



July 17, 2015

Dear ACE member:

We value and appreciate your support of and commitment to The Alliance for Coffee Excellence (ACE) and the Cup of Excellence program. Many of you are also COE auction buyers, and as such, you are an integral part of the process that rewards those farmers who produce winning COE coffees.

As you know, the Cup of Excellence competition has existed for sixteen years. Much has changed in that time, in both the specialty coffee world and the world of technology. The time has now come for ACE to “fine-tune” and upgrade the COE process. As part of a long-term strategic plan, our focus will be on four items:

- developing a new auction platform
- updating existing competition standards and protocols
- creating and implementing an electronic cupping form, and
- improving post-auction logistical issues with respect to deliveries of purchased lots

We hope to have these new COE pieces in place for the 2016 competition season. The goal, of course, is to increase the auction prices paid to farmers and ensure that COE coffees continue to represent the pinnacle of excellence. The changes we are implementing are exciting, and we believe they will result in more opportunities for coffee growers, more incredible coffees, and far better customer service for buyers. All of the planned improvements are designed with the express purpose of making sure the Cup of Excellence that we all care so much about can continue to be the most impactful coffee quality program in the industry.

Given our staff size, however, it is very difficult to institute these changes while still maintaining a full COE schedule next year. As a result, the ACE Board of Directors has determined that it is necessary to scale back the COE competition schedule for 2016. This is a temporary move, one that we expect will result in even bigger and better competitions in 2017 and future years. In 2016, COE competitions will be held in the following five countries: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras. Once we have implemented the new auction platform and competition standards in these countries next year, we intend to significantly scale up again, with COE competitions in many of the same countries we have worked with in the past, and hopefully new countries as well.

Our decision to temporarily scale back COE competitions in 2016 was a very difficult one for the board. We understand that this decision will impact farmers in countries without a COE program next year, and will also mean that in 2016, there will be fewer COE coffees for our members to buy. Ultimately, however, the board determined that this step was necessary to ensure that program changes can be successfully implemented and consistently replicated across all country programs. We have had personal conversations with all of our partner organizations to inform them of these decisions, and we very much appreciate their cooperation and understanding during this transition period.

We are still developing the ACE membership plan for 2016, but we will send you the 2016 membership details later this year. Given the shift in the competition schedule for next year, we expect new membership registration, as well as COE jury registration, to occur on the ACE website in early January 2016.

If you have any questions, please contact me at gwatts@intellegentsiacoffee.com, or Debbie Hill, our Executive Director, at debbie@cupofexcellence.org. Again, our members are the lifeblood of our organization and we appreciate your support as the COE program continues to evolve.

Sincerely,

Geoff Watts
Chair, ACE Board of Directors

