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Colombia: Opium Cultivation Reaches Commercial Levels [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
commercial-scale cultivation of opium in Colombia is relatively new, widespread, and expanding. [REDACTED]

How-
ever, less than ideal growing conditions and practices used by Colombian farmers to grow and harvest opium poppy are probably resulting in low yields. We expect that opium yields will rapidly increase as farmers gain experience. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] opium is not cultivated as an alternative to other narcotics crops with the possible exception of the coca growing area [REDACTED]

Opium Cultivation Soars

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We believe that most opium cultivation is by growers entering the narcotics business for the first time. The collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in July of 1989 may have been a contributing factor to the recent upsurge of opium cultivation. The lack of a coffee agreement, which had maintained coffee prices at artificially high levels, has resulted in a decrease in the profit margin of Colombia's small coffee producers. [REDACTED] many farmers hurt by the high freight and transportation costs have turned to opium cultivation as a quick fix to their economic plight. [REDACTED]

The greatest concentrations of opium in Colombia occur in the mountainous areas of Huila, Cauca, Tolima, and Santander Departments. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The high profit potential from opium—even compared to coca—is undoubtedly stimulating production. Press reports indicate that Colombian growers earn two to three times as much from opium than from any other licit crop. A sizable cash-flow could be realized within four to five months following planting. Traffickers subsidize the growers' startup costs and provide a guaranteed market, according to the press and [REDACTED], as further enticements for farmers to enter the trade. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] this is a relatively large field size and could make the crop more vulnerable to eradication, especially through aerial spraying. [REDACTED]

