

The Invisible Scientist: Farmers, Plant Breeders, and the Uneven Modernization of Latin America's Coffee

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One of the most dramatic transformations of coffee production in Latin America was the "technification" of its coffee farms starting in the 1970s. In the 1930s, plant breeders began developing high-yielding "dwarf" coffee varieties. But fully technified farming has only become the dominant mode of producing coffee in a handful of countries (albeit large ones). Breeders have continually struggled - with mixed success - to make themselves visible to coffee farmers, to develop coffee varieties that are relevant to their needs. Since 1990, breeders have also had to take into account the increasingly volatile economic and environmental conditions faced by the coffee growers and the coffee industry as a whole. In particular, breeders have paid attention to improving cup quality, resistance emergent diseases and pests, different farming practices, and the impacts of climate change. Coffee farmers, for their part, have sometimes embraced these new coffees wholeheartedly, sometimes selectively, and sometimes not at all.



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2:30-4:30 PM

via Zoom

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This event is part of the MIT Seminar on Environmental and Agricultural History sponsored by the History Faculty and the Program in Science, Technology and Society. For more information contact kalopes@mit.edu