



Honduran Military Discovers Coca Plantation with 40,000 Plants

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpts discuss the evolution of cocaine production in Honduras. Since 2017, authorities have discovered two separate cocaine plantations in the country. In 2017, it was assumed that the problem had been mitigated, but with the recent discovery of a new and even larger plantation, it appears that Honduras is now a cocaine production country even if it is growing significantly less than key production countries such as Colombia and Peru.

In mid-May 2019, Honduran news source *La Prensa* reported that authorities discovered a cocaine plantation and processing lab in the Limon community of Irióna (a coastal city located 454 kilometers from Tegucigalpa). The lab was discovered as a result of a joint operation between the Air Force, the Navy and the Xantruch Joint Task Force, as discussed in the passage. Following the discovery of this plantation, Honduran news source *Inter.hon* provided information regarding items seized from the laboratory, including “20 sacks of cocaine leaves ready for processing, 200 gallons of gasoline, 200 gallons of diesel and other chemical precursors needed to produce cocaine base.” The source also notes that authorities estimated about 30 individuals working at this plantation.



Coca Leaf Plant.

Source: Crista Castellanos via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coca_leaf_hoja_colombia_crista_castellanos.JPG, CC BY-SA 4.0

The discovery of the new narco plantation/lab is significant because in April 2017, Honduran news source *El Heraldo* reported the discovery of the first ever coca plantation in the Olancho Department of Honduras. At that time, authorities believed traffickers were simply testing new growth sites as nothing like this had ever occurred in Honduras. Now, authorities are realizing that this is not the case.

As the fourth passage from *Estrategia y Negocios* discusses, these discoveries demonstrate that “drug cartels are looking for new growth sites. It also reveals how traffickers are re-thinking their operational schemes and evolving to grow cocaine plants in other countries.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“A joint operation conducted by Honduran Armed forces led to the discovery of the second cocaine plantation and narco lab to ever be found in Honduras.”

Source: “Honduras localiza cultivo de hoja de coca y un narcolaboratorio (Honduras Finds Cocaine Plantation and Narco Lab),” *La Prensa*, 17 May 2019. <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1285195-410/honduras-localiza-cultivo-de-hoja-de-coca-y-un-narcolaboratorio>

A joint operation conducted by Honduran Armed forces led to the discovery of the second cocaine plantation and narco lab to ever be found in Honduras. The plantation had 40,000 plants. Following the discovery of this plantation and lab, soldiers searched areas around the lab to ensure there were no additional growth sites within the vicinity.

Source: “Encuentran Narcolaboratorio y 40 Mil Plantas de Coca en Colon (Authorities Discover Narco Lab and 40,000 Cocaine Plants in Colon, Honduras),” *Inter.hon*, 17 May 2019. <https://inter.hn/noticias/encuentran-narcolaboratorio-y-40-mil-plantas-de-coca-en-colon>

Authorities discovered a narco lab at the site. Items seized from the lab included 20 sacks of cocaine leaves ready for processing, 200 gallons of gasoline, 200 gallons of diesel and other chemical precursors needed to produce cocaine base. Authorities estimated that approximately 30 individuals worked at the lab.

Source: “Honduras: Incautan plantación clandestina de coca en Esquipulas del Norte (Clandestine Coca Plantation Seized in Esquipulas del Norte, Honduras),” *El Heraldo*, 27 April 2017. <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/1067087-466/honduras-incautan-plantaci%C3%B3n-clandestina-de-coca-en-esquipulas-del-norte>

Three months of surveillance and intelligence collection aided Honduran authorities in discovering the countries’ first ever coca plantation on 27 April 2017. The plantation itself was located on top of a mountain in the Palos Blancos village of Olancho. From this location, drug traffickers were growing more than 10,000 cocaine plants and 1,200 seedlings.

Source: “Honduras descubre plantación de coca (Cocaine Plantation Discovered in Honduras),” *Estrategia y Negocios*, 7 June 2017. <https://www.estrategiaynegocios.net/centroamericaymundo/1078918-330/honduras-descubre-plantaci%C3%B3n-de-coca>

Army intelligence agents believe that the discovery of the this cocaine plantation in Honduras demonstrates that drug cartels are looking for new growth sites. It also reveals how traffickers are re-thinking their operational schemes and evolving to grow cocaine plants in other countries. At the time authorities discovered the first plantation/lab, analysts indicated that this new phenomenon should put other countries on alert as the same thing could happen within their sovereign territory.