

Colombia

While high levels of spray activity continue in the Guaviare coca growing area, efforts to expand the program and achieve overall coca reductions face a number of challenges, including geography and the changing dynamics of the coca trade in the region.

- [redacted] Colombian coca eradication spray activity for the first five months of the year has nearly surpassed last year's total efforts. From January through mid-May of this year, an estimated 15,655 hectares of coca has been sprayed with the herbicide glyphosate—last year, total spray efforts amounted to only about 16,000 hectares.
- *Despite spray efforts in 1995 and 1996—when an estimated 40,000 hectares of coca in the Guaviare growing area was sprayed—Colombian coca cultivation increased.* From 1995 to 1996 overall cultivation jumped some 32 percent¹, while cultivation within the Guaviare growing area—outside of the zones routinely sprayed—increased by 34 percent. [redacted]

After nearly eight months of planning, spray operations began in mid-May out of the new forward operating base at Larandia, Caqueta, only to be halted a day later due to developments in the ongoing hostage negotiations between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). [redacted]

- The initial standdown of operations will last until mid-June, coinciding with the suspension of military operations and the demilitarization of large portions of Caqueta Department; however, *the standdown could be longer if negotiations with the FARC become protracted.* [redacted]

[redacted]
[redacted] Intensive spray activity at the end of the year—an estimated 9,320 hectares of coca was sprayed between October and December 1996—may result in the gradual death of some of this cultivation which will be reflected in the 1997 estimate. [redacted]

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The geography of the growing areas and inclement weather also will make aerial spray operations tough going in Caqueta and Putumayo.

- Coca fields in Caqueta and Putumayo are closer to licit agriculture, making accurate and proper application of glyphosate in the hilly and heavily forested terrain much more difficult, especially using the planned larger spray-equipped OV-10 aircraft rather than the more maneuverable T-65.
- Rainy weather will hinder aircraft operations and reduce the effectiveness of glyphosate, a water soluble compound.

While most of the current debate over the success or failure of the aerial eradication program has centered on the "effectiveness" of the herbicide glyphosate, there are other equally significant reasons why coca cultivation continues to increase.

- **Regional market forces.** Air interdiction and other antidrug efforts in Peru have encouraged Colombians to produce more coca domestically.
- **The economic realities of the coca industry.** Farmers and laborers can generally earn a greater amount of money in the coca industry than in any other comparable agricultural endeavor.
- **Coca growers can easily shift cultivation to new areas.** Abundant unclaimed land due to the lack of property rights, and the government's lack of effective political control over these areas present ample opportunity for growers seeking to evade eradication efforts.
- **The tenuous security situation.** Coca is grown in guerrilla-dominated areas which limits the government's ability to conduct successful antinarcotics operations and, more importantly, severely hinders the government's ability to successfully promote social and economic development schemes to provide alternatives to coca growing.

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