



## Chwele FCS

## Bungoma County, Kenya

**Partner since:** 2019

**Traceable to:** 1445  
Smallholders

**Altitude:** 1620 MASL

**Varietals:** SL 34, SL 28 (90%),  
Batian, Ruiru 11

**Processing:** Cherries are hand  
sorted, pulped, floated and let to  
ferment for 12-24 hours before  
being moved to raised beds

**Harvest:** October November December

**Booking:** March April May

**Arrivals:** May June July



Chwele is a trading center that brings farmers together from around the foothills of Mt. Elgon. This is NOT Central Highlands coffee – this is Kenya’s Rift Valley, closer to Uganda than to Tanzania. The region is devoted to farming, making Chwele Kenya’s the second largest open-aired market. The people here are primarily members of the Bukusu tribe, though some Tesos and Kikuyus call this home as well. Rich volcanic soils are fed with once-annual rains; 1500 mm, mostly between March

and August.



Kenya is an enigma. It occupies a top spot in specialty – Kenyan top lots are always amongst the most expensive of any harvest. But yet it's a country where coffee production is dropping year over year. Kenya is a place where traceability is given, but knowing what you want and how to get it are two different things. Rarely do we find partners more capable, and loyalties more difficult to navigate than we do in Kenya. For all the aforementioned reasons, competition in Kenya is fierce, making prized coffees feel like even more of a success.

However, no matter how formally the industry is structured, coffee still remains a system of people. And in a country where farmers own their own cherry production, there is additional power to connecting with coffee's most important stakeholder. Farmers can, for example, point you to the best collections from every harvest, or delay sending their lots to auction to give you another week to sample. At request they can change the way they separate lots, bringing new products to market in a year that would take other countries nearly a decade to do.

But experimentation is not the name of the game. With washed coffees working so well, you won't find many a manager willing to mess around with different fermentations, flotation, drying times or with certifications like organic.

The experiment instead is that of business model. How do cooperatives normalize earnings to keep their members engaged in coffee? How do we take away red tape to encourage more farmers to plant more coffee, as opposed to corn or dairy? How can small estates split off and succeed under their own pulping license? Is it better to sell through auction or directly to an international buyer – can you afford to cut out your marketing agent? Once you speak to these problems you are speaking the language of coffee in Kenya – this is a country that already knows how to coffee.