



## Emero Estate

## Keffa Zone, Ethiopia

**Partner since:** 2017

**Traceable to:** Single Estate

**Altitude:** 2100 MASL

**Varietals:** Heirloom

**Processing:**

**Harvest:** October November December

**Booking:** March April May

**Arrivals:** May June July



Efrem was first introduced to us in 2017 as a new but trusted producer by Crop to Cup Ethiopia organizer, Moata. His year-one quality was through the roof. No complaints there. We met him during a stop in Bonga town, where we shared an Ambo and some tibs (pictured). It was enough time to hear a story that included military, Cuba and Israel, and not near enough time to wrap our heads around a saga of that magnitude. Which is to say, we were very interested to learn more.

Fast forward to November as we are visiting near the onset of the 2018 harvest. The November rains stayed late this harvest, so we got stuck in mud. Lots of mud. Day one started with a slow and sloppy hike into the farm which gave us time to hear more of Efrem's story. He is an Ethiopian-born, Cuban-educated and part-time Israel-residing accountant who returned to work in his home community through coffee some six years ago.

You may remember that the US took part in a series of airlifts that brought almost all of Ethiopia's

Jewish population (~120,000 souls) to Israel following the 'violent red terror'. But the Beta Israel (as they are called) have a history in Ethiopia that they trace back to the tribe of Dan (son of Moses), and now a few brave members, like Efrem, are coming home to reestablish their community.

"They claim Decha is the birthplace of coffee, and that coffee is the source of happiness for our people. Emero means happiness..." Efrem explains as he serves us delicious coffee, taro root, and a bread made from fermented roots of false banana trees. "This is what we eat here on the farm" he continues, as our small group politely nibbles on the spread.

Noticing my sweat, and not knowing it was from the false banana bread, he changes topics. "The hike here, it was hard wasn't it? I'm hoping to build a road by next year". Actually, he needs a few roads, one being a foot-bridge over a local river (where we saw cattle being dragged by the horn through fast moving waters deeper than their heads.)

Later we found out that Efrem took us the long way into the farm. Not a bad way to show off his estate, which included not only coffee but cardamom, teff, old growth trees and easily startled spider monkeys. Or perhaps he took us the long way so that we'd work up a soggy-footed, high-elevation sweat.

In the parts where hiking was not possible, we saddled up. When horses could not make it, we jumped on a tractor borrowed from a neighboring farm. This is the western highlands and the highlands are wet almost year-round...which is why our first conversation with Efrem was on the subject of drying.

While the harvest had just begun, Efrem's drying trays were already thick with the first collection. When preparing naturals it is common to gradually increase the depth of they cherry pile (as a decrease in overall moisture occurs), this is done to consolidate and avail drying space for incoming cherry. But especially during the first few critical days cherries MUST be one layer thick and no more. It was clear that Efrem would need more drying beds in order to scale up with the harvest. The day following our visit we saw a Facebook update – voila!, more drying capacity. We are not surprised; this is Efrem's style. He'll take advice into immediate action. Last year Efrem's farm was brand new. In a years' time, he constructed a brick-making operation, invested in a ton of raised bed drying, and erected two facilities, an office + warehouse. Next on his to-do list is a vacuum packing machine.

In 2019, in addition to growing his volumes from 1 to 2 containers (ambitious), Efrem set and reached goals around investing in local schools and improving the roads.

Efrem's coffees lean into a subtle blue fruit-leather / concord grape profile. They're very clean and we think play especially well in espresso, which extenuates a nice round body, and coaxes those deep fruit notes to the fore.



Ethiopia is a coffee powerhouse. It's the birthplace of the plant, the seventh largest producing country in world, and one of the world's leading consumers of coffee as well. Because coffee is such a vital part of the economy in Ethiopia, the government has a hand in it, making for an interesting coffee context. Ethiopia is proudly a nation that has never been colonized, and the longtime government has been from a tribal minority (the Tigray). In 2018 there was a coup that installed an Oromo president – the largest tribe in Ethiopia. Its namesake region, Oromia, sprawls awkwardly south and west from the capital city Addis Ababa – and covers the majority of coffee territory in Ethiopia.

