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Small Businesses Strive For Global Reach

Local Restaurant Invests In Honduran Highlands

POSTED: 7:50 pm CDT July 19, 2009
 UPDATED: 8:22 pm CDT July 19, 2009



BENTONVILLE, Ark. -- It's no secret that most large American companies have global reach. But now, some local small businesses with just a handful of employees are literally planting the seeds of their business half a world away.

It used to be that only the big boys had enough money and capital to pour resources into developing countries. But now, smaller firms in the area are joining the globalized economy, and it's having an impact on some of the most remote regions of the world.

"It's a remote village way up in the mountains of the Opalaca mountain chain," said Rick Boosey, the owner of World Garden, a restaurant and coffee shop in Bentonville.

"They live in mud huts, thatched roofs, no running water, no electricity -- a very impoverished state," said Mark Bray, the coffee roaster for World Garden.

Bray was in a remote village in the mountains of Honduras last month. He was helping to prepare for the annual coffee harvest there, while also working for World Garden, a local small business that is investing directly in Honduras.

"My efforts are focused on helping them improve the quality of their harvest. The better quality that they have, the higher price that they're going to receive for their coffee," Bray said.

The goal is to raise the locals' living standards while providing a quality product back home.

"It just shows you what a global world we live in, how a small firm can make connections thousands of miles away to bring a product back to our neck of the woods," said Jeff Cooperstein, an economist with the University of Arkansas.

It's something large corporations have done for years, but small-town shops are tasting for the first time.

"We get a chance to make a difference in Central America. How often does a little tiny business get a chance to do something like that?" Boosey said.

Cooperstein added that the biggest potential drawback to these international business relationships is the unpredictability of the political and economic situations in many developing countries. Honduras is a perfect example, as the recent coup there may delay the World Garden team's next trip to the Honduran highlands.

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