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Andres Nuñez is the leader of the Twelve Apostles, a group of farmers from the Casil cooperative who are working this year to sell their coffee as a specialty lot.



"Twelve Apostles" Lead Way for Casil San Ignacio, Peru

By Laura Tilghman

Andres Nuñez and eleven of his fellow farmers from the Casil Cooperative have always been leaders among the coffee growers of San Ignacio in northern Peru. Year after year, they have been instrumental to the success of Casil, which underwent a revitalization in the early 2000s. Today, the cooperative has about 220 members who each grow his or her organic coffee on less than three hectares of land.

This year, Andres is leading the group of twelve outstanding farmers, including himself, in an effort to sell their coffee as a special lot, under the name "Twelve Apostles." Each of the growers

has been producing coffee for over 40 years and they take great care in growing and processing their coffee.

The Twelve Apostles are hoping that their effort to sell a special lot will provide an example for the other members of the cooperative for the market potential of really high quality coffee and the power of direct relationships with roasters. The Twelve Apostles all have reputations as leaders, and they hope their efforts will inspire other members of Casil to take the same care in their coffee production.

In many ways, Andres embodies the story of these twelve

farmers. He has grown coffee in the mountains of San Ignacio his entire life. As a boy, he helped his father and mother on their family farm. He remembers picking the ripe red coffee cherries during the harvest season, starting from when he was about eight years old. Sometimes there would not even be time to break for lunch in the middle of the day, and Andres would suck on the red cherries, enjoying their sweet pulp as a snack. While it was hard work, Andres remembers his childhood fondly and says each year he was excited to harvest.



Below: The town of San Ignacio in northern Peru, where the farmers of the Twelve Apostles live.



Andres has always been a forward thinker and adaptable, providing a positive example among the Casil members. For instance, he carefully follows the recommendations of the co-op extensionists on how to improve his organic production. About six years ago, Andres also began to serve as part of the co-op's management. He served on the oversight committee, then was elected as the co-op's General Manager. As the manager, Andres learned the business and logistical aspects of the co-op in the same careful detail that he had always managed his coffee farm.

Today, Andres has left the post of General Manager and is focusing his efforts on the Twelve Apostles' lot. This small group of seasoned farmers grow their coffee at 1,600 meters elevation in the communities of Ihuamaca, Uranche, Selva Andina, and Alto Tomache. Each grows his coffee in a distinct micro-climate around the Tabaconas National Sanctuary, an environmental reserve in the region. Together with Sustainable Harvest, the Twelve Apostles have evaluated each farmer's coffee to determine how to group them into a specialty lot. While

each grower has his own distinct profile because of the differing micro-climates, in general the profiles of their coffees all share the honeyed and dried fruit flavors, a citric acid that evokes passion fruit, and floral notes.

The specialty lot from the Twelve Apostles is the first time that these farmers or the cooperative have put together a specialty lot from just a few producers. Oscar Gonzales of Sustainable Harvest at Origin in Peru has helped guide the farmers during the process. He adds that since this is their first time working on a project like this, the Twelve Apostles are refining the details of how they collect the coffee from each person's farm and store it between processing stages. Oscar believes that as the farmers improve the operations of putting together the special lot, the excellent quality will only continue to improve.

To see a satellite map of the San Ignacio region where the Twelve Apostles grow their coffee, [click here](#).