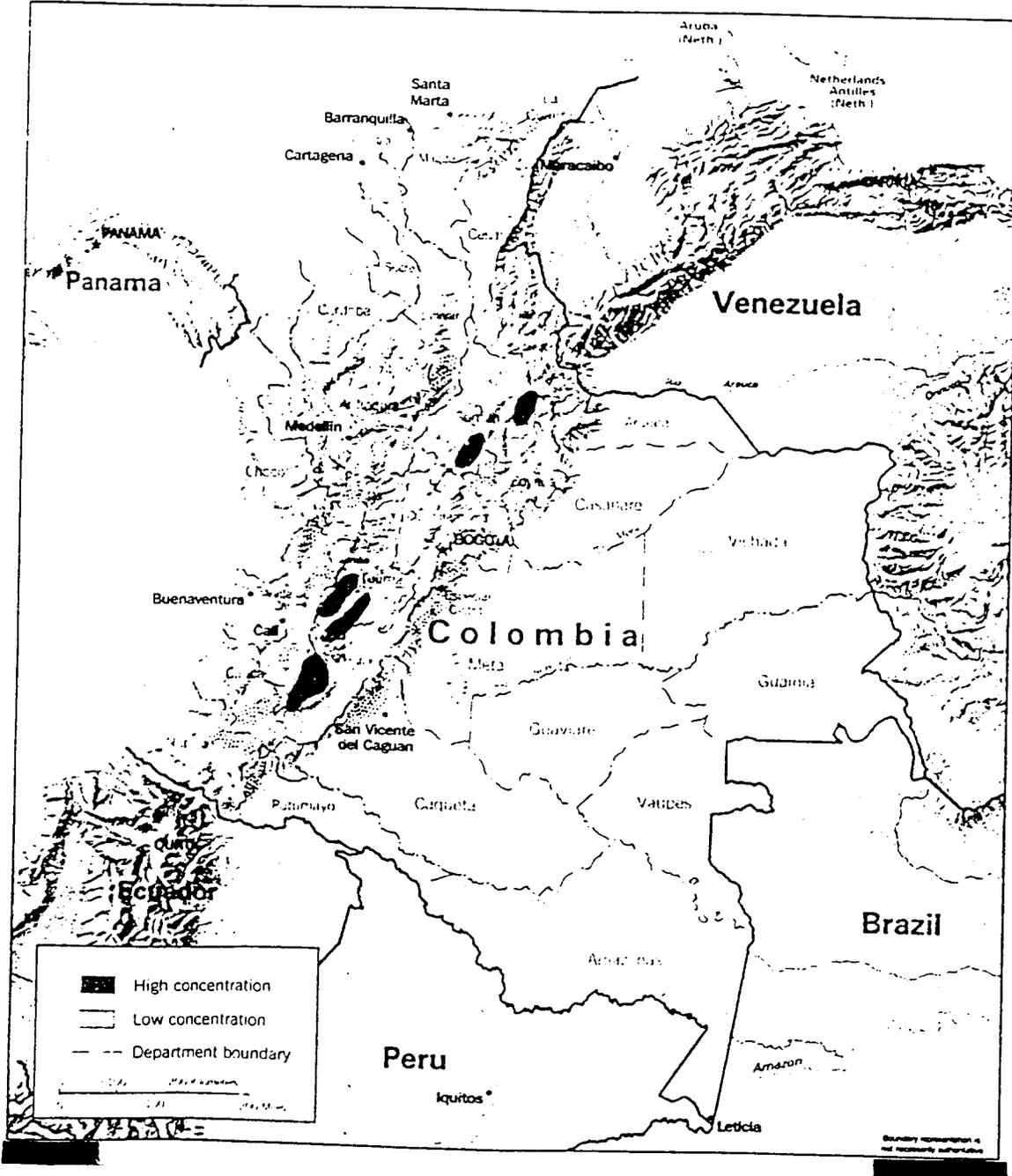
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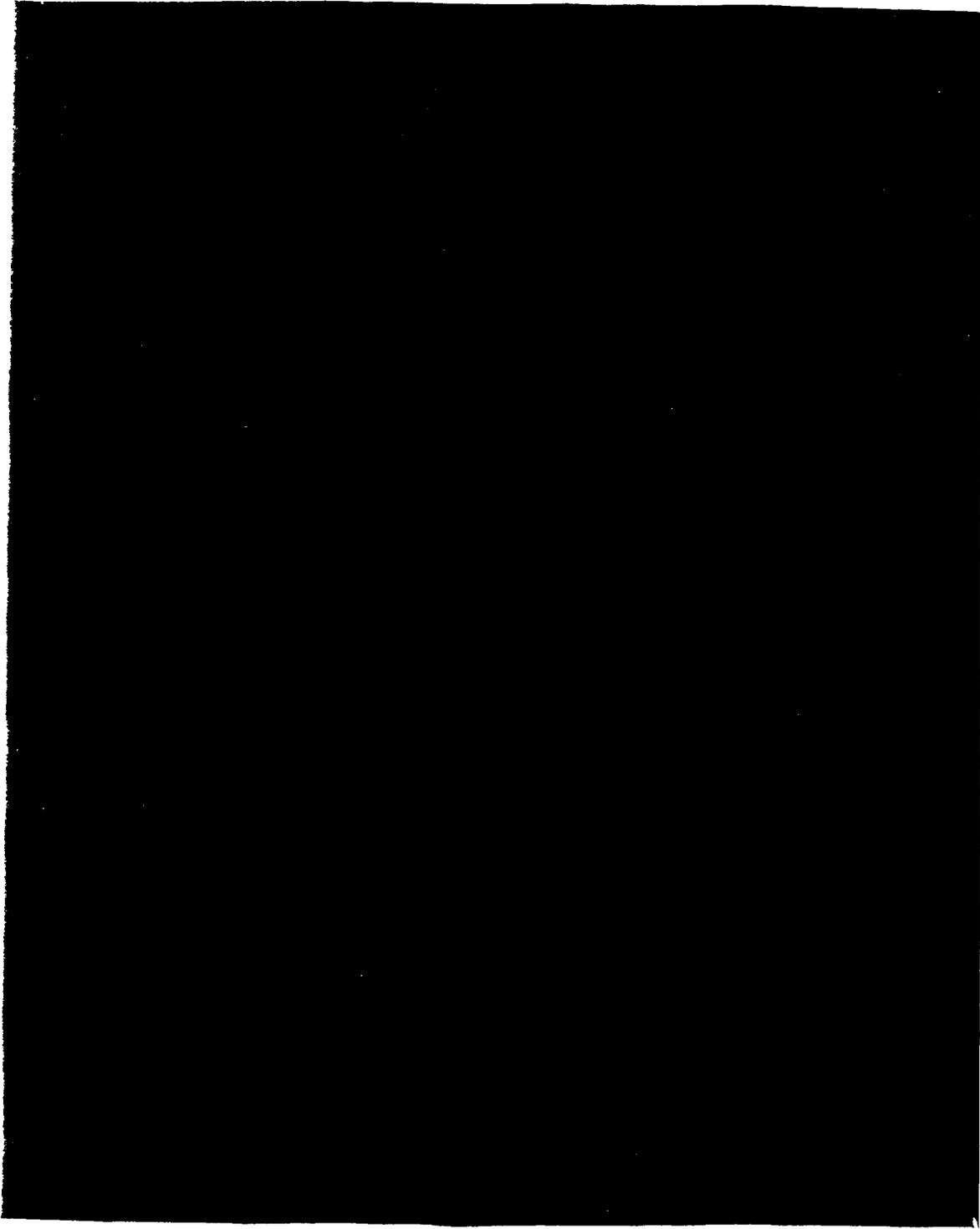
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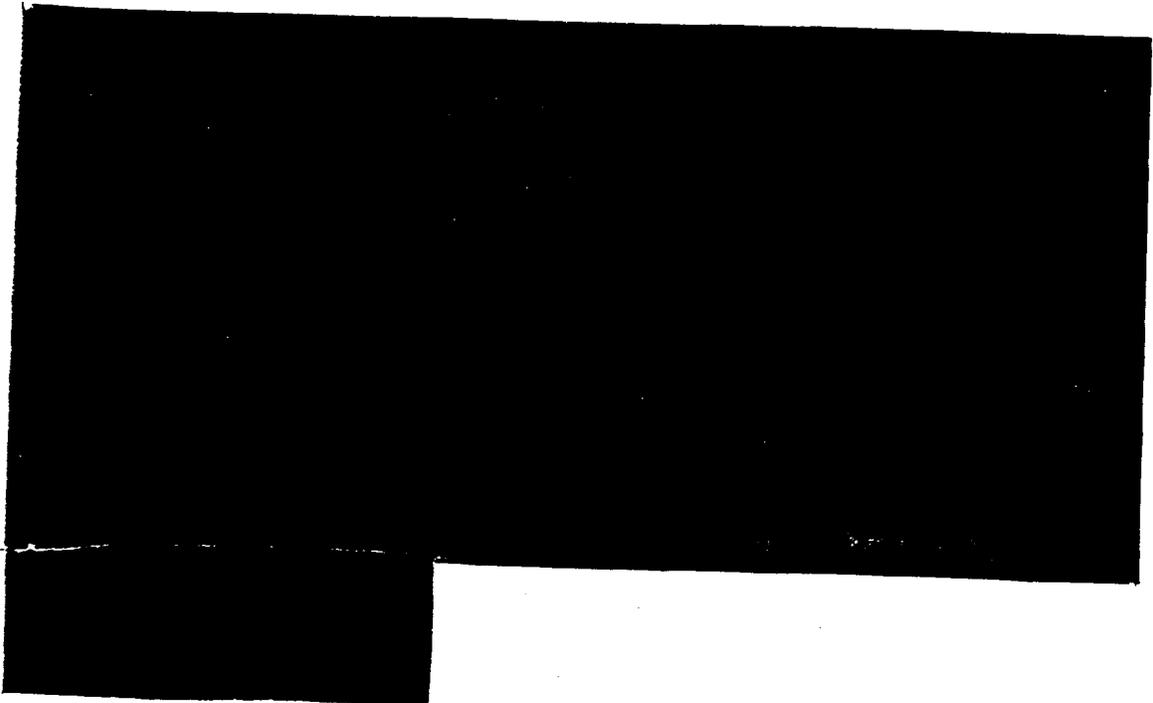
Figure 1
Colombia: Areas of Opium Cultivation, 1991



