likely to have the harvest at the same time, according to local reports.

In recent years, local producers have also employed foreign labor from Nicaragua and Panama during harvest, as competing demand for workers from other sectors - such as pineapples, construction and tourism - has sharply diminished labor availability for coffee, which remains the third largest agricultural export after pineapples and bananas.

The country, one of the main suppliers to Starbucks Corp., produced about 1.79 million 60-kilo bags in 2006-07, up from 1.75 million bags the previous year. 2007-08 output is seen around 2 million bags.

The country consumes about 20% of national output. The marketing year runs from Oct to September. About two-thirds of coffee exports are sold in the differentiated markets, fetching high premiums for their qualities.

As reported, Guatemalan coffee growers in Antigua another producing area of high quality coffees have reported an early flowering for the coming 2008-09 crop.