



Giakanja Coffee Farmers Society

Nyeri County, Kenya

Partner since: 2016

Traceable to: 1870 Members

Altitude: 1705 - 1800 MASL

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

Processing: Cherries are pulped, floated through channels, soaked for 12-24 hours, skin dried, moved to raised beds for drying, and then stored in conditioning bins

Harvest: October November December

Booking: March April May

Arrivals: May June July



Giakanja sits on the highlands of Nyeri County, fully 6,000 ft above sea level, lifted by the Aberdare range to the West. It's about 5 hours north of Nairobi and might be the most infamous of Kenya's central provinces. Cups here are known for stewy, sticky tomato paste and currant profiles with effervescence and candy sweetness. Giakanja has long been contributing to that reputation. The factory was erected in 1968, only five years after independence, and as is typical of Kenyan factories

in this part of the country. It's built around a large 2-stage Mckinnon pulper, that channels into tens of fermentation tanks. Generous vistas are available at the top of the hill by the cherry hoppers. Bright baby blue paint on the channels and tanks contrasts against a lush rolling landscape. The tanks are piped down to a pump at the bottom of the hill, where the slurry either gets sent to holding tanks (used if the factory was out drying capacity and it needed to preserve parchment) or onto skin drying tables for a primary drying. There's endless rows of steel-framed raised-bed drying tables that undulate with the valley.

Giakanja spun out from the larger Tetu Union in 2000, after fifty years of petitioning for independence. In 2010 they received training and support from Technoserve, setting them up for success, and we are happy to help them get the recognition they deserve. Both in 2017 and 2018 Giakanja FCS was able to boast the best premiums paid to members in all of Nyeri county.

Their membership is currently just under 1,200 strong (from 86 years old to 18 last we checked), and currently work with CMS – an affiliate of Dorman's that provides inputs as well as milling and marketing support, and supplies Crop to Cup under a year-over-year contract.

More than the scale, elevation or vistas that all deserve a second glance, what stands out in Giankanja after days and days of meeting with other cooperatives, is the management. John, the W.S. manager, shows us the factory, and has a considered response to greet all our inquiries. He's doing a 72hr ferment and a 21 day dry – covering his parchment at full sun. Sounds pretty on the nose. We see fresh paint on all the surfaces that coffee would touch in the processing and as we pass by the cherry receiving area we see farmers hand-sorting cherry. Signs of sophisticated processing, good management and motivated members are everywhere.

As we sit in the office we see a map that shows the entire catch basin – where the 1,200 members are all traveling from to deliver cherry. Peter can show us cherry receipts in a log, and Giakanja is paying significantly more than other coops we visited in the area. In 2018 they boasted the highest premiums of any group in the central highlands.

There are public charts that track sale prices of their crops, and payments back to farmers. Good records means transparency for farmers, and transparency for farmers engenders trust for the membership – but also for us. They keep 12% of the parchment price for the coop – where we often see that number closer to 20%. Peter the Chairman, has been consistently at the helm and communicates confidently and in a timely manner.

The cup follows suit. We see fantastic and consistent qualities from Giakanja. Cup profiles are very bright, candy sweet and full of grapefruit, melon, and effervescence. It's not rare for us to see quality coffee coming from excellent organization – but it's delightful everytime we encounter it. We've been working with Giakanja now for 4 years, and have contracted before the harvest in 2018 – a rather unusual play in Kenya but one that allows them to pursue higher qualities with more confidence of a buyer – and solidifies our access to their absolute best.



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.