

FLIES FOR PEACE

Former FARC fighters are being trained as insect breeders so they can build new lives for themselves. The soldier flies they breed can serve as animal feed and give the former guerrillas a sustainable source of income.

After the peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government, about 60,000 FARC combatants went back to small-scale farming, but they have found it hard to make ends meet. The Colombian Karol Barragán studied black soldier flies during her PhD research in Wageningen and now intends to use her knowledge to help the new farmers. Insects for Peace is an initiative by the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, to which the Wageningen Laboratory of Entomology is contributing. Soldier flies are a useful source of protein in animal feed and are easy to breed on local waste flows such as manure or harvest residues, without any need for major investments. Barragán: 'The reason these people joined FARC in the first place was poverty. Now they



▲ After 20 years in FARC, Ricardo Arciniegas Cárdenas is now building a new life as an insect farmer.

have to start all over again. Breeding soldier flies is a cheap, innovative way of building an independent livelihood. If farmers breed insects themselves, they don't have to buy expensive import products for their animals, and

they can earn money by selling their surplus.' The project's primary target group is ex-combatants, but 'ordinary' farmers are welcome too, emphasizes Marcel Dicke, who is involved in the project on the Wageningen side. 'We want to stimulate a local, sustainable economy.'

The first proud insect farmer is Ricardo Arciniegas Cárdenas. He joined FARC at the age of 13 and was a soldier for 20 years. Now he is breeding soldier flies and working with five students who are doing their research on the process. The results will be used to start insect breeding in other regions. Last November, Ricardo gave a presentation on Insects for Peace at the Universidad Nacional. Barragán: 'A beautiful moment. It is tremendously important for a respected institute such as the university to help these people. They were always seen as the enemy, and we hope we can change that. Collaboration between the ex-guerrillas and the rest of the population helps them to reintegrate.' **ICJ**