

Image. **Freepik, 2024.**

# A Tea for Mexico

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# HEALING THE LAND

Mexico has one of the most extensive herbal traditions, fundamental in ancestral medicine of pre-Hispanic civilizations (Aztec, Maya, Mixtec, among others) and their traditional practices have transcended thousands of years. Mexico's extensive plant variety makes it one of the twelve countries with largest global biodiversity. "The Mexican flora consists of over 23 thousand species with an over 40% endemic level" (PAOT, 2006).

Traditional Mexican herbalism is in jeopardy due to industrialized agricultural practices that depend on the use of pesticides and other chemicals, as they affect the capacity of the land to produce nutrients. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Mexico mentions that the "excessive collection of some large demand species is resulting in many of them being in danger of extinction" (SADER, 2016). Valle de Bravo, in the State of Mexico, is renowned for being a tourist attraction due to its dam-lake and its colonial architecture (it is a Magic Town since 2005), and it is also a region with great agricultural tradition; it houses several botanical species of traditional Mexican herbalism.

In 1998, Dr. Dieter Le Noir, a Mexican-German physician, specialized in Anthroposophical Medicine, Biodynamic Agriculture, and inhabitant of Valle de Bravo, notices the loss of botanical biodiversity in his environment. Being involved in research topics related to the use of medicinal plants as treatment of several illnesses, Dr. Le Noir realizes that in order to heal the human body, the land must be healed first. Keeping this in mind, he founds Flor de la Paz, I.A.P. (Private Assistance Institution), an

> ...organization devoted to the development of sustainable social projects in rural communities nearby Valle de Bravo, México, whose main target is to improve health, agriculture, and education, in order to promote a salutogenic culture that contributes to the improvement of the human being's health and their environment (Flor de la Paz, 2023).

Dr. Le Noir and his associates started the project with seven hectares in Valle de Bravo; these were in very bad shape as the previous owners had used chemical fertilizers and pesticides. For six months the Flor de la Paz team focused on healing the land using a process of green compost to recover the nutrients, beneficial microbiology, and free the soil from erosion.

Once the land was recovered, Dr. Le Noir and his team grew chamomile, cedar, melissa, and pericon with the goal of producing medicinal herbal teas based on Mexican herbalism. “The elaboration of organically produced teas does not only guarantee the physical wellbeing recommended in each of their presentations (serenity, wellbeing, enjoyment, essence of the soul, etc.), but it also provides economic help for the community where it is located” (Jiménez, 2021).



**In Valle de Bravo, there are six months of rain and six dry months, and based on this rainfall, they developed a rain collection system that has enabled to water the plants through drip irrigation in the dry months.**

Image. **Wirestock in Freepik, 2024.**

# A 100% ORGANIC AGRICULTURAL MODEL

The success of Flor de la Paz by bringing those seven hectares back to life was based on sustainable agricultural practices and they developed the 100% organic Agri-Culture model. This model is founded on three axes: sustainable agriculture, medicinal plants, and decent jobs. Sustainable agriculture prohibits the use of fertilizers and chemical pesticides, soil overexploitation is prevented, water is used consciously and saved to the maximum extent possible. In their first cultivation area, Flor de la Paz built "...two lakes for rain collection, through which each hectare is supplied through a drip irrigation system that provides the water each plant needs (no more, no less), thus the percentage of saving of this vital liquid is higher" (Flor de la Paz, 2023).

Plant cultivation with medicinal properties that are later harvested are transformed into infusions or brews, popularly known in Mexico as teas. Flor de la Paz sells them with a 100% organic and pesticide-free certification, which also provide different health benefits. "The foundation is born in this way, not receiving donations, but being sustained by the products we are producing, and which has brought jobs to the people of the community, also cooperating for children to have education guaranteed" (Jiménez, 2021).

Images.**Freepik, Smashicons, Kerismaker and Reion in Flaticon, 2024.**

## AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES OF FLOR DE LA PAZ

- Biodynamic and organic handling applying green compost and seeds.
- Beneficial microbiology to fight pests.
- Natural barriers that combat soil erosion.
- Application of sulphate and calcium products to nurture the land.
- Harvesting according to lunar alignment and the planets.
- International organic certification.
- Drip irrigation. This prevents erosion and the plant receives only what it needs with no waste.

Source: Beyond Line, 2023.

With the decent job axis, Flor de la Paz meets a very important social mission: dignifying the job of Mexican farmers, thus they are trained in organic agriculture techniques and procedures, receiving a fair price for their harvests, and benefitting from the construction of schools and housing improvement.

