

“A Coffee Crop Withers” Discussion Guide

For the article [“A Coffee Crop Withers”](#) by Elisabeth Malkin, which appeared in *The New York Times* on May 5, 2014.

Read the article at nytimes.com/2014/05/06/business/international/fungus-cripples-coffee-production-across-central-america.html (or use the direct link above).

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the complex factors that make the Central American economy so vulnerable to *la roya*?
2. The article refers to *la roya* as “a slow-onset natural disaster” (page 2). How might the response of aid groups, governments, and individuals differ in this case as compared to a disaster such as an earthquake or a tsunami? Why do you think that is?
3. The article mentions many ways in which *la roya* has a ripple effect, affecting individuals, families, communities, and entire nations far beyond coffee production. Which of these examples stood out to you most? Can you think of others?
4. As coffee-drinkers and as North Americans, do you feel we have a role to play in helping farmers combat coffee rust? For what reasons?
5. Was there a fact or image that stood out to you from the article that you might refer back to if you tell others about *la roya*?
6. Did you find any kernels of hope in this mostly bleak article?

Additional Resources

Watch Equal Exchange’s 3-minute video about coffee rust and the Red Cherry Challenge.
youtube.com/watch?v=6U8Vz0btk5k

Read about how *la roya* is affecting some of Equal Exchange’s farmer partners at
<http://equalexchange.coop/blog/coffee-leaf-rust-devastates-coffee-farms>.

Screen the feature-length documentary *Connected by Coffee*, which explores many challenges facing farmers in the Fair Trade system, including coffee rust. Purchase the DVD or screen it online for free at <http://connectedbycoffee.com>.