



## Buhorwa Washing Station

**Bukeye Commune,  
Murimvya Province,  
Sogestal Kayanza,  
Burundi**

**Partner since:** 2009

**Varietals:** Bourbon, Jackson Bourbon

**Traceable to:** 550 Smallholders **Altitude:** 1775 - 1890 MASL

**Processing:** Cherries are collected at the washing station, and sorted to remove overripes and underripes before going into the cherry hopper. After an overnight fermentation underwater, cherries then dry on raised beds.

**Harvest:** April May June July

**Booking:** August September October

**Arrivals:** November December



When Burundi opened up the coffee sector to private investment, the government put all of their nearly 200 washing stations on the market. The Sogestals – regional cooperatives who manage these washing stations – purchased several for themselves. One of these is Buhorwa, one of the country's highest altitude washing stations, and the first community outside of Uganda to work with Crop to Cup back in 2009. Each season our in-country partners cup through dozens and dozens of daily and weekly lots from each collection center. And we do too. What we bring in represents the best batches from each harvest. This leads to lot selections based on harvest timing and cup, instead of altitude or geography.

Competition for coffee is fierce in and around Buhorwa Washing Stations. Sogestals and other buyers have had to launch satellite collection centers for farmers who do not live so close to the station and who may otherwise be enticed to sell to middlemen. Buhorwa Washing Station itself has 3 cherry collection centers. Lots are separated (and cupped) by collection center, by day, in order to avoid potato and they highlight the very best that Burundi can be.

In 2018 Crop to Cup launched Projet Vache. This project supports coffee farmers around Buhorwa and neighboring Gatere with community-managed dairy cow sites for milk, alternative income and manure to improve the region's low level of soil health.



No other country excels in the smallholder context like Burundi. Here – more than any other producer country where we source – we find true smallholders, some producing coffee on such a small scale that they make more income from their dairy cow in a day than they do in a year from coffee. This of course carries its risks (when coffee is an afterthought), but, with the proper partners and washing stations in place, the organization and quality control bears unique, high scoring lots on both micro and full container scales.

For decades Burundi coffee has suffered due to lack of soil health, partly due to historical influences like colonial regulations requiring tree planting too close together, partly due to a lack of complete training in good agricultural practices. Tree health can be so poor here that, almost without fail, the productivity of the nation's coffee sector swings drastically from year to year (with dire consequences for annual farmer income and national GDP). During the 2019 harvest, for example, some suppliers reported their volumes down 80% from year prior.

Most coffees in Burundi are fully washed, the products of over 100 large washing stations, each able

to produce several containers per year, across 5 main growing regions. Washing stations usually purchase from a range of 300 to 1,500 smallholder farmers living nearby. Prior to 2010 most exporters bulked together washing stations and simply sold container-load lots by grade or by the wider region name. But around 2010, thanks in part to a USAID funded program called Burundi Agribusiness Project, washing stations drastically improved their quality control practices and began marketing coffees under their own station names. Traceability to the washing station level may be commonplace now, but in these early days of Burundi specialty coffee, station by station traceability is truly what allowed the industry to grow and build a name for itself.

Now in the late 2010s we find ourselves not only sourcing coffees by station name, but by the “colline” (hill, around which farmers groups are usually organized), processing method or even single farmer name. Our Burundi lot selection process each year (around June/July) usually involves dozens of lots per station, each separated by a day or week of harvest time. The industry is well and widely organized around cherry flotation, skilled washing, and daily/weekly lot separation (“lots journalieres”), making it one of our favorite origins. One where we don’t have to push hard to keep specialty lots separated for our quality control or product variety needs.

The bulk of the industry is still dominated by these washing stations, producing stellar lots. They are owned and managed by a variety of actors, including private individuals and corporations (many of them foreign-owned), cooperatives, and “Sogestals”, which are quasi-private entities leftover from the days of a nationalized coffee industry – now privately financed, but in many ways operate like cooperatives.

In an exciting shift away from volume-focused washing stations, a few single farmer “estates” began to pop up in the mid-2010s, also buying cherry from neighbors and thus acting as small outgrower program operators. We’ve seen a variety of alternative processing methods pop up in these locations, and the specialty backgrounds of many of their operators allow for high scores and high prices. Fortunately, these best practices spread around the region, from neighbor to neighbor, and many of the larger stations and Sogestals have upped their game.

Crop to Cup has worked in Burundi since 2010, much of the time with the same longstanding exporter, washing station and farmer partners. Since then we’ve been pleased to see a drastic reduction in potato cup, and a continual growth in cup score.