In 2024, Flor de la Paz has 32 hectares, three artificial lakes, and it benefits the agricultural communities of *San José Potrerillos, Huerta San Agustín, El Manzano and Mesa Rica*, all of them in the State of Mexico. Thanks to the flowers of the chamomile, lavender, cedar, and pericon crops, they also contribute to bee preservation and thereby apiculture has emerged as an additional activity. Thanks to this, they have their own line of organic multiflora honey.



Image. **Freepik, 2024.**

**"Our goal us to continue training more farmers and ejido members of vulnerable areas, that in a given term can plant their own lands and become a supplier extension of Flor de la Paz, thus creating a livelihood that will give peace of mind to their families" (Flor de la Paz, 2023).**

The quality of the products of Flor de la Paz, together with their social and environmental mission, has enabled them to sell their products in several stores. "Today, you may find a variety of Flor de la Paz teas as well as sachets, their infuser cup, and organic honey in different points of sale like *Vips, Superama, La Comer, La Europea, Chedraui, El Palacio de Hierro, and Liverpool*, among others; additionally these infusions are in several restaurants like *Pujol, Eno, and Cafe O*, among others". (Noticias NEO, 2021).

# CHALLENGES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND COMPETITION

Flor de la Paz is facing the challenge of climate change: 2023 has been considered the hottest year in Mexico according to the National Meteorological System (SMN). Nevertheless, several historical heat records were broken in the country in the early months of 2024. This affects agriculture in two ways: the first one is water availability, the higher the temperature, the higher the evaporation of water sources; the lack of rain brings about longer droughts. In 2024, the Cutzamala system reached record drought levels, by February 2024 "...the current water storage (of the Cutzamala system) is of 39.3% of its capacity, quite below the historical average of 76.2% at this time of the year. This number represents a 37% decrease". (Montejo, 2024).

The Cutzamala System is essential for the work of Flor de la Paz, as the Valle de Bravo Lagoon, which in fact is a dam, is part of that system. Due to climate change, the rainy season was delayed in Mexico and the Valle de Bravo dam reached very low historical levels. According to OCAVM (*Organismo de Cuenca Aguas del Valle de México*/ Water Basin Agency), on May 20, 2024, the Cutzamala System was at 27.6% of its total capacity; in previous years, on the same dates, its capacity was around 52%. "...Valle de Bravo is now a blot that contracts, made up by increasingly contaminated water and muddy plains due to drought, the transfer of the liquid towards the capital, bad planning, and illegality". (*Proceso*, 2024).



Image. **ArthurHidden in Freepik, 2024.**

**Changes brought about by climate change weaken the fields of Flor de la Paz, thus, their complete production chain, but that is not the only challenge they face.**

And the second harmful effect of high temperatures is that some types of crops are not resistant to them. For instance, chamomile flower needs "...between 20 and 25 degrees Celsius, otherwise it weakens", as affirmed by the farmers of Flor de la Paz. (Jiménez, 2021).

Consumption of teas and infusions in Mexico is a category that has been on the rise since 2009, according to the Agrifood and Fisheries Information System (SIAP). In Mexico, around 80% of the population are used to preparing and consuming homemade infusions. “In 2009, Mexico imported 620 tons of tea from USA, China, Argentina, and Canada” (Agircultural Ministry of Chile in Mexico, 2011), and this increased 8.2% in 2014. Even when Mexican consumers have shown a growing interest for teas and infusions, it is of great concern that most of what is consumed is imported. Even in the segment of organic infusions as the ones offered by Flor de la Paz, competition is increasing.

## CONSUMPTION OF TEAS AND INFUSIONS IN MEXICO

*Most consumed infusions:

- Chamomile
- Lemon (grass)
- Peppermint
- Jamaica

* In 2011, 40% of Mexicans affirmed they consumed tea.

*The market value of tea in Mexico is 980 million pesos (MXN) (2016).

* In 2016, Mexico imported one thousand tons of tea.

* In 2021, the per cápita tea consumption in Mexico was of 8 cups annually.

Source: Celestial Seasonings, 2019.



Image. **Freepik, 2024.**

# COMMUNICATING THE HIGHER PURPOSE

Unlike other tea and infusion companies, Flor de la Paz has a fine model of sustainable production with a social purpose. The effective transmission of this message to the final consumer is essential to support their value proposition and become more competitive before an increasing complex environment (climate and competition). Thereon, the following questions arise:

- How could Flor de la Paz effectively communicate their higher purpose?
- How can they better convey their value proposition to their stakeholders and the final consumer?
- Which communication strategies are suggested to Flor de la Paz to prove their sustainability Mission and social development in Mexico to the final consumer?
- How can storytelling be used to inspire customers (retail companies like *Chedraui, Liverpool, Costco, Amazon*, or restaurants like *Vips* and *Eno*), the final consumer, and Flor de la Paz' partners towards a more sustainable, ethical, and socially aware future?

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