Of the over 100 million people in Ethiopia, almost 15 million rely on coffee for income. Coffee accounts for 60% of foreign income, and is about 40% of total country exports. For the scope (Africa's largest producing country) and importance of the industry, there's a surprising amount of consolidation. Things are constantly changing in Ethiopia but for the most part, buying happens in three ways, from an Exporter who buys off the ECX, from a Coop Union which markets coffees collected from member coops, or direct from a single producer or estate (as long as they have a farm over 2 hectares, they can export). You can see more about these below.

ECX: The Ethiopian Commodity Exchange was established in 2008, with good intentions. The idea was to make market prices / price discovery available to rural sellers. The ECX installed tickers at 32 rural sites and also push notifications to a quarter million subscribers. The idea was, that this would protect farmers from predatory buyers. The ECX established 55 physical warehouses, where coffee is held across the country. Farmers bring parchment to the warehouse where it is graded by cuppers and given a designation. Contracts are sold to buyers that have seats on the auction. Contracts are all for 30 bag quantities, and buyers do NOT get to cup the lots before purchasing. When the ECX first opened, the mandate was that coffee had to go through the ECX. Quickly, warehouses overflowed, prices plummeted. There was also an outcry from specialty coffee buyers who wanted to work directly, or taste coffees before contracting. Certainly, it was a difficult launch. There's a good "Market Watch" piece on it called, The Market Maker. Those regulations were soon relaxed, allowing for some direct trading to continue with individual farms. However, the regulations still maintained that buyers and sellers be de-coupled. Previously, exporters often owned wetmills in Ethiopia and

could buy cherry and sell green. Now, wetmills are required to sell to the EXC, and exporters are required to buy from the ECX. In other words, wetmills cannot not directly sell to exporters. As it stands now, the only way to get exceptional coffee from the ECX is to buy it, then cup it see if you like it. If you don't, you're stuck. This process isn't practical for a specialty buyer, so oftentimes exporters will allow specialty buyers to cup through their purchases from the ECX and select the ones they like – the exporter can then use the coffees not selected to fill a commodity contract for another buyer. While this can result in good coffee, the traceability is lost and the ability to replicate that coffee next year is only as good as the cupper and relationship with your exporter.

**COOP UNIONS:** When we first arrived to Ethiopia in 2013, there were only 5 operating Unions organized by geography (Oromia, Sidama, Yirgacheffe, Limmu and Bench Maji). Oromia (extending as it does) is the largest, with 405 member coops, followed by Sidama Union, tiny in comparison with just over 50 coops represented. Yirg Union is smaller still. Coop Unions have a standard model in Ethiopia: buy coffee at the auction price, sell coffee to a buyer and collect 20% of the profit as service fees. From, there they split the remaining profit 70/30 with the coops they bought from. Unions are generally known in Ethiopia as FTO suppliers. Coffee that move through the ECX do not carry certifications, so the only place that you can get certified options are Unions and private farms. Recently, a new Coop Union was established called Kata Maduga. It brought together coops in Jimma that were formed by Technoserve work, and previously managed by the Oromia Union. These coops felt that their qualities were exceptional and that they could better represent themselves. It is now in its 3rd harvest, is a healthy Union and growing. We're big fans.

**PRIVATE FARMS:** Private farms are self-explanatory in many ways. Since 2008 and the establishment of the ECX, private farms have been the one option that preserve relationships and traceable coffee. The issue has been that Ethiopia is so populous, that farms large enough to fill a container, or produce an export size volume of coffee are rare. Where they do happen is most commonly seen in the west (Jimma and Keffa Zones) where land redistribution has formed larger coffee blocks.

Similarly, you may also find a landowner that builds a mill on their land, and buys cherry from surrounding farmers. This is called an out-grower scheme. They can directly export these coffees, and this has been a major loophole for wetmill owners who were affected by the ECX regulation. For examples, if I had a wetmill only, I have to sell to the ECX. But If I have a wetmill and I buy the farm it's on and register that farm for direct export – now I can sell all the coffee from my mill to direct buyer and bypass the ECX. While this does happen, the only ones that can do it have both money and political clout, stacking the deck a bit against the smallholder.