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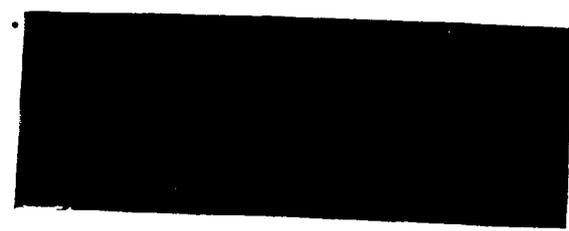
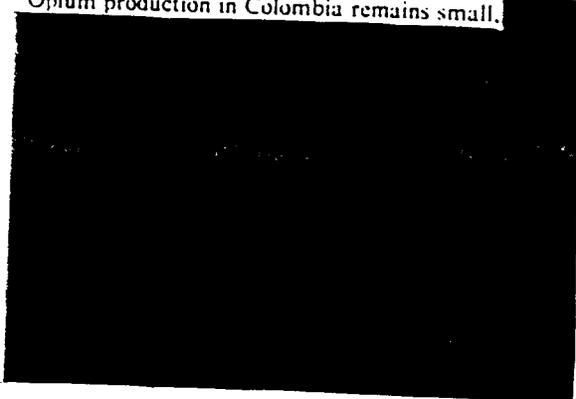
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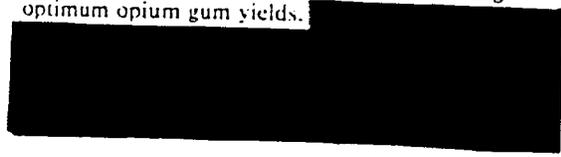


Opium Production Remains Low

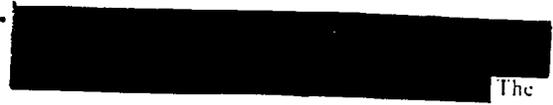
Opium production in Colombia remains small.



- The very moist and rich soil conditions found in Colombia's opium growing regions are ideal for poppy plant growth, but not ideal for achieving optimum opium gum yields.



We attribute the country's low opium yields largely to grower inexperience in implementing proper methods for cultivating and harvesting opium:



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gum harvest is also hampered by the almost daily rains—occurring year-round in the region—that frequently wash away the opium exuded by the plant before the grower has a chance to collect it.

Despite this, we judge that Colombian growers should be able to double or triple their yields over the next several years as they gain experience and improve their growing and harvesting methods. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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